

**Digital Activism Under State Surveillance: The Role of Telegram
and LIHKG during the 2019 Hong Kong Anti-Extradition
Movement**



THESIS

Submitted to Fulfill the Requirements for Obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in
Department of Communication Studies at the Faculty of Social and Cultural
Sciences

Universitas Islam Indonesia

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STATEMENT LETTER

STATEMENT LETTER

It is hereby certified that this thesis constitutes the author's own work and contains no material previously submitted, either in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or qualification at any institution of higher education. Furthermore, to the best of the author's knowledge, this manuscript contains no ideas, expressions, or published data authored by another individual, except where explicit textual citation is provided and duly recorded in the references.

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Sincerely



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MOTTO

قُلْ إِنَّ هُدَى اللَّهِ هُوَ الْهُدَى

Qul inna hudā llāhi huwa l-hudā

“Indeed, the guidance of Allah is the only true guidance.”

—Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayah 120 (2:120) —

“The heart is like a compass: when it is purified, it points only toward the truth.”

— *Imam Al-Ghazali* —

“One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs, or the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls.”

— *A Thousand Splendid Suns* —

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

My parents and Grandma whose unseen prayers and shaped my direction;

My brother and family, my constant point of return;

My favorite person, a presence that steadied the journey;

My friends in arms, who chose to walk beside me without question;

University Islam of Indonesia and Communication Studies programme;

and, in the end, to myself for learning when to hold on, and when to simply

endure until completion.

PREFACE

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim,

All praise and gratitude are due to Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala for His grace and guidance, which have enabled the author to complete this thesis as part of the academic requirements at Universitas Islam Indonesia. The author hopes that this work may provide insight and benefit for readers and future research. Completing this thesis represents an important academic milestone shaped by learning, persistence, and critical reflection. Throughout the process, this study was supported by the guidance and encouragement of various individuals and institutions who contributed meaningfully to its completion. This thesis, entitled *“Digital Activism Under State Surveillance: The Role of Telegram and LIHKG during the 2019 Hong Kong Anti-Extradition Movement,”* examines how encrypted digital platforms were utilized as communication tools within a protest movement operating under conditions of political surveillance. This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies at the Faculty of Psychology and Socio-Cultural Sciences, Universitas Islam Indonesia.

Appreciatively, I dedicated this thesis to mys elf, another part of myself that is always eager for challenges in life. And especially for:

1. First and foremost, the deepest gratitude is addressed to Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala for His endless grace, guidance, and blessings, and for granting strength, patience, and perseverance throughout the academic journey and the completion of this thesis.
2. The author is profoundly grateful to my parents, Fefti Dewi Oktavia, Anamar Ardy, and my grandma, Aminah, whose unconditional love, prayers, sacrifices, and constant encouragement have been the foundation of every achievement, as well as to my brother, Respati Al-Fariel, whose presence and motivation have inspired the author to continuously strive toward becoming a better version of myself.

3. Sincere appreciation is extended to Dr. Zaki Habibi, M.Comms., as the Head of the Communication Science Department, Universitas Islam Indonesia, for his leadership and academic support. The author would like to express the highest gratitude to Prof. Dr. rer. soc. Masduki, S.Ag., M.Si., as the thesis supervisor, And to Dr. Herman Felani, S.S., M.A., as a thesis examiner for his time, patience, guidance, constructive feedback, and encouragement throughout the thesis-writing process.
4. The author would also like to thank all lecturers of the Communication Science Department, Faculty of Socio-Cultural Sciences, Universitas Islam Indonesia, for the knowledge and insights that have been invaluable in completing this thesis.
5. The author wishes to convey heartfelt appreciation to author friends: Jinan, Balqis, Musda, Safira, Ama, Helsa, Maylia, and Jeha. Your prayers, support, laughter, encouragement, and companionship have consistently uplifted me during times of exhaustion and numerous challenges.
6. I would also like to express profound gratitude to Rendika Ariyansyah, my steadfast support system, who has remained by my side through every circumstance, whether in moments of hardship or joy. Thank you for your attentive listening, unwavering encouragement, and for standing with me when situations felt overwhelming. The support, compassion, and genuineness you have displayed are key factors that enabled me to persist and bring this Final Project to completion.

Yogyakarta, January 2026
Warm Regard,



Annisa Azzahra Rahmatika

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ABSTRACT

Rahmatika, Annisa A. 22321257 (2026). “Digital Activism Under State Surveillance: The Role of Telegram and LIHKG during the 2019 Hong Kong Anti-Extradition Movement,”. Communications Department, Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, University of Islamic Indonesia.

This study analyzes digital activism under state surveillance, focusing on the role of the encrypted digital platforms Telegram and LIHKG during the 2019 anti-extradition bill protests in Hong Kong amid state digital surveillance. The research analyzes data obtained from Telegram, LIHKG forum discussion logs, and international news reports. The main findings demonstrate four key points. First, there is a complementary functional dichotomy in which Telegram serves as a real-time tactical tool for on-the-ground mobilization, while LIHKG functions as an anonymous deliberative space for formulating long-term strategies. Second, the platforms’ anonymity proved to be a double-edged sword; on one hand, it protected demonstrators’ identities, while on the other, it triggered an internal crisis of trust stemming from fears of state infiltration and the spread of disinformation. Third, Telegram successfully evolved beyond a communication tool into a decentralized humanitarian infrastructure ("network of care") that provided physical protection, logistics, and psychological support among demonstrators. Fourth, the narrative analysis reveals a sharp contrast between external institutional media, which predominantly framed the protests around physical violence, and the platforms’ internal communications, which focused on tactical safety and the movement’s operational survival. Ultimately, this study elaborates on the theory of Digital Activism alongside other supporting theories, namely affective publics, connective action, and networked social movements. It demonstrates that digital decentralization reconstructs a temporary (ad hoc) functional hierarchy in which coordination remains concentrated through highly curatorial roles.

***Keywords: Digital Activism, Encrypted Communication, Telegram, LIHKG,
2019 Hong Kong Protest***

ABSTRAK

Rahmatika, Annisa A. 22321257 (2026). “Aktivisme Digital di Bawah Pengawasan Negara: Peran Telegram dan LIHKG Selama Gerakan Menentang RUU Ekstradisi Hong Kong Tahun 2019”. Departemen Komunikasi, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Budaya, Universitas Islam Indonesia.

Penelitian ini menganalisis aktivisme digital di bawah pengawasan negara, dengan fokus pada peran platform digital terenkripsi Telegram dan LIHKG selama protes menentang RUU ekstradisi tahun 2019 di Hong Kong di tengah pengawasan digital oleh negara. Penelitian ini menganalisis data yang diperoleh dari Telegram, log diskusi forum LIHKG, dan laporan berita internasional. Temuan utama menunjukkan empat poin kunci. Pertama, terdapat dikotomi fungsional yang saling melengkapi, di mana Telegram berfungsi sebagai alat taktis real-time untuk mobilisasi di lapangan, sementara LIHKG berfungsi sebagai ruang deliberatif anonim untuk merumuskan strategi jangka panjang. Kedua, anonimitas platform-platform tersebut terbukti menjadi pedang bermata dua; di satu sisi, hal itu melindungi identitas para demonstran, sementara di sisi lain, memicu krisis kepercayaan internal yang berasal dari ketakutan akan infiltrasi negara dan penyebaran disinformasi. Ketiga, Telegram berhasil berevolusi melampaui sekadar alat komunikasi menjadi infrastruktur kemanusiaan yang terdesentralisasi (“jaringan kepedulian”) yang menyediakan perlindungan fisik, logistik, dan dukungan psikologis di antara para demonstran. Keempat, analisis naratif menunjukkan kontras yang tajam antara media institusional eksternal yang sebagian besar memfokuskan liputan protes pada kekerasan fisik dan komunikasi internal platform-platform tersebut, yang berfokus pada keselamatan taktis dan kelangsungan operasional gerakan. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menguraikan teori Aktivisme Digital bersama dengan teori-teori pendukung lainnya, yaitu publik afektif, aksi konektif, dan gerakan sosial berbasis jaringan. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa desentralisasi digital merekonstruksi hierarki fungsional sementara (ad hoc) di mana koordinasi tetap terkonsentrasi melalui peran-peran kuratorial yang sangat ketat.

***Kata kunci: Aktivisme Digital, Komunikasi Terenkripsi, Telegram, LIHKG,
Demonstrasi Hong Kong 2019***

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. Study Background

Technological developments in digital communication have changed how modern social movements are organized and mobilized. Large-scale protest movements have relied significantly on hierarchical, centralized leadership structures to mobilize the populace. However, a paradigm shift toward "leaderless" and networked forms of collective action (networked social movements) has been triggered by the rise of digital media and encrypted online forums. Modern digital platforms enable spontaneous coordination, real-time tactical adaptability, and mass engagement without the risk of system failure at a single point of command by avoiding traditional communication routes using a horizontal communication architecture. (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Margetts et al., 2016; Tufekci, 2017).

This shift directly gives rise to a communication problem: how can millions of individuals effectively disseminate information, test ideas, formulate consensus for mass action, and carry out logistical coordination on the ground without a central body or leader to make decisions. This challenge has become the main focus of digital activism studies, where social media platforms are needed to help organize and sustain protest movements. The 2019 Hong Kong protests offer a critical case through which this problem can be examined. Demonstrators made strategic use of two distinct platforms: Telegram, used for encrypted tactical and logistical coordination, and LIHKG, a local forum described as Hong Kong's equivalent of Reddit, which functioned as a deliberative space for gathering information, planning protests, organizing events, and engaging in transparent political debate (ISPI Newsletter, 2021). Like the 2014 Umbrella Movement before them, the 2019 protests reflected the public's collective desire to expand democratic freedoms and oppose China's encroachment on Hong Kong's autonomy. The use of these encrypted platforms allowed demonstrators to communicate and organize despite government crackdowns. However, residents' hopes appear to have faded in the ten years since the Umbrella Movement, indicating that the struggle for civil rights has not ended (Guardian, 2024).

These decentralized platforms gave protesters a way to coordinate actions, exchange information quickly, and spread their messages globally in order to circumvent censorship and governmental restrictions. Nevertheless, the reliance on encrypted messaging also raises new communication dilemmas, particularly regarding the potential for information distortion and incitement to violence in the digital public sphere (Guardian, 2023).

LIHKG critically examines macro-level communication issues related to the limitations of physical spaces for discussion, although offering a more local focus than Telegram. Activists frequently utilize the site to get over information by exchanging tactical plans and up-to-date details regarding police activities. This allows for rapid collective actions without the need for personal coordination or centralized guidance (Reuters, 2025). This decentralized communication system allows participants to engage anonymously, thereby overcoming the psychological barriers posed by surveillance, which in turn increases the burden of digital investigations for authorities. However, as subsequent arrests have shown, the protection of anonymity in this communication system remains partial rather than absolute (Reuters, 2025). Beyond their role in resolving internal coordination issues, both LIHKG and Telegram serve as vertical information distribution channels through which an international audience can receive timely information about developments in Hong Kong, thereby strengthening the global communication network for the pro-democracy movement and increasing diplomatic pressure on Chinese authorities regarding Hong Kong's autonomy (Reuters, 2025).

One case illustrating the government's increasing surveillance of Telegram in Hong Kong is the arrest of Lui Sai-yu, a Telegram channel administrator who was found guilty of separatism for sharing slogans related to the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Although Lui admitted his guilt, he was still sentenced under the National Security Law (NSL). This case demonstrates that following the 2019 protests, the Hong Kong government has increasingly utilized the NSL to restrict activities and expressions deemed to support the protest movement (Associated Press, 2023). In addition, the government has also stepped up surveillance of digital platforms used by protesters. In 2020, a Hong Kong court issued a temporary order banning the

dissemination of content deemed to contain elements of violence on LIHKG and Telegram. This policy reflects the government's efforts to tighten control over the digital space, which had previously served as the protesters' primary means of communication (Hong Kong Free Press, 2020). Nevertheless, Telegram remains a platform in the protest movement due to its decentralized system. This characteristic makes Telegram an effective communication tool while also making it more difficult for the government to control. (Hong Kong Free Press, 2020).

This dependency on Telegram was apparent when cyberattacks were aimed at the platform as part of mass protests facing a controversial extradition bill the Hong Kong government proposed. The digital assaults happen increasingly in the context of the great social upheaval in Hong Kong, as Pavel Durov, founder of Telegram, has discovered. However, it is still very useful for activists searching for safe communication channels amid constant surveillance and censorship from the government (AP News, 2019). Using these platforms for protest is drawing more attention from government authorities. In March 2023 only one court case found an individual who used Telegram to issue statements about protest issues guilty of inciting violence and six-and-a-half years behind bars, even with an appeal to overturn a conviction that ties it back to the 2019 protests. The case shows that use of Telegram during protests leads to severe actions against individuals due to the legality of the user and evidence of the authorities' steps toward criminalization of online comments with regard to activism. ([Hong Kong Free Press, 2023](#)).

In January 2023, the Hong Kong government arrested a 24-year-old man on charges of sedition for allegedly using social media platforms, including LIHKG, to support Hong Kong's independence. According to authorities, between November and December 2022, he posted messages calling for the dismantling of both the Hong Kong and Chinese governments, encouraging anti-court sentiment, and urging the public to boycott pandemic-related measures. During the investigation, law enforcement officers also seized electronic devices from his residence that were believed to have been used to publish the online content. The case illustrates the government's increasing use of the National Security Law and related legislation to monitor and prosecute online political expression (Hong Kong Free Press, 2023).

A similar case occurred in 2025 involving pro-democracy activist Chow Kim-ho. On 8 April 2025, he was convicted over social media posts published on Facebook, Instagram, and Threads that criticized the governments of Hong Kong and China. The case reflects the broader enforcement of the National Security Law, under which online expressions considered to threaten national security may result in severe criminal penalties. It also demonstrates how digital platforms have become a key focus of government surveillance and law enforcement in the post-protest period. ([Reuters, April, 8th 2025](#))

The widespread adoption of digital platforms such as LIHKG and Telegram among Hong Kong's demonstrators reflects a broader challenge confronting states that seek regulatory control over decentralized communication ecosystems. Deprived of access to conventional organizational channels under intensifying state surveillance, demonstrators relied upon encrypted and pseudonymous technologies to coordinate collective action, disseminate tactical information and legal guidance, and sustain resistance against government crackdowns. However, the gradual tightening of the legal framework culminating in the National Security Law and Article 23 imposes heavy restrictions on online expression and places participants in digital activism at risk of criminal prosecution, fundamentally altering the conditions under which such platforms can be used. ([ISPI Newsletter, 2021](#)).

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in this study is arranged linearly and hierarchically to dissect the transformation of digital social movements from the level of macro emotional motivation to the level of micro tactical operational in the field. This framework moves sequentially through four conceptual stages: (1) the process of forming shared emotional impulses through the space of digital activism (*Affective Publics*); (2) how the impulse materializes into action without centralized leadership (*Connective Action*); (3) how the action forms a macro network structure that triggers a new authority dilemma (*Networked Social Movements vs. Soft Leadership*); and (4) how the technical features of the platform concretely facilitate all such communication functions (*Platform Affordances*).

1.1.1 Digital Activism and the Formation of Affective Publics

The main theoretical foundation of this research is rooted in the concept of digital activism, which examines how technological infrastructure is reshaping the landscape of political resistance and civic participation. In the new media ecosystem, digital activism is no longer seen as merely an instrumental tool, but as a discursive space where collective identities are formed, negotiated, and maintained. To understand how digital masses can be mobilized massively without institutional command, this study correlates digital activism with the concept of affective publics offered by Zizi Papacharissi (2015).

Papacharissi argues social media facilitates the formation of a public that is united not by hierarchical organizational structures or formal ideologies, but by shared feelings and emotions, such as anger, solidarity, or a deep sense of injustice. In the context of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the intensity of public emotions towards the regulation of the extradition bill (Anti-ELAB) was constantly amplified through digital platforms. However, in contrast to Papacharissi's initial study, which generally focused on open platforms with macro network structures such as Twitter, this study examined how the psychological and emotional effects of *these affective publics* are crystallized through more private, hybrid, and protected platforms such as LIHKG and Telegram. Technical limitations in the form of strict anonymity and encryption features on both platforms actually strengthen the group's sense of security (*collective psychological safety*). These safe conditions, in turn, deepen affective bonds, minimize the risk of external compliance, and strengthen demonstrators' commitment amid the threat of real political repression on the ground.

1.1.2 Connective Action and the Logic of Personalized Participation

From emotional conditioning in the affective public space, the mobilization logic is then materialized into real action in the field through the connective action framework formulated by W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2012, 2013). If traditional collective action requires a long-term commitment to formal organization and rigid ideological alignment, connective action works through the circulation of personalized narratives and symbols. Individuals participate by

sharing content, memes, hashtags, or slogans that are personally meaningful to them, which weave into a vast network of actions without the need for a single leadership or command center. The "Be Water" ethos of the Hong Kong protests is an adaptive and radical expression of this logic of connective action, in which the flexibility of movement depends on the specific contribution of each digital node.

More specifically, Bennett and Segerberg distinguish movement structures into several types, including *organizationally enabled connective action* and *crowd-enabled connective action*. The Hong Kong case illustrates a variation of *crowd-enabled connective action*: the *upvoting/downvoting* features and *thread structures* in LIHKG forums act as a substitute for formal institutions to filter aspirations and build tactical consensus, while *broadcast channels* on Telegram replaces the role of a central editor or spokesperson in distributing logistics information, hazard warnings, and movement instructions in bulk and instantly (*real-time*).

To fully understand how this *crowd-enabled* structure shifted from the realm of digital deliberations to physical execution on the street, this study integrates the concept of networked micro-coordination initiated by Zeynep Tufekci (2017). Tufekci argues that digital platforms accelerate the capacity of mass organizing, allowing leaderless crowds to adjust their tactics on the ground dynamically and *in real-time* such as abruptly changing the route of action or mapping the position of security forces based on information updates on the platform. However, Tufekci also gave a critical note on networked fragility. Movements that jump directly to the stage of large-scale mass mobilization to the efficiency of social media without going through the slow process of building traditional organizational infrastructure often experience a *tactical freeze* when faced with drastic changes in the situation, new repressive tactics, or the disconnection of communication lines by the state.

1.1.3 Networked Social Movements as the Dilemma of Horizontality

The logic of connective action mediated by such technology shapes what Manuel Castells (2012) conceptualizes as networked social movements. Castells

argues that contemporary movements in the internet age are characterized by their completely horizontal, participatory, and leaderless structure. Through decentralized digital communication networks, physical spaces (highways, town squares) and cyberspace merge in what Castells calls a space of flows and timeless time. This fusion allows spontaneous mobilization, tactical coordination, and occupation of public space to occur instantly without geographical barriers and beyond traditional institutional time constraints.

Although Castells' theory provides a strong explanation of the horizontal character and bureaucratic destructiveness of this movement, this study applies criticism from Paolo Gerbaudo (2018) to analyze the internal dynamics of the network more critically and realistically. Gerbaudo argues that digital platforms are not neutral containers without distortions; Platform architecture inherently creates communication agency inequality. Even in networks that claim to be horizontal and *leaderless*, there is still a form of informal authority or what is called soft *leadership*. This authority is carried out by Telegram admin, the coordination team, or contributors with the highest number of upvotes on the LIHKG forum, who have the authority to pin messages, delete threads, or direct public attention. This theoretical tension between Castells's purely horizontal thesis and Gerbaudo's critique of platformization becomes a key critical lens in this study to dissect how collective decisions are made in the midst of anonymity and how tactical information is curated so as not to get caught up in a vortex of hoaxes during the Hong Kong protests.

1.1.4 Affordances, Platform Architecture, and Communicative Function

The relationship between the macrostructure of the movement (Networked Social Movements) and the communication behavior of the demonstrators in the field is operationally bridged through the theory of platform affordance. This theory states that the technical features and architectural design of a platform such as access control, level of anonymity, content visibility, and encryption capacity directly influence, direct, and limit the communication practices and actions of its users (Gibson, 1979; Nagy & Neff, 2015). Affordances sees technology not as an

absolute determinant (determinism), but as a reciprocal relationship between the potential of a technical system and the sociopolitical needs of its users.

1.1.4.1 Characteristics of Social Media Platform in Conflict Context

To understand how this aversion works, it is important to map out the general characteristics of social media that distinguish it from traditional mass media in the context of political conflict. Referring to the typology of the new media environment (van Dijk, 2012; boyd, 2011), the main characteristics include:

- **Accessibility Requirements:** Regulates the extent to which a tactical message or visual narrative is instantly accessible to the general public (supports *Real-Time Coordination* and *Visual Storytelling functions*).
- **Security Avoidance and Privacy Controls:** A technical structure that provides encryption and data management that limits the tracking of authorities (underpins *the Anonymity and Digital Security* function).
- **Scalability Attribution:** The platform's ability to amplify messages from one node to hundreds of thousands of other nodes without bureaucratic constraints (underpinning the *Leaderless Structure function*)

1.1.4.2 Utilizing Social Media Platforms: The case of LIHKG and Telegram

The theoretical approach was then used strategically (utilizing social media platforms) by demonstrators in Hong Kong through a specific digital division of labor between LIHKG and Telegram (Lee, 2021). This utilization exploits the architecture of each platform to meet pre-mapped tactical needs. :

- **Utilization of LIHKG for Deliberative-Affective Functions:** The characteristics of LIHKG as a *thread-based* forum with a reputation marking system (*upvoting/downvoting*) are used as a "digital parliament" space. Here, the strong aversion of pseudonymity facilitates the need for *Anonymity and Digital Security*, so that the masses can debate strategies, refine tactical ideas, and construct *Visual Storytelling* securely without fear of their true identities being exposed.
- **Utilization of Telegram for Operational-Tactical Functions:** In contrast, Telegram's architecture that prioritizes instant messaging, *broadcast*

channels, and *end-to-end encryption* is utilized as a field command tool. This approach facilitates the need for *Real-Time Coordination* and maintains the *Leaderless Structure*, where logistical information and the movement of the apparatus are disseminated asymmetrically to hundreds of thousands of users at once for the sake of "*Be Water*" *tactical flexibility*.

1.2 Literature Review

Digital Social Movements on the Twitter Social Media Platform: Twitter Please Do Your Magic. (Rindi Ari Primus Iswanti (2023), Sociology, Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, Surabaya)

The framing of "Twitter Please Do Your Magic" is investigated in an innovative way in Iswanti's (2023) study. However, a theoretical weakness is identified, as it is expected that social movements always function in a secure and democratic digital context. While visibility in a public place, such as Twitter, is used to assess a movement's performance, it is recognized that this openness may be perilous in countries with high cyber-surveillance, making it easier for authorities to discover and arrest activists.

On the other hand, author's study looks into how Telegram and LIHKG were used during the very constrained 2019 Hong Kong demonstrations. Protesters in Hong Kong used the anonymity of LIHKG and the encryption of Telegram to ensure tactical survival and enable leaderless field cooperation. In contrast, movements on Twitter rely on public visibility seeking to draw attention. By revealing how a digital movement can remain cohesive and make decisions in the face of severe government censorship, this work fills a theoretical gap.

Communication Patterns in Social Media Protest (Juan Daniel Mayanfrans Simbolon, Communications, Gadjah Mada University, 2022).

Simbolon's research (2022) makes an important contribution in mapping the relationship structure and communication patterns of cyber actors through the Social Network Analysis (SNA) approach to the movement to reject the Job Creation Law on Twitter. However, critically, the study has limitations in looking at power dynamics in the digital space. Simbolon's analysis is too fixated on identifying polarized network structures and the role of key actors (such as

influencers or opinion leaders) as the main drivers of information dissemination. This popular actor-centered structural approach tends to ignore how a movement can survive and coordinate organically when the digital space is no longer hospitable, or when those key actors are deliberately eliminated in order to avoid legal repression.

For comparison, author's study examines the 2019 Hong Kong protests that utilized Telegram and LIHKG in a highly repressive political ecosystem. In contrast to Simbolon's analysis, which focuses on the centralized network structure and open relationship patterns on Twitter, the movement in Hong Kong operates in a fully decentralized manner without relying on actors or influencers as the command center. Under the threat of censorship and strict government surveillance, protesters are using Telegram's encryption and LIHKG's anonymity features not to build social capital or network popularity, but to conduct tactical coordination and real-time logistics sharing. The study complements the existing gap by showing that when digital public spaces are censored, social movement communication shifts from polarized, open patterns to defensive, functional closed networks.

Utilization of Communication Media in Social Mobilization during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Sambatan Jogja Social Movement (SONJO). (Afifatul Millah, Communication, Gadjah Mada University, 2022)

Millah's research (2022) makes an important contribution by showing how the multichannel communication ecosystem, especially WhatsApp Groups, can be optimized to build community resilience and mobilize humanitarian aid during global health crises. However, the study has academic limitations because it examines social movements in a cooperative, non-confrontational space. Millah's analysis assumes that digital communication infrastructure always operates in a climate free from political intimidation, where states and societies are in a collaborative position without the threat of cyber surveillance or the encroachment of civil space.

In comparison, this study examines the use of Telegram and LIHKG in the 2019 Hong Kong protests, which were marked by highly volatile political tensions.

While Millah's SONJO movement focuses on open public collaboration and legal humanitarian logistical coordination, the movement in Hong Kong operates in a confrontational climate fraught with the threat of censorship and criminalization. Under this pressure, platform selection is no longer just a matter of virtual team coordination efficiency, but part of a defensive strategy. The use of encryption and semi-anonymity features has become a crucial instrument for demonstrators to organize political resistance tactically amid a tight surveillance siege from state security authorities.

The Influence of the Use of the Telegram Application on the Effectiveness of Information Dissemination of Novo Club Batch 3 Community (Isnaena Wulan Safitri, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Lampung University, 2025).

The Safitri study (2025) succeeded in mapping how Telegram helps the smooth distribution of information within the Novo Club community through quantitative analysis. However, the study has limitations because it sees the effectiveness of communication only as a linear and one-way technical process of sending messages in a secure space. The quantitative approach used to reduce Telegram's features to mere administrative tools, thus failing to capture the dynamics of more complex interactions, especially when the platform is used in conflict situations or politically stressful environments.

This difference is what my research on the 2019 Hong Kong protests is trying to answer. When Safitri examines the use of Telegram for organized and formal community purposes, the study looks at how Telegram and LIHKG collaborate to become a space for tactical coordination amid the threat of cyber surveillance by state authorities. Here, encryption and semi-anonymity features no longer serve for the efficiency of ordinary communication, but are transformed into a decentralized strategy and a protector of the security of the demonstrators in making real-time decisions on the ground. Through this comparison, my research offers a new perspective on how the reliability of technology is tested not in a stable space, but in the midst of a repressive political crisis.

Unpacking the Link between Protest Support for Illicit Behaviour and Social Media Use: A Hong Kong Study (Chuanli Xia & Fei Shen, 2024).

The research of Xia and Shen (2024) makes a strong theoretical contribution in mapping the relationship between social media consumption, particularly LIHKG, and individuals' tendency to support radical protest actions through the O-S-O-R psychological model. However, critically, the analysis of this study has limitations because it is too centered on aspects of cognitive psychology and individual behavior. By treating digital platforms as a stimulus that triggers negative emotions and political attitudes, Xia and Shen ignore the functional and architectural role of such technology. This overly impact-centric approach misses

capturing how these platforms work practically as a tactical infrastructure that drives collective action on the ground.

In comparison, the study shifted the focus from individual psychological changes towards the analysis of communication and coordination systems on LIHKG and Telegram during the 2019 Hong Kong protests. In contrast to Xia and Shen's focus on opinion formation and attitude radicalization, this study uncovers how encryption and semi-anonymity features on both platforms are used practically to carry out decentralized coordination, share information in real-time, and minimize the risk of tracking by security forces. Through this comparison, my research fills a theoretical gap by showing how communication technology does not simply shape political perceptions, but functions directly as a tactical navigation tool for leaderless movements under the pressure of state cyber surveillance.

1.3 Research Gap and Novelty

The position of this research was determined by addressing specific limitations in the existing literature on digital activism, platform architecture, and leaderless movements. While previous research has laid a solid foundation in understanding the role of social media in mass mobilization, there are still two important gaps that have not been addressed:

1.3.1 Contextual Gaps (Public vs. Semi-Closed Platform Dichotomy)

Existing research on digital activism in Indonesia, such as studies on #GejayanMemanggil movements, has focused heavily on *hyper-public* and *broadcast-oriented* platforms such as Twitter/X and Instagram (e.g., Iswanti, 2023; Simbolon, 2022). While these platforms are excellent for outside propaganda and mass awareness-building, they have not been able to explain how activists manage high-risk operational coordination in *real-time* as well as how internal identity deliberation is conducted under close *surveillance*. In contrast, studies of the Anti-ELAB movement in Hong Kong often examine Telegram or LIHKG in isolation (separately) or through purely quantitative glasses (e.g., Xia & Shen, 2024). There is a lack of comparative qualitative exploration of how these two different

architectures (Telegram as a secure instant messaging and LIHKG as an anonymous forum) interact simultaneously in a single movement.

1.3.2 Methodological Gaps (Overreliance on Quantitative Metrics)

Much of the literature around encrypted or anonymous digital mobilization relies on *big data* analysis, network mapping, or quantitative sentiment analysis. While useful for mapping macro trends, these methods often omit the nuanced contextual meaning, strategic calculations, and emotional dynamics embedded in activists' discourse in the face of a crisis. To bridge these gaps, this study introduces the following elements of novelty:

1.3.3 Cross-Platform Architectural Synergy:

Instead of just analyzing one single app, this study uncovers a functional symbiosis between Telegram and LIHKG. This research conceptualizes how leaderless movements divide their digital ecosystems strategically: leveraging the architecture of one platform for secure and decentralized operational logistics, and another platform for the formation of a democratic and anonymous collective identity.

1.3.4 Qualitative Depth through QCA:

By using the Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) method, this study goes further than just an engagement metric. This research provides an in-depth text-based interpretation of how platform features (digital affordances—such as Telegram channels/groups and LIHKG's upvote/downvote mechanics) actively shape resistance rhetoric, security strategies, and solidarity building in repressive environments.

1.4 Problem Formulation and Objective of The Research

1.4.1 Research Questions

Social media, encrypted platforms particularly such as LIHKG and Telegram were a key feature of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. These platforms enabled protesters to communicate securely and plan without concern about government monitoring. This research aims to explore how these platforms were used to communicate the protests, as well as how these platforms impacted the

movement's successes and its image in the eyes of the world. The main research question of this study is:

1. How did protesters employ these communication networks for tactical coordination and collective action during the 2019 protests?

1.4.2 Research Objectives

This study explores the role of Telegram and LIHKG as communication tools during the 2019 Hong Kong protests. It examines how these platforms enabled protesters to communicate securely, coordinate protest activities, and respond quickly to changing situations. The study also explores how Telegram and LIHKG supported decentralized communication by allowing users to participate without relying on a central leader. In addition, it investigates how the platforms helped protesters reduce the risks of government surveillance and censorship. Finally, this study examines how Telegram and LIHKG facilitated the spread of protest information to both local and international audiences, increasing awareness of the pro-democracy movement.

1.5 Methodology

1.5.1 Research Approach

This research is using a qualitative descriptive approach by applying the Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) method. The use of a qualitative descriptive approach in this study aims to construct an in-depth, systematic, and contextual picture of how digital infrastructure is used by social movement actors. The QCA method was chosen because of its ability to decompose, classify, and interpret the meaning, contextual dimensions, and communication manifestations of cyber documents in a structured manner (Mayring, 2014). In contrast to quantitative content analysis that reduces text to numerical units or simply calculates the frequency of word occurrences, QCA relies on hermeneutic forces that are controlled by strict procedural rules. This approach allows researchers to dissect highly complex socio-political issues, such as the dynamics of cyber movements in Hong Kong, without having to sacrifice the depth of the cultural context,

political situation, and emotional intensity of the texts studied (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Operationally, this study adopts purely the Content Structuring Model (*Structuring/Deductive Category Assignment*) from Philipp Mayring (2014). The selection of this content structural model is based on the urgent need to bridge the gap between empirical data in the field and the theoretical foundations used. Through this model, the process of category formation is not carried out freely without direction, but is guided deductively by postulates derived from Manuel Castells' *Theory of Networked Social Movements*. Nevertheless, the Mayring model still provides room for inductive reasoning, so that if researchers find digital behavior anomalies or variations in new communication patterns that have not been recorded in Castells' theory, these new codes can be absorbed organically (Patton, 2002; Berg, 2001). Thus, the application of this model ensures that the entire process of interpreting texts runs on a consistent rule rail (*rule-guided text analysis*), is free from the biases of loose interpretation subjectivity, and has high scientific accountability (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

1.6 Data Sources, Analysis, Collection Method

1.6.1 Purposive Sampling Procedure and Triangulation Parameters

In the digital communication landscape of a decentralized, anonymous, and encrypted social movement such as the 2019 Hong Kong Extradition Bill Protests, reliance on a single set of data can trap researchers in skewed analysis. Given that the cyber messages in this movement are mass-produced by thousands of users (user-generated content) in the midst of intense political repression, this study applies the strategy of Triangulation of Data Sources (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Triangulation is not just a secondary data collection technique, but an epistemological need to conduct cross-platform cross-confrontation, in order to ensure that the internal validity and validity of findings can be maintained in the face of cyber information bias.

The determination of observation subjects was carried out through the Purposive Sampling technique. Through this technique, sample withdrawal is not based on the principle of random probability, but is consciously determined based

on specific inclusion criteria that have the highest level of relevance to the research question. Based on these parameters, the researcher locked the total sample rigidly on 18 comparative data units representing the dynamics of the peak of social movement escalation throughout June to December 2019. The distribution and inclusion criteria of the 18 data units are presented in the following matrix:

Table 1. 1 *Data Sources, Types, and Periods*

Data Sources	Description	Quantity	Analysis Function
Primary Analysis Data	Archived LIHKG Forum Threads (Text & Visual Content) & Telegram	11 Topic	<p>Dissect the dynamics of internal communication, tactical coordination patterns in the field, and the horizontal deliberation process of movement actors through an analysis of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LIHKG thread on the <i>Current Affairs</i> sub-forum with an accumulation of <i>upvotes</i>. • Messages from public Telegram channels or groups.
Comparative Data	Institutional: International Media Investigative Articles (CNN, Al Jazeera, The Guardian).	7 Articles	Mapping the <i>narrative contrast</i> between global media representation and the reality of the grassroots movement through an analysis of <i>in-depth reporting</i> or investigative articles that specifically document the use of cyber technology during the 2019 Hong Kong protests.
Period Focus	The 2019 Hong Kong Protests		

Through this data integration structure, researchers bring together two complementary poles of the communication ecosystem. The data cluster from LIHKG and Telegram serves to record how the demonstrators organize themselves organically from the inside (insider perspective). Meanwhile, the data cluster from 7 international news articles acts as an anchor of external validation (outsider perspective) that places the micro-cyber data into a broader socio-political macro-context.

1.6.2 Data Types Analysis

We categorized the information into three groups based on the primary data classification stage in the Data Collection & Classification document. These categories were selected as they embody different strata within the communication ecosystem: institutional framing, operational coordination, and internal community processing. Collectively, these three elements together offer a comprehensive and varied perspective on the mechanisms of information dissemination, structuring, and interpretation within the 2019 movement in Hong Kong.

Table 1. 2 *Data Classification Functional*

No	Data Categories	Example Content	Primary Communication Function
1.	News	Articles from publishers such as CNN, Al Jazeera, The Guardian	Analysis of External Framing and Narrative Contrast (to frame the movement's image globally).
2.	Non-Visual & Visual Content	Police position photos, evacuation route screenshots, digital posters	Evidence of real-time tactical coordination and citizen journalism supporting the “Be Water” strategy
3.	Feedback/Comment	Strategy debates, digital security tips, morale discussions	Core material for analyzing strategic ideation, digital security adaptation, and psychological resilience; reflects LIHKG’s “collective brain”

This typology consists of three components that together prevent the research from focusing solely on one facet of communication: (1) the public's perception of the movement, (2) coordination of actions among protesters at the site, and (3) collaborative dialogues regarding meaning, strategy, and ethos among participants. This study follows the QCA principles and avoids simplistic interpretations by drawing on three types of analysis that add credibility to the information given through qualitative research analysis.

The use of a variety of data types allows a different perspective from various viewpoints to take the full picture of the protest communication environment. Structured around a typology for institutional narratives, on-the-ground tactical activities, and community-centric processes of meaning-making, this layered typology mitigates analytical bias. This provides an analytical framework that is thorough and strong methodologically.

1.6.3 Data Collection Method: Digital Archiving

The data collection process in this study faces the challenge of the characteristics of cyberspace that are very ephemeral, where digital information in situations of intense political conflict is very fragile, easily manipulated, altered, and even unilaterally deleted by users or due to censorship interventions from state authorities. Facing these obstacles, this study applies a strict and systematized Digital Archiving protocol. The operational steps of data collection are carried out by downloading conversation logs from Telegram, extracting text data from LIHKG threads, and documenting international news articles that are the target of the sample.

During this archiving process, the researcher paid close attention to the preservation of the original metadata, the post sequence markers, and the preservation of timestamps. This is done to maintain the authenticity of the cyber document format so that it meets qualitative reliability standards if a replication or re-tracking process is needed in the future. From the ethical aspect of qualitative research, considering that the data collected comes from a politically sensitive digital environment, the researcher applies strict data security procedures through total anonymization techniques. All usernames, digital identity numbers, or visual elements that could lead to the tracking of the personal identities of the movement

actors are completely disguised without compromising the informative value and contextual substance of the analyzed text.

1.7 Data Analysis Method

1.7.1 Data Classification

The first stage of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) involves selectively sifting through raw text data and organizing it into well-defined analytical categories. This study categorizes digital data collected from Telegram and LIHKG into three main categories: visual data (exemplified by images, memes, and videos), feedback/comment data (including posts, replies, and threads), and news data (encompassing articles and media reports). Such a structured process allows for the systematic organization of content prior to the extended coding phase, enabling greater clarity and validity in the analysis. Mayring's Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) framework formally supports this approach by emphasizing that content analysis must be conducted systematically in terms of categorizing and organizing raw data before beginning coding (Mayring, 2014). Following Mayring's methodology for organizing structured and clear qualitative content analysis, having the material already categorized before starting this process is a significant advantage.

1.7.2 Mayring's QCA Workflow: Methodological Steps in Data Collection and Analysis

The procedure for implementing Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) in this study is designed as a systematic, linear, and rule-guided text analysis workflow. Referring to the methodological protocol developed by Philipp Mayring (2014), the operationalization of this research separates the process into two major phases that are integrated with each other, namely: Data Collection and Pre-Analysis Phase, and Structural Coding Phase.

All of these stages avoid the use of coding terms from the Grounded Theory family, such as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding in order to maintain the purity of QCA and ensure that conclusions are drawn based on a consistent deductive theory structure. The comprehensive workflow is outlined through the following procedural steps:

Phase 1: Data Collection and Pre-Analysis Phase

Digital Archiving and Metadata Extraction

The workflow begins with the extraction of raw data from the three digital ecosystems that are the subject of observation, namely the movement's internal communication platforms (Telegram and LIHKG) and external institutional documents (international media investigation articles). Given that the nature of digital data in political conflict situations is very ephemeral (fragile and easily deleted), researchers carry out *digital archiving* actions in real-time. At this stage, the original Chinese/Cantonese text from LIHKG and Telegram message logs are extracted along with important metadata such as *timestamps* and user interactions (*upvotes*).

Pre-Analysis Phase

Before coding, all of the empirical material collected is filtered using *purposive sampling* techniques based on strict inclusion criteria (such as thread popularity thresholds and news content relevance). The data that passed the screening was then put into three homogeneous functional typology rooms: *News Data*, *Non-Visual & Visual Content* (Tactical Maps/Infographics), and *Feedback/Comment* (Discussion Logs). This pre-analysis step is crucial to ensure

that the data corpus is neatly structured before being broken down into smaller coding units.

Phase 2: Structural Coding Phase

Defining the Unit of Analysis

The first step in text analysis is to determine the analysis unit, the *coding unit*, and *the context unit*. Researchers isolate the smallest parts of text, phrase snippets, or visual elements that contain a single, independent meaning from the data corpus. This unit of encoding is cut in such a way that it becomes the smallest operational semantic unit to be given the code, while the surrounding text is retained as a unit of context to maintain the authenticity of the meaning.

Inductive Code Formulation

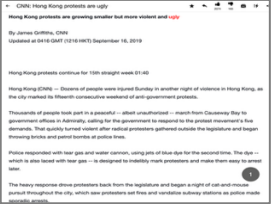
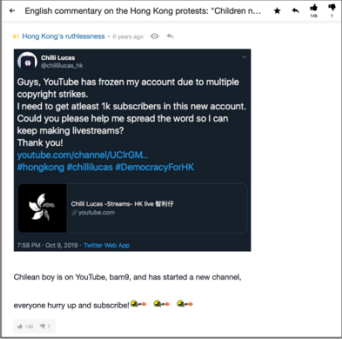
After the encoding unit is determined, the researcher conducts an in-depth repeating reading to assign a descriptive-substantive label (code) to each of these semantic units. This process runs inductively, where the codes that are born reflect the language of protest, cyber adaptation, collective action, and real communication phenomena that occur in the field without any intervention of the researcher's personal assumptions.

Structural Categorization

Microcodes that are similar and have functional similarities are then grouped into higher abstract levels, referred to as Functional Categories. At this stage, the researcher mapped out the operational dichotomy between the platforms: the code group related to field logistics coordination was classified into the tactical dimension (dominant on Telegram), while the code group related to long-term tactical deliberation and narrative framing was classified into the strategic-deliberative dimension (dominant on LIHKG).

1.8 Example of the Coding Process

Table 1.3 *Example of the Coding Process*

Raw Data	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Theme
 <p><i>"Anonymous users posted information about police locations, route changes, possible flashpoints..."</i></p>	<p>Tactical warnings, police locations, immediate alerts</p>	<p>Strategic planning & rapid situational updates</p>	<p>Theme 1: Real-Time Tactical Coordination</p>
 <p><i>"...practical recommendations, including disabling GPS, avoiding personal SIM cards..."</i></p>	<p>Risk avoidance, digital self-defense, collective security</p>	<p>Operational security culture</p>	<p>Theme 2: Anonymity in Collective Action</p>
 <p><i>"...identified several units of meaning, including</i></p>	<p>Emergency aid, medical supply, protection points</p>	<p>Decentralized network of humanitarian care</p>	<p>Theme 3: Telegram as a Key Humanitarian Infrastructure</p>

<i>emergency aid, medical supply availability..."</i>			
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1.9 Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) Data Validity

This research considers three aspects of validity: linguistic authenticity, translation accuracy, and metadata limitations to ensure the credibility of the qualitative content analysis. Since many LIHKG posts are written in Cantonese and Mandarin, translating them into English may affect their meaning, particularly when interpreting emotional expressions, political terms, or language related to protests. To mitigate this risk, the researchers maintained two versions of the data: (1) the English translations used for coding and (2) the original Cantonese or Mandarin texts from LIHKG. This approach enhances transparency, reduces interpretive bias, and allows the findings to be verified.

1.9.1 Metadata and Chronological Limitations

Metadata such as timestamps, author information, and post order, provides important context in digital activism (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). However, many LIHKG archives do not contain complete metadata, especially exact posting times. Therefore, this study focuses on the content and meaning of the messages rather than their chronological order. This approach is appropriate for Qualitative Content Analysis because it identifies communication patterns and the meanings behind messages despite incomplete temporal data (Elo et al., 2014). Despite these limitations, the data still provides valuable insights into how communication took place during the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH OBJECT OVERVIEW

2.1 Overview of the 2019 Hong Kong Protests

The Hong Kong protest that started in the year 2019, was driven by growing discontent with an increasingly powerful Beijing government that many citizens believed was gradually eroding the city's autonomy (DPR RI, 2019). Millions from different social backgrounds protested on the streets in the ensuing months, turning the unrest into one of Asia's most important protests in recent years (BBC, 2019). The immediate trigger factor for all these protests is the government's plan to introduce an extradition bill (also known as the extradition law). This law has caused fear among Hong Kong residents because it could result in the transfer of suspects and convicted individuals to other jurisdictions, such as Mainland China (Hong Kong Government, 2019). These events have raised doubts regarding threats to the independence of the local legal system as well as the prospect of new legal mechanisms to target political opponents (Congressional Research Service, 2019). The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission has also expressed concern about the bill, viewing it as a violation of the "one country, two systems" principle, which is intended to preserve the integrity of Hong Kong's legal and political framework. Erosion of this principle could lead to violations of fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, assembly, and the press (Freedom House, 2020).

Opposition to the extradition bill gradually developed from a policy issue into a broader pro-democracy movement. As the movement grew, protesters also demanded police accountability and the release of those who had been arrested. At the same time, the protests reflected growing public dissatisfaction with declining living conditions and Hong Kong's political direction. These long-standing concerns helped sustain the movement and encouraged people from different social backgrounds to participate (Shek, 2020). Many protesters were motivated not only by the extradition bill but also by concerns about Hong Kong's autonomy and civil rights. This helps explain why many people continued to participate despite arrests, police crackdowns, and economic pressure (Balaraman, 2022).

Digital technology played an important role in supporting the movement. It helped protesters communicate, coordinate activities, and share information in real time. Unlike traditional forms of organization, digital platforms allowed people to organize through decentralized networks, making coordination faster and more flexible, especially under government surveillance and political repression. By using encrypted messaging applications and online platforms, activists were also able to reduce the risk of police identification (Pun, 2020).

2.1.1 LIHKG as a Deliberation Space

LIHKG serves as an online platform for the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement in Hong Kong (Shek, 2020). Often described as Hong Kong's equivalent of Reddit, it is organized through topics and discussion threads where users can post, comment, and vote on content (Shek, 2020). This structure allows users to collectively evaluate ideas and bring the most relevant discussions to the top of the platform (Pun, 2020). A key feature of LIHKG is its anonymity, which enables users to express opinions, share sensitive information, and propose protest strategies without revealing their identities (Au, 2022). Under conditions of government repression, this anonymity encouraged political participation while reducing personal risk (Pun, 2020). The platform's voting system also helped identify useful information, allowing protest strategies and field updates to spread quickly without centralized leadership (Shek, 2020; Pun, 2020). Through continuous discussion and collaboration, protesters developed collective action plans, including protest locations, symbolic actions, and responses to law enforcement (Au, 2022). These characteristics made LIHKG an important platform for generating ideas, coordinating protest activities, and supporting decentralized communication during the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement (Shek, 2020; Pun, 2020).

2.1.2 Telegram as a Tool for Real-Time Coordination

Telegram has become an important form of communication for protesters in Hong Kong because of its digital security, anonymity, and capability for large-scale coordination. As an important tool for communications and a leaderless organization, the app, during the 2019 Anti-Extraordinary Bill protest, let

thousands of people exchange information and get up to speed without having to wait a long time to organize their actions. This solid security and data protection functionality is vital to the app's growing use as a coordination tool. Research by Urman, Ho, and Katz suggests that protesters preferred Telegram due to its message encryption, greater privacy options, and the ability to use pseudonyms. This facilitated the dissemination of protest-related information quickly, while preserving some measure of anonymity for its users.

2.1.3 Complementary Functions Between LIHKG and Telegram

LIHKG and Telegram served complementary rather than interchangeable roles, strengthening the leaderless and decentralized nature of the Hong Kong protest movement. LIHKG functioned as a space for discussing ideas, evaluating strategies, and reaching collective decisions, while Telegram was used to coordinate protest activities and share real-time operational information. Together, these platforms enabled large-scale organization without centralized leadership. During the planning stage, LIHKG allowed users to propose ideas, discuss strategies, and evaluate risks through its thread-based discussions and voting system. Once decisions were made, Telegram became the primary platform for mobilization, providing updates on protest locations, timing, police movements, and other tactical information. Features such as message forwarding, bots, and instant updates enabled protesters to respond quickly to changing conditions. Communication between the two platforms was continuous. Information, photos, and videos shared on Telegram were brought back to LIHKG for discussion and evaluation, allowing protesters to refine strategies for future actions. This interaction created an ongoing cycle of planning, coordination, and reflection. While LIHKG emphasized collective decision-making and strategic discussion, Telegram focused on real-time coordination, together supporting decentralized protest communication.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Research Findings

This study analyzes eighteen data sets, as shown in Table 3.1, consisting of international news articles, LIHKG forum posts, and archived content from two public Telegram channels collected during the 2019–2021 Hong Kong protests. These data sets document communication, coordination, and collective decision-making throughout the movement. International news sources, including CNN, Bloomberg Graphics, ISPI, and The China Project, provide an external perspective on the protests and highlight the role of Telegram and LIHKG in supporting decentralized communication. Meanwhile, discussions on LIHKG reveal how protesters exchanged ideas, built consensus, and discussed anonymity and trust. The Telegram archives show how the platform was used for real-time coordination, security updates, and emergency communications.

The data were analyzed using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) in three stages. First, open coding was used to identify descriptive codes from news articles, forum discussions, and Telegram content, such as tactical warnings, collective consensus, anonymity strategies, and narratives of resistance. Second, axial coding grouped these codes into four main themes: (1) real-time tactical coordination, (2) collective identity, (3) counter-narratives, and (4) anonymity in collective action. Finally, selective interpretation links these themes to the theoretical concepts of reframing, surveillance evasion, and connective action. This process provides a systematic understanding of how Telegram and LIHKG supported decentralized communication during the 2019 Hong Kong protests. The classified findings are presented in the following section.

Table 3. 1 *Data Classification and Type of Communication*

No	Date	Platform	Tittle	Main Focus	Communication Function
1	15/9/2019	CNN	Hong-Kong Protest Violence	Institutional framing on violent clashes	Represents external media focus on conflict and confrontation
2	21/7/2021	ISPI	Digital Revolution: How Social Media Shaped the 2019 Hong Kong Protests	Rise of encrypted platforms (LIHKG & Telegram)	Illustrates decentralized and participatory communication
3	19/9/2019	The China Project	LIHKG and Telegram: The Software Powering Protests in Hong Kong	Encrypted communication technologies	Explains tactical and secure digital coordination
4	14/6/2019	The Guardian	Hong Kong's Digital Battle: Tech that Helped Protesters	Dual use of technology	Reveals both empowerment and surveillance potential

			Now Used Against Them		
5	6/9/2019	South China Morning Post	How Hong Kong's Reddit Forum LIHKG Became a Protest Hub	Participatory identity & strategy	Highlights community- based digital mobilization
6	20/10/2019	Rest of Worlds	Feature on LIHKG as a movement's “digital brain”	Digital Activism and Platform Governance (The study of how the LIHKG forum enabled and sustained a leaderless, decentralized social movement in Hong Kong).	Crowdsourcing and Decentralized Coordination (Using platform features like anonymity and voting/upvotes to achieve rapid consensus on strategy and mobilize resources for real-world action).
7	22/9/2019	Bloomberg Graphics	Casual coverage of airport occupation	Media dramatization	Visual framing emphasizing mass tension
8	16/9/2019	LIHKG	Real-Time Protest Information	Politics and Social Movement (Specifically, discussion and planning	Discussion, Opinion Exchange, and Coordination (To share

			Zone (連登仔實時報料區)	related to the 2019 Hong Kong protests and activities around the Mid-Autumn Festival period).	information, express political viewpoints, rally support, or potentially organize specific actions related to the movement)
9	19/9/2019	LIHKG	Police Action in Real-Time (警方行動實況圖)	Politics and Social Movement (Specifically, high-level strategy, coordination, and general discussion related to ongoing actions during the peak of the 2019 Hong Kong protests).	Mass Mobilization and Strategy Formulation (To facilitate large-scale information dissemination, gather consensus on tactics, discuss protest goals, and organize collective action).
10	2019	LIHKG	Should We Go Out Tonight? (今晚出唔出好?)	Politics and Social Movement (Discussion, strategy, and planning related to the ongoing Hong Kong protests).	Coordination and Consensus Building (To propose, debate, and gain support for specific protest actions, strategies, or public messaging).
11	2019	LIHKG	Anonymity Safety Tips (匿名安全建議)	Politics and Social Movement (Discussion on sustained action, international lobbying, or strategy related to economic pressure and political leverage, typical of the later stages of the 2019 movement).	Strategy Coordination and Information Dissemination (Used to synchronize efforts, spread news related to international events, or organize consumer-based actions like boycotts).

12	2019	LIHKG	Trust Crisis in LIHKG (連登仔信任危機)	Meta-Platform Discussion and Internal Community Dynamics (Discussion about the integrity, accountability, and reliability of information and actions generated by the collective LIHKG user base, often stemming from failed protest actions or perceived infiltration/misinformation).	Self-Critique, Accountability, and Remedial Strategy (Used to analyze past failures, debate community identity and ethics, establish internal quality control, or call for self-correction to restore internal trust).
13	2019	LIHKG	Escape Route Updates (逃走路線更新)	Media Counter-Narrative and Political Propaganda (文宣) (Addressing perceived negative or biased international media coverage of Hong Kong protesters and strategizing to correct the narrative).	Mass Mobilization and Strategic Propaganda/Messaging (Urgent call for volunteers and content creators ("文宣") to create and disseminate messaging to counter unfavorable foreign media reports and ensure maximum turnout for a specific future protest date [8.18]).
14	2019	LIHKG	Medical Support Group (醫療支援群組)	Fear, Dehumanization, and Political Warning/Risk Assessment (Expressing fear of violence escalation, analyzing the rhetoric used	Urgent International Information Dissemination and Risk Management (Calling for the immediate creation and distribution of

				by authorities to justify extreme force, and warning the public about potential lethal force).	文宣 [propaganda/messaging] to the global audience to create international pressure, and to discuss defensive strategies/countermeasures against perceived threats [e.g., water cannons]).
15	2019	LIHKG	Our Future	Economic/Civil Disobedience Strategy and Mobilization (Discussion, coordination, and organization of large-scale strikes and non-cooperation movements to exert pressure on the government).	Sectoral Coordination and Mass Mobilization (To facilitate information sharing across different industries, encourage participation in the general strike, and coordinate transportation and logistics during the planned disruption).
16	2019	LIHKG	Global Solidarity Posts (世界各地聲援)	Civil Disobedience and Legal/Political Resistance (Focusing on the immediate public response, legal challenges, and practical defiance against the newly implemented Anti-Mask Law).	Urgent Safety Consultation and Direct Action Coordination (Used to share knowledge on safety measures, discuss legal risks, generate slogans, and coordinate mass defiance by wearing masks in public)

17	23/9/2019	Bloomberg: Telegram (Archieve)	Protest Coordination Channel (示威行動情報頻道)	Institutional framing on violent clashes	Operational coordination; encrypted rapid dissemination
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A. Anonymity and Strategic Deliberation (This process of slogan generation and action planning, e.g., "Be Water").

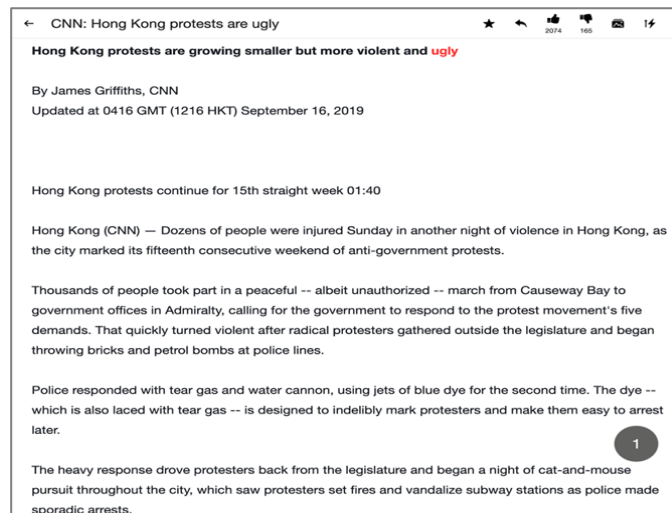


Image 3. 1 *Real-Time Protest Information Zone*

Data recorded in Image 3.1 (Police Action in Real-Time) validates and expands Zizi Papacharissi's thesis on the formation of affective publics. Anonymous discussion threads documenting police position updates, route changes, and real-time mapping of danger points show that the masses are not driven by institutional instructions, but by affective bonds in the form of organic solidarity to protect each other. In contrast to open platforms such as Twitter, LIHKG's affordance platform, which implements strict anonymity, has succeeded in creating collective psychological safety. This identity silencing feature mitigates the risk of external compliance due to political repression, so that the outpouring of public emotions (anger and fear) does not evaporate into mere cognitive digital expression. Instead, those emotions crystallize into a deep tactical commitment in

which each user voluntarily acts as a node of risk evacuation information on the ground. This lack of personal identity decouples the message from the communicator; Tactical information is judged purely based on its empirical accuracy in the field through a crowdsourced peer-pricing mechanism. When one user uploads tactical data, another user instantly verifies or adds micro-details, creating a dynamic source of situational awareness without relying on a central leader.

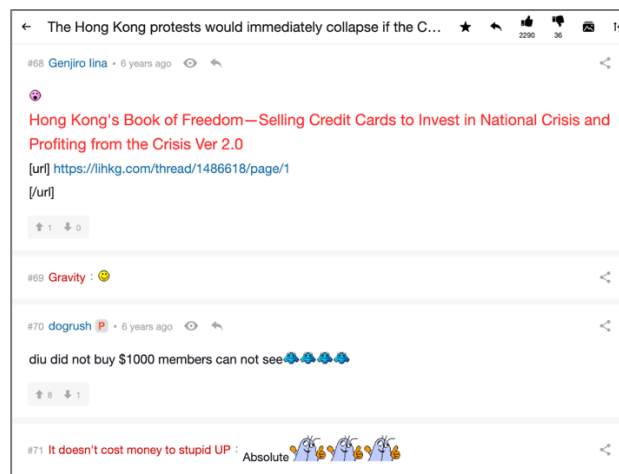


Image 3. 2 *Police Action in Real-Time*

This communicative dimension is reinforced by the linguistic characteristics found in Image 3.2 (Real Time Action). The dominance of informal language, sarcasm, and internet humor that initially seems casual actually has a crucial structural function in the *ecosystem of affective publics* that are threatened with infiltration. In the perspective of communication analysis, this specific language style operates as an organic authentication system (*digital shibboleth*). The use of local slang and Hong Kong pop culture references serves as a cultural tool to filter out organic participants from state propaganda actors or bots (*state-sponsored trolls*). The inability of outside actors to replicate these linguistic nuances instantly creates a *trust boundary* within an anonymous environment. In addition, casual humor functions as an *affective tuning* process that reduces psychological tension under high political pressure. Through the circulation of short and witty messages, collective fear is transformed into resistance energy that

maintains the retention of participants within the network without compromising their operational security.



Image 3.3 *Should We Go Out Tonight?*

The logic of this transformation from affective deliberation to physical execution is radically manifested in the form of crowd-enabled connective action as shown in Figure 3.3 ("Should We Go Out Tonight?"). The brief rhetorical question triggered a very diverse circulation of personal expression, ranging from logistical calculations, practical advice, to affective emojiification. Referring to the conceptual framework of Bennett and Segerberg, this phenomenon shows how platform features take over the role of formal institutions in aggregating movements. The thread structures and upvoting/downvoting feature in LIHKG act as a digital consensus engine; The most relevant tactical ideas or suggestions are mechanically amplified by the masses to the main page based on collective judgment, rather than on the instructions of the organization's elite. This procedure is directly integrated with *Zeynep Tufekci's* concept of networked micro-coordination, in which the decentralized masses are able to adapt their tactics fluidly in the field, (Tufekci, 2017). The constant exchange of information and self-evaluation of risks in this thread explains why movement decisions remain flexible. Participants consume updates from LIHKG, interpret risks autonomously, and act

synchronously to change routes or disband instantly. Thus, the interplay between anonymity, language coding, and algorithmic aggregation at LIHKG successfully operationalized the "Be Water" ethos from an abstract philosophy into an adaptive and coordinated physical action on the streets of Hong Kong. (Tufekci, 2017).

B. Internal Dilemmas: Crisis of Trust (*Specific Content: An examination of posts that reveal internal doubts or distrust, as illustrated by Image 3.4, highlighting the societal repercussions associated with anonymity*).

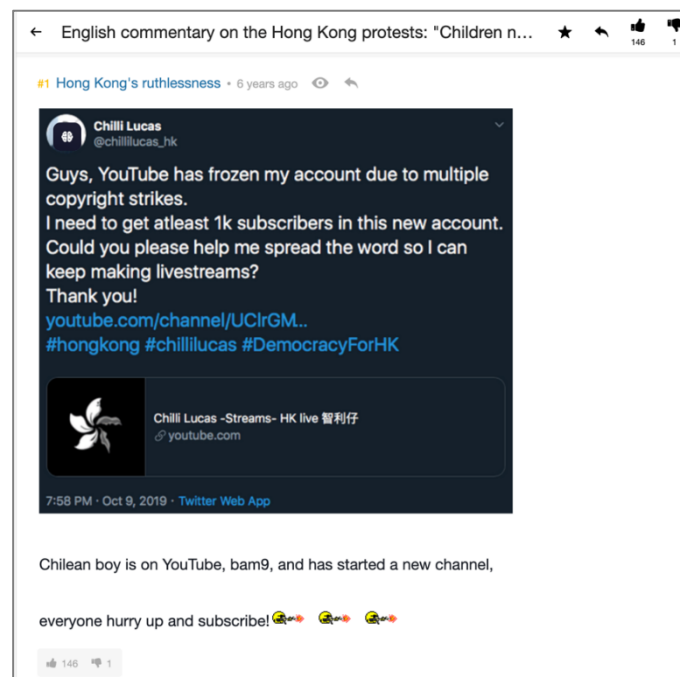


Image 3. 4 *Anonymity Safety Tips*

The data in Image 3.4 (Anonymity and Digital Security Tips) theoretically confirm how LIHKG's affordance platform is used to build a collective psychological and operational defense infrastructure. The circulation of tactical recommendations such as disabling GPS tracking, avoiding personal SIM cards, and deleting photo metadata before uploading, shows that digital security literacy is an absolute instrument to operate the "Be Water" tactic. In conditions without centralized leadership, this dissemination of privacy protection knowledge acts as a communication strategy to mitigate the risk of state repression. However, the conditioning of safe spaces facilitated by this anonymity holds a profound

structural paradox. When personal identities are completely removed for the sake of operational safety, the foundation for building traditional trusts based on reputation or institutional verification collapses. As a result, communities are forced to develop an ethics of caution based on validating behavior and synchronizing actions on the ground, rather than on the speaker's personal status.

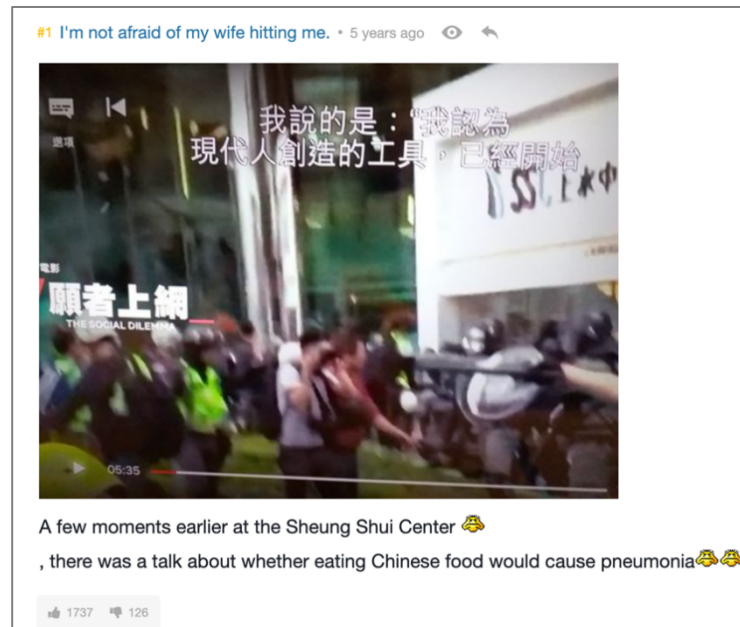


Image 3. 5 Shows a clash between protesters and police during the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

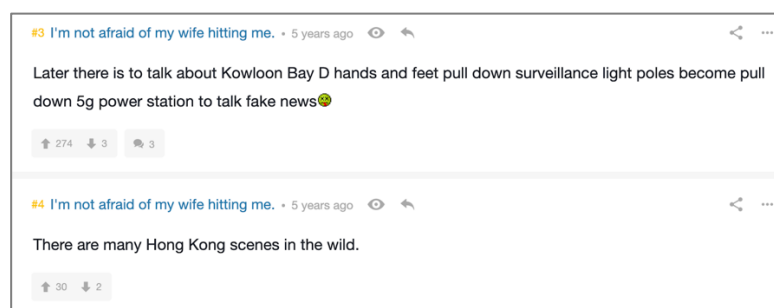


Image 3. 6 Reflect the spread of rumors and misinformation discussed online during the protest

#5 I'm not afraid of my wife hitting me. • 5 years ago



Image 3. 7 Shows a large crowds gathering as a apart of mass protest in Hong Kong 2019

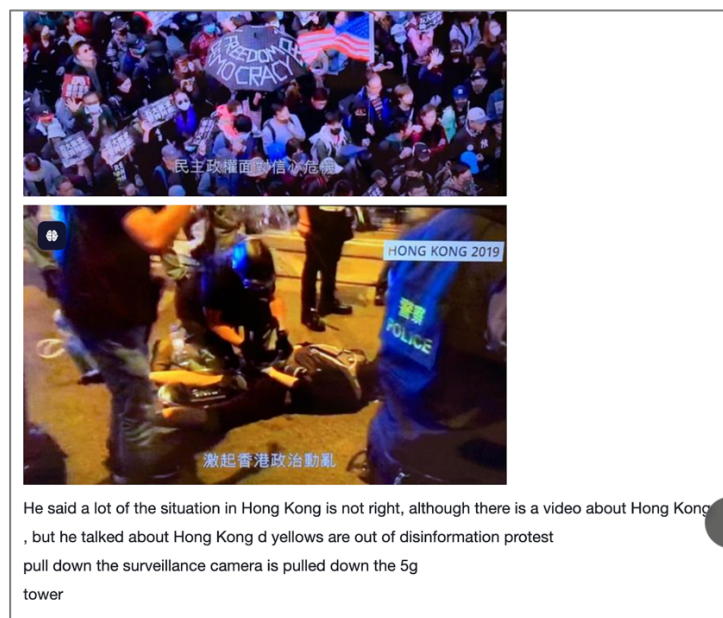


Image 3. 8 Capture the arrest of a protestor by police during the 2019 Hong Kong Protest

This architectural paradox reaches its tipping point when confronted with the realities of physical repression and information disruption, as captured sequentially in Image 3.5, Image 3.6, Image 3.7, and Image 3.8. The combination of brutal physical clashes in the field with the penetration of rumors and misinformation in cyberspace creates a double psychological burden for participants. On the one hand, the mass manifesto had to face the real threat of external arrest; On the other hand, they are caught in a vortex of internal suspicion (fear of infiltration) and fear of betrayal by their fellow anonymous protesters. The presence of dystopian affective terms such as "suspicion" and "infiltration" in the coding data suggests that fully horizontal digital public spaces are particularly vulnerable to narrative sabotage.

This condition of chaos and crisis of trust triggered the birth of the phenomenon of soft leadership as formulated by *Gerbaudo*. To prevent the movement from experiencing a tactical freeze due to mass panic and hoaxes, certain autonomous actors, such as channel administrators, thread creators with the highest upvotes, or information curators that take over the functions of pseudo-authority. They curate data flows, pin security verification messages, and remove narratives that are indicated as state intelligence fabrications. This informal authority does not work through institutional coercion, but rather through the legitimacy of the platform's algorithms that are trusted by the masses. This process of self-stabilization shows that unity in a leaderless movement is not something that happens automatically, but rather the result of laborious communicative hard work through a routine of mutual verification. In the end, the data set from Figures 3.5 to 3.8 proves the truth of *Tufekci's* thesis on the fragility of networks: the speed of mobilization without formal organizational infrastructure makes this movement very vulnerable to collapse from within due to a crisis of trust, unless its digital ecosystem is capable of producing adaptive information defense mechanisms in real-time.

3.1.1 Telegram's Role in Real-Time Coordination and Operational Security:

A. Function: *Real-Time Update* and *Escape Route* (*Specific Content: Detailed analysis of messages like Image 3.9, 3.10*).

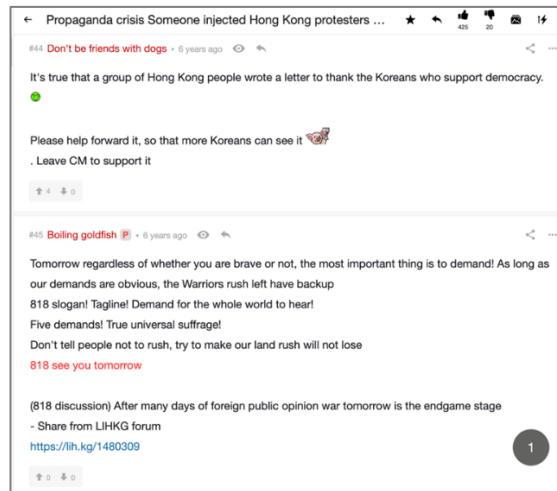


Image 3. 9 Shows discussions on the forum related to the 2019 Hong Kong protests

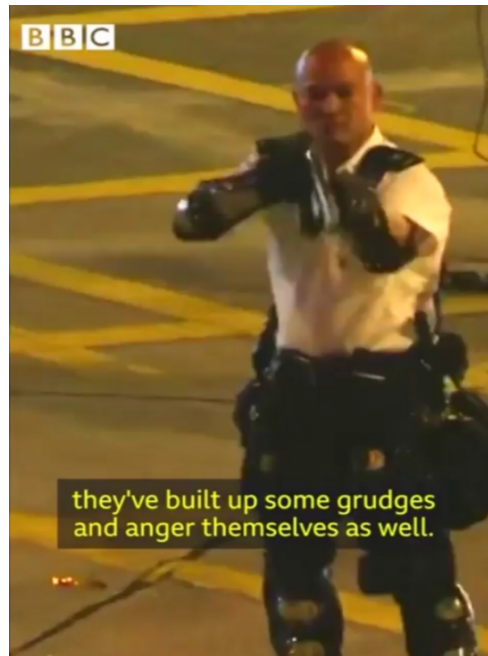


Image 3. 10 Shows a police officer in riot gear standing on a street at night during a tense situation

Contextual analysis of Image 3.9, and Image 3.10, shows how Telegram's affordance facilitates the transmission of high-speed asymmetric information under physical pressure. Short, directive messages such as "Avoid this exit" or "Police

are seen near Nathan Road" prove that the platform's main usefulness lies in its ability to generate dynamic situational awareness. Communication patterns recorded in open coding such as instant alerts, field coordination, and evacuation route mapping, show clear functional differentiation with LIHKG. If LIHKG functions as a digital agora space where personal narratives are tested into macro consensus through connective action logic, Telegram is a purely operational instrument where the consensus is tactically executed. This constant stream of data updates allows the masses to act synchronously and adaptively, directly representing the "Be Water" ethos, where the flexibility of mass movement on the streets is determined by the accuracy of digital information intake in real-time.

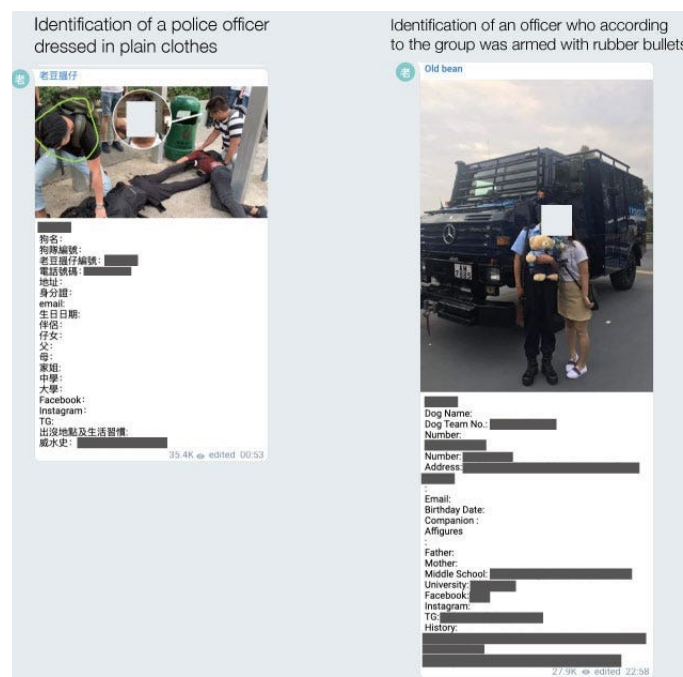


Image 3. 11 Shows personal information and photos shared online, suggesting the exposure of private data

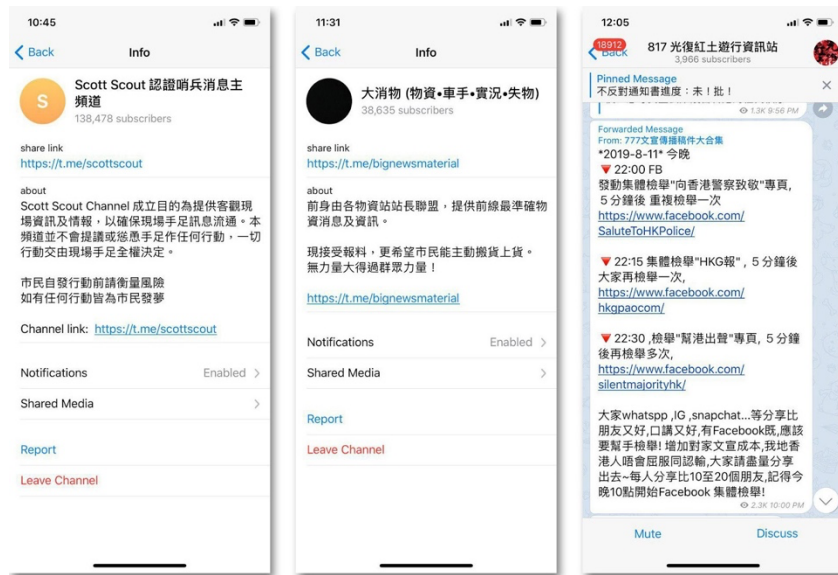


Image 3. 12 Displays telegram channel profiles that used broadcast news, updates, and political information to large audiences



Image 3. 13 Shows an anonymous poll conducted on a messaging platform to measure public opinion on a political issue

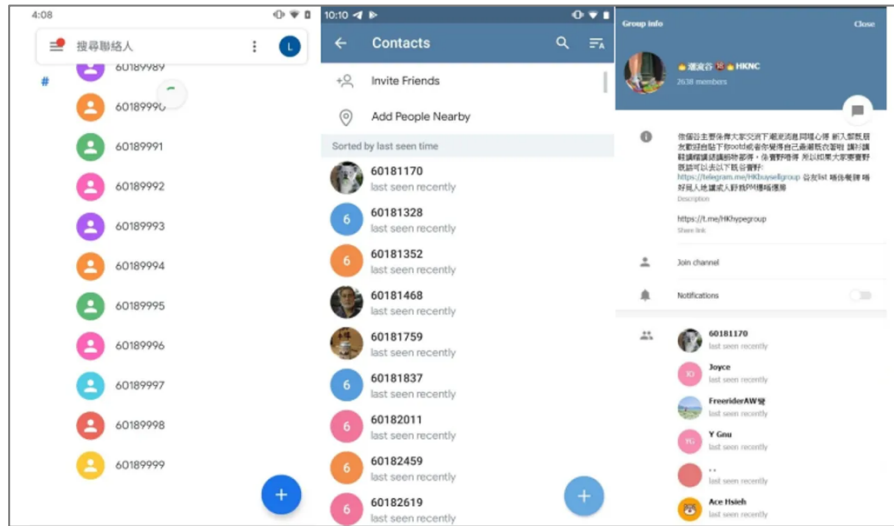


Image 3.14 Depicts contact lists and group information in a messaging application used to organize and coordinate communication among users

This operational and architectural dimension is deepened by the data sets in Image 3.11, Image 3.12, Image 3.13, and Image 3.14. The massive use of arrows, location markings, and short commands such as "Stop!" or "Nearby Safe Zone" confirm the workings of the crowd-enabled connective action model that is fully mediated by the platform's technical capabilities. The broadcast channels (Image 3.12) and anonymous polls (Image 3.13) feature structurally replace the roles of the traditional central editor, spokesperson, or field commander. One-to-many broadcasting channels allow a small group of field curators to disseminate danger warnings to tens of thousands of demonstrators simultaneously without exposing the identities of members, minimizing the metadata trail vulnerable to surveillance evasion. Meanwhile, anonymous polls act as an instant measure of mass preferences to determine decisions.

However, the integration of data from Image 3.11 to 3.14 also reveals the inherent vulnerabilities of *this networked micro-coordination*. The threat of exposure to personal data (Image 3.11) and the risk of communication disconnection by state authorities are critical limits that can trigger a *tactical freeze*. To anticipate these *networked vulnerabilities*, protesters took advantage of contact management and encrypted groups (Image 3.14) to build semi-private local communication clusters. This pattern suggests that coordination does not depend on one-way hierarchical instructions, but rather develops organically through a

network of information nodes that verify each other. Through this unique *combination of affordance*, Telegram transformed from a mere instant messaging app to a tactical defense architecture, allowing the liquid masses in Hong Kong to maneuver safely, avoid the threat of arrest, and maintain the continuity of movement amid massive political repression.

3.1.2 Visual Framing Analysis:



Image 3. 15 Shows how the word “cockroaches” was used during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide to dehumanize and justify mass killing

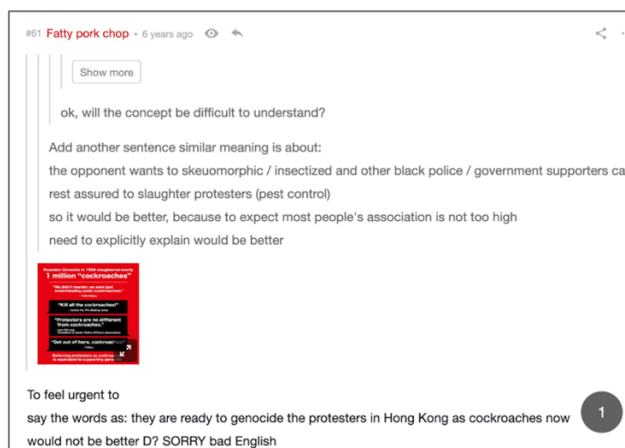
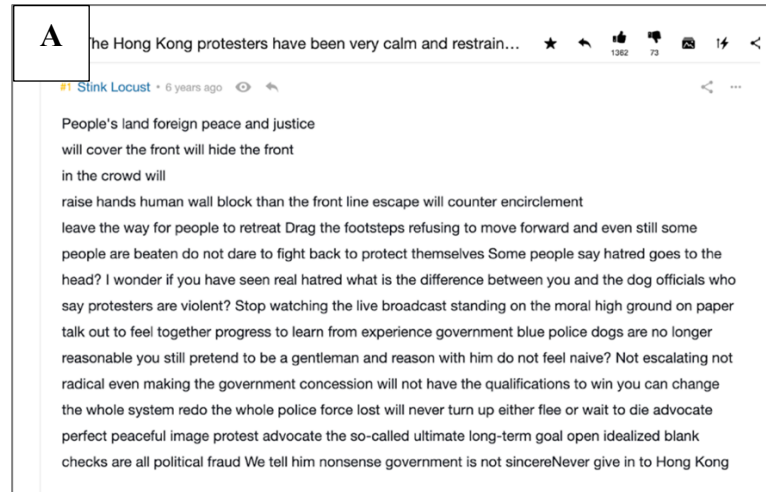
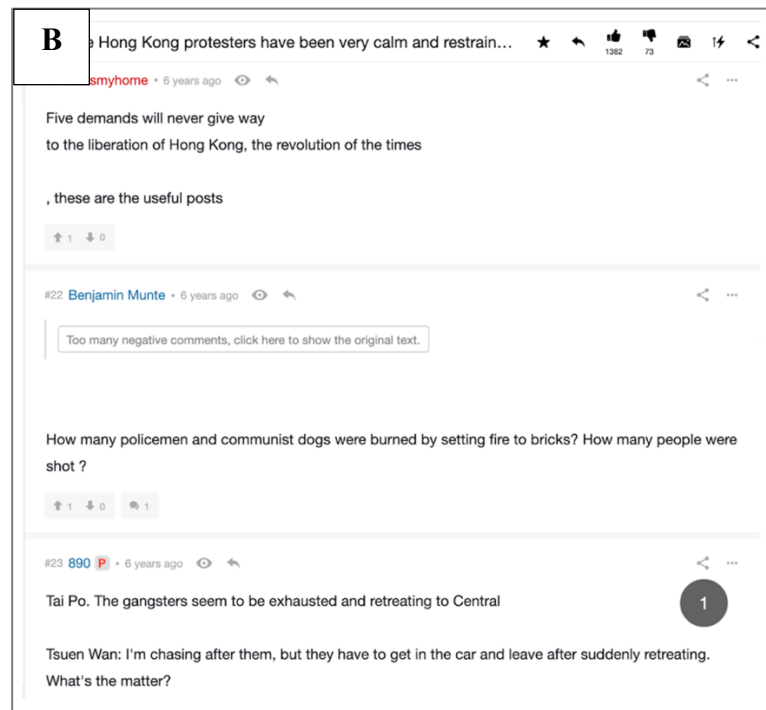


Image 3. 16 Shows the same dehumanizing word being used against protesters, warning that such language can encourage violence

The transition from purely tactical coordination to the circulation of visual artifacts marks a crucial phase in which the digital ecosystem is used to produce macro-narrative counters. Through the lens of affordance platform theory and affective tuning, digital posters and infographics distributed on Telegram and LIHKG do not only function as propaganda tools, but as radical reframing instruments. This framing process aims to reject the dehumanization of authority, build a resilience-based collective identity, and secure moral legitimacy at the international level.

A comparative analysis of Image 3.15 and Image 3.16 reveals how Telegram transformed into a *networked humanitarian infrastructure* in direct response to the threat of narrative repression. The use of dehumanizing terms such as "cockroaches" by state apparatus is analyzed not just as a verbal attack, but as a systematic attempt to justify physical violence. Faced with this communicative dystopia, the demonstrators used the Telegram channel to build a *decentralized network of care*. The results of axial coding showed that micro-messages regarding the availability of medical logistics, first aid posts, and emergency psychological assistance at evacuation points functioned as a form of *humanitarian resistance*. The concept of *movement sustainability* is achieved because the platform facilitates dual protection: physical safety in the field as well as the recovery of collective psychological trauma. *Telegram's affordance platform* ensures that all of these risk mitigation activities run under strict operational security protocols without relying on hierarchical formal humanitarian institutions.

A. Analysis of dominant themes in shared posters and photos: How protestors construct their identity (e.g., narrative of *resilience* vs. *victimhood*).



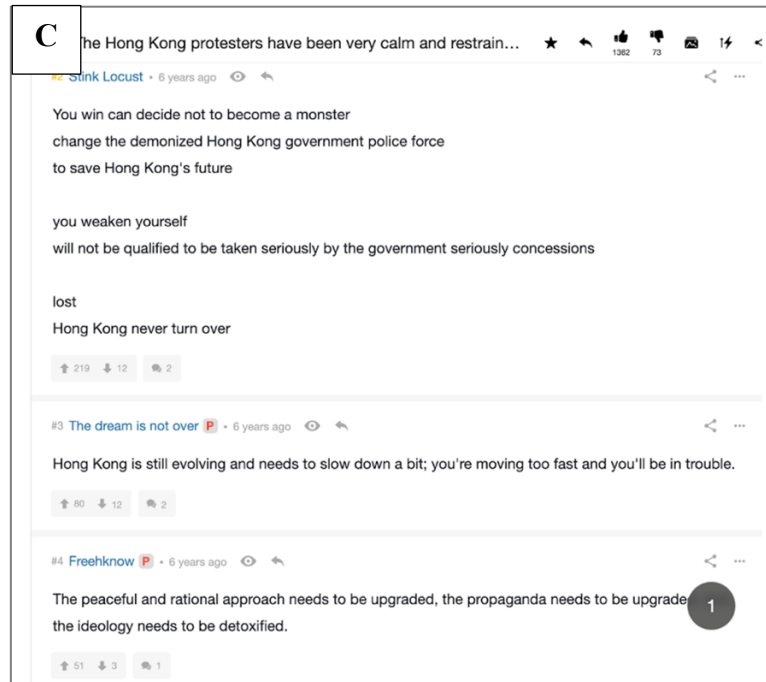


Image 3. 17 *A,B,C Presents excerpts from online discussions where protesters and police actions are debated in a highly polarized way*

The dimension of the internal narrative reframing dimension is reflected in depth in the Image 3.17 data (LIHKG Strategic Discussion Threads). Through an initial draft of the code that captures the concepts of "collective hope," "intergenerational solidarity," and "vulnerable existence," the discourse at the LIHKG forum actively deconstructs the unilateral framing by state media that labels these movements as criminals or *provocateurs*. Forum users conceptualized Hong Kong's future as a *shared battleground* to defend the right to *self-determination*. This communicative relationship links street political activity with moral responsibility to future generations. By utilizing the opinion aggregation feature in LIHKG, participants transformed individual experiences of fear into a narrative of collective resilience. This forum serves as a counter-narrative production engine that redefines the position of the demonstrators from mere political victims (*victimhood*) to defenders of legitimate democratic values.

A

4 Kemiripan Unjuk Rasa Hong Kong dengan Demo Mahasiswa di Indonesia

Ternyata, meski ribuan kilometer jauhnya, demonstrasi Hong Kong dan Indonesia memiliki sejumlah kemiripan. Apa saja?



Oleh **Rizki Akbar Hasan**

Diterbitkan 25 September 2019, 21:00 WIB

Share



B

Indonesian media reports have highlighted similarities betwe...



My mother is Indonesian I heard some relatives there said there were stones and petrol on the ambulances for the protesters

187 3 6

#13 **Grain Tail Fun** • 6 years ago

Exporting the Hong Kong model has moved

Indonesians. Keep it up!

138 1 3

#14 **Elementary school student (Xi Jinping)** • 6 years ago

Do you think these anti-human laws

will be like Hong Kong's blue-collar crappy people who come out to blindly support them? 🤔

45 1 4

#15 **Hiroki Iijima** • 6 years ago

Exporting the Hong Kong model has moved

Indonesians. Keep it up!

Too many negative comments, click here to show the original text.

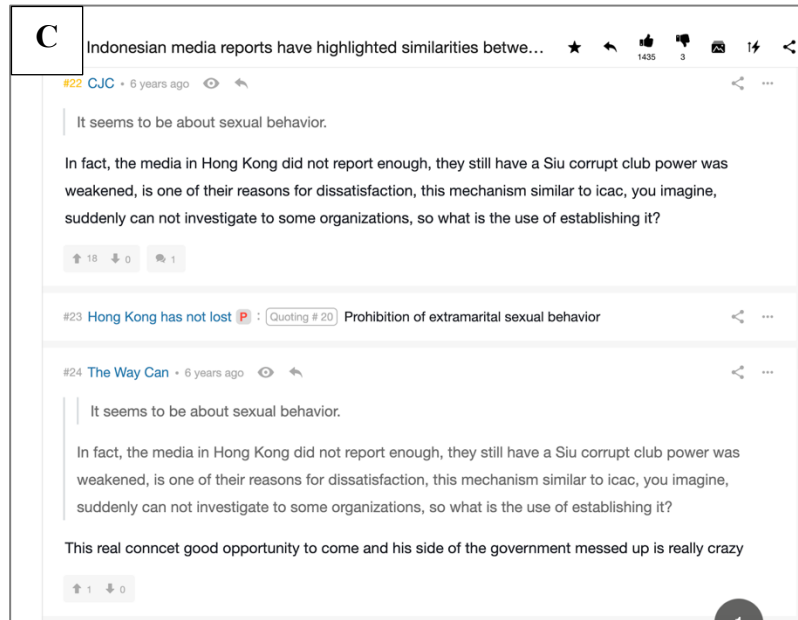


Image 3. 18 A,B,C Global Solidarity Posts

These local narratives are then amplified to the global realm through the circulation of tactical digital posters, as recorded in Image 3.18 A, B, C. The visual focus on transnational support, including manifestations of solidarity from Indonesian and Southeast Asian communities, has a very high theoretical significance. This data expands the boundaries of network social movement (NSM) theory by proving that it is capable of crossing Western geopolitical and cultural boundaries. The results of axial coding of supporting visual elements such as multilingual posters and regional solidarity actions affirm the reframing of the Hong Kong movement as a global moral issue related to human rights and civil liberties.

Strategically, this visual spread of transnational solidarity in Image 3.18 directly breaks the hegemonic narrative of the Chinese authorities that the protests are merely the actions of isolated, small-scale domestic radical groups. Through the use of digital circulation channels, cross-regional alliances are formed organically. For demonstrators on the ground, including migrant worker networks and diasporas, this visualization of international support injects massive affective conditioning in the form of moral reinforcement. At this point, digital images no longer serve as a means of conveying one-way messages, but rather as a symbol of

global empathy and recognition of the moral legitimacy of a movement that binds the world's communities under the same democratic values.

3.1.3 Narrative Comparison: Internal vs. External Media (News Data):

This section examines how major events, including clashes with the police, were portrayed across digital platforms by comparing content from LIHKG and Telegram with reports from six independent international news outlets. This comparison provides different perspectives on the 2019 Hong Kong protests and shows how local narratives and external media complemented each other in shaping public understanding of the events. The analysis is based on a collection of article titles and publication dates from the selected sources.

THE EXTERNAL MEDIA

A. CNN – Violence of Hong Kong Protest

Media: CNN

Date: 15/9/2019

Focus: Escalation of violence and physical clashes

CNN's CNN highlighted the violence in the Hong Kong protests, nothing that it was central to its coverage. Using an open-coding approach for thematic analysis, several key themes emerged, including "violent clashes," "tear gas," and "confrontations with police." This framing presents the protests as a security issue rather than a citizen-led digital movement. Axial coding identifies the broader theme of Conflict-Based Framing, which emphasizes the physical confrontations between protesters and police. This contrasts with internal messages from the LIHKG and Telegram forums, which focus on tactical warnings, evacuation routes, and the "Be Water" strategy to minimize direct confrontation.

B. The Guardian - “Hong Kong’s Digital Battle: Tech that Helped Protesters Now Used Against Them”

Media: The Guardian

Date: 14/6/2019

Focus: Ambivalence of technology; empowerment versus risk

As reported by The Guardian in an article, digital technology has become a battleground between the state and protesters. Concepts such as “surveillance,” “tracking,” and “data extraction” emerge from the open coding process. Axial analysis reveals a recurring pattern regarding Dual-Use Technology: While these digital tools initially empowered demonstrators to assert their rights during protests, they were later used as tools of state surveillance. This stands in stark contrast to the narrative emerging on LIHKG, which views technology as a tool for anonymity rather than an existential threat.

C. South China Morning Post (SCMP) - “How Hong Kong’s Reddit Forum LIHKG Became a Protest Hub”

Media: South China Morning Post

Date: 2019

Focus: LIHKG as a community-based mobilization center

SCMP portrays LIHKG as a community-based platform and a tool for mobilization. This yields themes from open coding, including “community-based,” “online consensus,” and “participatory approach.” Meanwhile, axial coding highlights key themes regarding Participatory Identity Development. In fact, the SCMP report presents LIHKG as a forum where demonstrators collaboratively plan strategies and shape their collective identity. This closely mirrors the internal narratives identified in the LIHKG data, particularly regarding consensus-building and issues of trust.

D. Bloomberg Graphics - “Coverage of Airport Occupation”

Media: Bloomberg Graphics

Date: 22/9/2019

Focus: Visualization of mass, public tension, and dramatization effect

Bloomberg describes the protests as large-scale visual events. This makes it easy to code “occupations,” “mass tension,” “crowd density,” and the like as primary focuses. The “Spectacular Framing” pattern emerges through axial coding with a focus on the scale and dramatic narrative of mass activities. This narrative differs from Telegram, which prioritizes detailed on-the-ground coordination over mere visual depictions of large crowds.

E. The China Project - “LIHKG and Telegram: The Software Powering Protests in Hong Kong”

Media: The China Project

Date: 19/9/2019

Focus: The role of encrypted platforms in movement coordination

The China Project clearly identifies LIHKG and Telegram as the technical foundations of the movement. The open-source code references “encrypted communication,” “secure coordination,” and “decentralized planning.” From the code, the theme of Decentralized Infrastructure emerges. This article aligns closely with the demonstrators’ experiences, emphasizing the importance of leaderless coordination and real-time information dissemination, as reflected in data from Telegram and LIHKG

F. ISPI - “Digital Revolution: How Social Media Shaped the 2019 Hong Kong Protests”

Media: ISPI

Date: 21/7/2021

Fokus: Socio-political transformation through digital platforms

ISPI views the Hong Kong Movement as a key example of a digital revolution. Key concepts emerging from the open coding include “decentralized participation,” “security culture,” and “digital activism.” Through axial coding, a central theme was identified: Structural Transformation in Civic Participation. This indicates that, fundamentally, the protests reflect a radical shift in the political engagement of the younger generation. This final pattern aligns closely with the dynamics long observed on the LIHKG and Telegram platforms.

Table 3. 2 *Internal Platform*

Platform	Main narrative	Analysis
LIHKG	Anonymous discussions, community consensus, trust dynamics	<i>How decisions are made: strategic deliberation, crisis of confidence, production of moral identity</i>
Telegram	Real-time tactical coordination, evacuation routes, medical support	<i>Why action occur: field requirements, operational safety, internal solidarity</i>

Thus, across the five sections, comparative analysis shows a pronounced difference in narrative emphasis. Outside media focused mainly on the observable elements of the movement violence, mass mobilization, technological threats, and striking imagery. On the other hand, the internal digital platforms (LIHKG and Telegram) offered a very different narrative focused on decision-making processes and the underlying reasoning behind actions taken.

3.2 Analysis and Discussion (Theoretical Interpretation)

3.2.1 Operationalization Networked Social Movement

The communicative interaction between LIHKG and Telegram directly embodies the main characteristics of Manuel Castells's theory of Networked Social Movements, transforming abstract conceptual frameworks into operational realities in the field. Empirical data show that coordination in the 2019 Hong Kong protests ran entirely non-hierarchical, operating as a decentralized network where command authority was replaced by the utilization of platform affordances. In LIHKG's asynchronous environment, strategic deliberations, such as the viral question "Should We Go Out Tonight?" released from the control of formal institutions. Tactical decisions are born from the process of horizontal aggregation, in which ideas are independently filtered and validated by the masses through the mechanics of the platform's algorithms.

Telegram then cuts through the time barrier that exists in forum discussions by providing *real-time operational synchronization*. The distribution of spatial data, the movement of apparatus, and the constant change of transportation routes are empirical manifestations of Castells's concept of *space of flows* and *timeless time*. Under these conditions, digital networks have succeeded in eliminating geographical boundaries and traditional bureaucracy. This dual ecosystem not only facilitates micro-coordination of logistics on the streets, but also actively forms a resilient collective identity. Instead of being dictated by the organization's elite, symbols of resistance such as *the "Be Water" ethos* and the transnational visual campaign "*Our Future*" are produced, negotiated, and maintained through horizontal, self-contained mass communication. Thus, the structural cohesion of this movement is purely a product of constantly distributed network communication.

3.2.2 The Double-Edged Sword of Anonymous Communication

The empirical findings reveal the existence of a deep structural tension at the center of the architecture of movement communication, which places anonymity as a double-edged sword: on the one hand it strengthens defenses, but on the other it fragments collective action. Data from the LIHKG thread regarding

digital security tips shows the birth of a very tactical *operational security culture*. Preventive recommendations, such as disabling device biometric authentication, avoiding registered SIM cards, and deleting photo metadata prove that anonymity is not just a passive preference, but an active defensive communication strategy to create collective psychological security in the face of state surveillance apparatus.

However, this total elimination of physical and digital identities triggers a systemic vulnerability within the body of the movement, namely the collapse of traditional reputation-based trusts. As evidenced by the high mass anxiety against intelligence infiltration, agitation of propaganda actors, and the spread of tactical disinformation, this horizontal space is constantly plagued by a crisis of trust. Without a hierarchical verification structure, anonymous masses are particularly vulnerable to external sabotage and tactical freeze. To neutralize the networked fragility, these decentralized communities are forced to develop an "ethics of prudence." Trust is rebuilt through a crowdsourced peer-verification protocol, which requires users to substantiate their anonymous claims with field photo proof, cross-platform cross-matching, and rapid algorithm validation via an upvote button. As a result, while anonymity succeeds in lowering barriers to mass participation and avoiding state surveillance, it comes at a high cost of communication by complicating group consensus and making networks always vulnerable to internal suspicion.

3.2.3 Citizen Journalism and Counter-Framing

Beyond its logistical and defensive functions, the relationship between LIHKG and Telegram operates as an autonomous infrastructure for citizen journalism, directly challenging the dominant narrative frameworks of both the state and mainstream international media. Through collective counter-framing, the demonstrators rejected external characterizations that reduced their actions to mere acts of criminality or security crises. Through the dissemination of visual narratives, self-paced documentation, and multilingual tactical infographics, participants shifted their public image from the position of victimhood or provocateur to defender of legitimate democratic values.

The strategic dissemination of this visual material across language boundaries including Cantonese, English, and Indonesian effectively brought this movement into the framework of transnational solidarity. This cross-regional resonance transforms passive global observers into stakeholders who recognize the moral legitimacy of movements, while disrupting the country's local censorship. While mainstream global broadcasting networks use *conflict-based framing* to dramatize street violence, LIHKG and Telegram's internal media ecosystems prioritize structural reasoning, shared trauma, and collective resilience. This communicative autonomy is a clear example of Castells's concept of *mass self-communication*, in which the technical architecture of digital platforms allows the leaderless masses to independently produce and circulate their own political discourse at the global level, transforming visual communication from a mere means of conveying messages into a radical instrument for narrative self-determination.

Research shows that LIHKG and Telegram functioned not only as coordination platforms but also as spaces for citizen journalism that challenged mainstream media narratives. Through counter-framing, protesters collectively produced alternative interpretations of events, responding to what they perceived as biased or incomplete media coverage. The content shared on both platforms included photographs, posters, real-time updates, and independent fact-checking. Open coding identified themes such as *alternative narratives*, *self-documentation*, *narrative reconstruction*, *global visibility*, and *emotional solidarity*. For example, the poster in Image 3.17 communicates resilience, unity, and nonviolence, offering an alternative to media coverage that often emphasized violence.

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

4.1 Conclusion

This research succeeded in deconstructing the dynamics of communication in the 2019 Hong Kong protests by proving that LIHKG and Telegram do not simply function as a means of message transmission, but operate as independent dual political-communicative infrastructures. The main significance of this study for Communication Sciences, especially in the sub-discipline of Digital Communication and Social Movements, is the rejection of the assumption of "*absolute leadershiplessness*" in *networked social movements*. Through the qualitative content analysis methodology, this study transparently proves that when formal leadership is eliminated, the system does not experience communicative anarchy; Instead, the system conducts self-organization where authority is dynamically redistributed through the platform's technical features (*platform affordances*).

Theoretically, this study expands the boundaries of the concept of *Networked Social Movements* from Manuel Castells and *Connective Action* from Bennett & Segerberg. Field findings show that the process of forming a collective identity does not occur in a single, homogeneous digital public space. There is a strict *communicative division of labor*: LIHKG acts as an asynchronous agora space where *affective publics* are crystallized into macro consensus through algorithm-based horizontal filtering mechanisms (*upvoting/downvoting*). Meanwhile, Telegram acts as a synchronous neural system that translates these abstract consensus into micro-tactical actions in *real-time* on the ground through *broadcast channels* and *anonymous polls*. Thus, the cohesion of the "*Be Water*" strategy has been successfully maintained not because of the similarity of ideologies, but because of the platform's technical ability to manage the tension between operational privacy and the need for mass coordination.

4.2 Conceptual Communication Model: Dual Digital Communication

Based on the integration of empirical findings and theoretical synthesis, this study proposes a *Dual-Platform Digital Communication Ecosystem Model* to explain how a decentralized social movement maneuvers under strict state surveillance. The model operates through a *three-phase communicative feedback loop*:

Macro Deliberation Phase (LIHKG)

An asynchronous communication space that receives narrative input and emotional expression from anonymous users horizontally. In this phase, tactical ideas are evaluated together and filtered by the community using the upvote/downvote feature to generate a single collective consensus.

Micro Execution Phase (Telegram)

Consensus from LIHKG is streamed through the information transmission pipeline to Telegram. Here, synchronous platform characters are used to translate abstract ideas into micro-operational instructions (evacuation routes, tear gas dispersion). In this phase, *soft leadership* emerges from channel administrators who curate messages to maintain *operational security*.

Real Response and Reframing Phases

Tactical instruction is executed in the physical space of the streets. When faced with repression or distortion of information from outside media, protesters *counter-framing* through multilingual *citizen journalism* which is fed back to digital platforms. This new field data is then fed back into LIHKG for evaluation, creating a circular and adaptive communication cycle.

4.3 Suggestions & Implications

4.3.1 Theoretical Implications for Communication Science

This study contributes significantly to the enrichment of *Framing Theory* and *Mass Self-Communication Theory* in the cyber landscape, particularly through the deconstruction of traditional framing. This research proves that in the digital age, the monopoly of mainstream media agendas such as *spectacular framing* and *conflict-based framing* by global media can be effectively broken through collective *counter-framing* organized from the bottom. Through this dynamic, the

research has also succeeded in redefining platform capabilities (*platform affordances*), where the understanding of the function of communication technology in crisis conditions is radically expanded. Technical characteristics such as encryption systems, access controls, and high levels of anonymity are no longer seen simply as security features of individual privacy, but are analyzed as instruments of collective psychological defense architecture that determine the life-and-death of a social movement in the digital space.

4.3.2 Practical Suggestions

In practical terms, this dual ecosystem model offers a strategic communication *blueprint* for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), humanitarian activists, and grassroots communities who are forced to maneuver under regimes with repressive levels of state *surveillance*. One of the fundamental steps offered is the importance of institutionalizing functional channel separation in the group's digital architecture. To maintain the efficiency of the movement while reducing the risk of data leakage, civil society organizations must strictly separate between asynchronous and consensus-open policy deliberation spaces and strictly synchronized, encrypted, and curated operational coordination channels. This architectural separation has proven effective in mitigating the spread of tactical disinformation while closing the infiltration gap of state actors. In addition, other practical implications demand the institutionalization of the *ethics of caution*. Faced with the constant threat of information sabotage, decentralized communities are advised to no longer rely on traditional interpersonal trusts, but instead actively adopt a culture of *crowdsourced peer-verification* by requiring visual *cross-checking* before disseminating tactical information to the field.

4.3.3 Research Limitation

This qualitative research has methodological and contextual limitations that need to be described transparently in order to maintain its academic validity, starting from the limitations of chronological coding transparency. Because conversation data was obtained from the digital archives of LIHKG threads and Telegram channels, most of which have lost chronological *metadata* due to periodic deletions for user security, this study deliberately prioritizes in-depth

thematic analysis over linear chronological reconstruction of events. This automatically limits the study's ability to precisely map the direct causal relationship between a specific message on a device and a physical action in minutes on the street.

In addition to time constraints, there are also geopolitical and regime contextual limitations that limit the generalization of findings. The results of this research are strongly tied to Hong Kong's unique socio-political characteristics in 2019, where the region is supported by a very high level of internet penetration, a mature digital literacy of the community, and a specific local platform structure. Therefore, the application of this conceptual model to social movements in other countries with a wide level of digital divide or that are under the threat of total internet control (*internet shutdown*) must be interpreted with great caution. The last limitation lies in the multilingual semantic bias, where the process of translating text from the native language of local Cantonese and Hong Kong cyber digital slang into English or Indonesian for qualitative analysis purposes has the potential to cause *semantic misinterpretation*. This linguistic complexity is recognized as an inherent limitation in cultural research of digital communication that involves cross-language.

4.3.4 Suggestions for the future research

To overcome the above limitations and develop an understanding of digital activism, the next researcher is advised to implement *mixed-methods* integration. Future researchers can combine this qualitative content analysis with Digital *Network Mapping* or *time-series analysis* to accurately capture fluctuations in message volume and see how soft leadership nodes move from one account to another during a crisis.

Furthermore, it is also necessary to develop an in-depth cross-regime comparative analysis. Future comparative studies should compare Hong Kong's dual communication model with similar movements in regions with different internet architectures and geopolitical pressures, such as protest movements in Iran, Myanmar, or Latin America, in order to test the universal validity of this dual digital ecosystem model. Finally, the next researcher is recommended to conduct a new algorithm impact study focusing on cutting-edge technology. An in-depth

investigation needs to be directed to examine the impact of the integration of artificial intelligence (*AI*) technology and bot automation in the process of *counter-framing* information by protesters, to see if the efficiency of *crowdsourced verification* can be improved automatically or even more disrupted by the presence of such technology.

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