Framing Political Distrust

Online public discussion during the Li Gang Scandal

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Abstract

This research investigates the online public discussion during the Li Gang Scandal in order to understand how the public framing led to political distrust in China. It seeks to address the following questions: (a) why do framing activities of political distrust gain popularity, (b) how were popular beliefs formed, (c) what was made more salient and what was underrepresented. Frame analysis was employed to identify different frame packages which emerged and frame interactions among various levels and different locations. Data were collected through the "Tianya Forum." Nine threads with 20179 replies were analyzed and in total, 7235 related segments were coded. Results demonstrated that political distrust frames at the system level or even at the broader context level were widely accepted. Several key events were highlighted in order to enhance the political distrust frame and raise the collective negative emotions. Both the key events and the emotional mood functioned in the context which excreted influence on the individuals' acceptance of frames. In addition, the results indicated that deeper roots of political distrust lie in the dissatisfactions towards the government's poor management of social issues and perception of unequal positions in political reality. The new media also contributed to the spread of political distrust by offering a forum for communication, when the information available in the formalized channel was questioned by the public. In the specific context of new media, sponsors of the pro-distrust frame package made their voice dominant.

Keywords: Political distrust, framing, Li Gang Scandal, China

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1. Introduction

A new catchphrase – *"Lao Bai Xin* (the common people), *Lao Bu Xin"* (never trust) – appeared on the Internet in China recently. It demonstrates the distrustful attitudes of the general public in today's China – people are accustomed to doubt the credibility of the government. The belief that the government will never produce the preferred outcome defuses nation-wide after a series of political scandals have erupted from the Internet in recent years. Meanwhile, the newspaper starts to focus on the increasing political distrust in the Chinese society as well (Zhao, 2011). Despite the fact that trust is an important determinant of a political party's stability, distrust towards the government has become a serious problem (Patterson, Wahlke, & Boynton, 1973). It is trust in government that helps support and strengthen a political regime when it encounters difficulties, resulting in good performance in the short run (Chen & Shi, 2001). Therefore, the perceived high level of political distrust could result in withdrawal of support from the political system and become a potential threat to the stable and healthy development of a state.

What's more important and interesting however, is, how people acquire the belief of the government being untrustworthy and how they discuss it. One possible answer to this question could be that the ways people talk about the government influence their perceptions and attitudes towards the government. In other words, the framing of the issues do influence public beliefs (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999; Sheafer, 2007; Snow et. al, 2011). Because facts do not speak for themselves, it is the interactions between the information communicators and the information receivers that construct the reality towards them and contribute to the formation of the popular beliefs. Usually, the information communicators frame issues in a certain way by attaching an affective attribute to the issue consciously or unconsciously (Sheafer, 2007) so that it is easier for the information receivers to resonate with them.

The idea the researcher presented above is simple but not new. A number of researches have already paid attention to the influence of the manner of

communication. More specifically, the manner of how the information is communicated plays an important role in shaping the public perception of reality. Thus, frame analysis has been widely used to sort out the underlying logics of framing activity. It originated from the work of Goffman (1974), which was first used to organize and understand people's daily sense making. In a later extension of Goffman, Gamson (1983, 1987) referred to frames as the central organizing idea which holds together different elements and gives meaning to events. The framing activity, hence, becomes an essential part of meaning making in daily life and has relevance in several fields of research, such as in sociology (Goffman, 1974; Gamson, 1992), social-movements research (Snow & Benford, 1992), psychology (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984), politics (Lakoff, 2004), policy study (Schön & Rein, 1994) and communication (Entman, 1993). In the present research, the researcher is interested in exploring the relationship between the online framing activity and the attitudes of political distrust.

Although someone put it as, "it's not what you say, but how you say it," it is of course not to say that the substance does not matter. On the contrary, the content of communication does say a lot (Adriaansen et al., 2010). Since the results of communication are likely to have an outcome of both content and framing (Scheufele, 2000), this research will also pay attention to what kinds of frames of reference people used in their online framing activity in order to understand online framing of political distrust and its deeper roots in society.

1.1 Research Question and Research Relevance

The main puzzle of the researcher is to find how framing activity influences people's attitudes towards the government. A specific case from China – Li Gang Scandal – is selected as the research context for the framing activity of political distrust. Online public discussion during the Li Gang Sandal is collected and frame analysis is used to analyze the data collected. The main research question of this project is:

How can we understand the online framing of political distrust during the Li Gang Scandal?

Results from many lab experiments and real-life empirical research supported that frames have impact on individuals' attitudes and opinions (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Sheafer, 2007), however, not enough attention was paid to the frames that audience members have actively constructed during the communication (Zhou & Moy, 2007). This research will focus on the framing activity in the form of public discussion.

Besides, some studies already pointed out the importance of bringing power and culture back into the study of the framing activity (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Gorp, 2007), because it helps to examine the framing activity in a wider political and social contexts. In addition, the researcher agrees that reality is largely created in the social interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and the public opinion depends heavily on the public reasoning and deliberation (Habermas, 1962). Following these assumptions, this research attempts to look into the framing activity from the constructionist approach. In this tradition, public discusssion will be reagarded as the collective (re)contruction of reality. It is not only a communicative interaction process and but also a framing process, in which frame contruction, frame interaction and frame effects will take place all the time.

Communicative interaction among citizens is central to the development of democracy in western society. It is the point of penetration where one can investigate the patterns of contemporary consciousness with all these negotiations of norms and values of people's everyday life. People's daily social interactions may not directly connect to politics or political interests. They have, however, something to do with the common interests; hence, they have the potential to be political. Just as what Dahlgren (2005) said about the importance of focusing on people's everyday discourse:

> This is a role which can have non- or pre-political aspects, but which may
>
> develop toward politics and indeed evolve into formalized politics. The key here

is to underscore the processual and contextual dimension: The political and politics are not simply given, but are constructed via word and deed. (p. 158).

Investigations of the daily communicative interactions could provide political scientists with contextual specific knowledge on how certain political attitude is constructed. Additionally, frame analysis can help make sense of societal and contextual issues by break them into different elements and provide people with rich information of the context in which our daily lives are embedded in. Better understandings of the policy debate at various dimensions can be generated.

The public discourse is relevant for the policy makers as well. The meaning in the daily communication offers policy makers with valuable information to deal with a crisis of confidence, and helps to reestablish the trust in the government. In order to be both effective and efficient, the government counts on the support of socially shared legitimacy beliefs. It is important to generalize reliable knowledge about how people think of society, and how they develop common beliefs. In today's China, people's daily framing of political distrust has become a central issue for the government, when complex problems rise together with rapid societal changes. Political reform has been addressed in China for a long time, however, the debate on how the government should be improved never ends. By looking into what exactly people are talking about in regards to the government and how they are talking about political distrust, the Chinese government may find the direction for political reform in the near future. In addition, being responsive to the public discourse helps make the public "feel good" (Hendriks, 2009) about the government.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

The exploration of how to understand the online framing of political distrust in China needs to bridge levels of analysis and answer the following sub-questions: (a) why do framing activities of political distrust gain popularity, (b) how were popular beliefs formed, (c) what was made more salient and what was underrepresented. In order to

answer these questions, this thesis is organized as follows:

The present chapter first introduces the background of this research in order to provide the reader with some clues how the researcher gets interested in the present topic. Then, the research question and research relevance is displayed.

Chapter 2 aims at getting the readers familiar with the specific context, in which this research is carried out. Both the case selected – Li Gang Scandal, and the data analyzed – online public discussion, are described in details. This chapter also gives a specific focus on the media which hosts all the public discussion, because it has an influence on the topic studied in this research.

Chapter 3 reviews the prior researches on the framing activity and political distrust. Definitions of frames, framing and political trust/distrust are discussed in this chapter. A large portion of effort is put on the development of the theoretical framework of framing activities, because the framing theory is the central assumption that the research holds onto in order to understand the widespread nature of political distrust online. Research on political distrust is studied in order to find out how to distinguish different types of political distrust and how can they be influenced.

Chapter 4 reports the methodology of this study in detail. Illustrations of the method used, the data collection procedure and the data analysis procedure are displayed. In addition, brief reflections on the philosophic position and the role of the researcher in this project are stated.

Chapter 5 shows the results of the analysis. Findings are organized in five sections: (a) attitudes influenced by the posts; (b) objects of political trust/distrust; (c) perception of positions in political reality; (d) reality testing of beliefs; (e) solution recommendation.

Chapter 6 thoroughly discusses findings in relation to the literature. Answers towards the three sub-questions are presented explicitly in order to offer a profound answer to the main research question.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by restating the claim of this research and providing further research direction.

2. Research Context

As stated in the introduction, this research was carried out in the particular context of China. More specifically, it focused on the communicative interactions online during the well-known Li Gang scandal – which is a far-reaching political scandal that broke out in China in 2010, and later caused a heated national discussion on the credibility of government. In this chapter, the researcher is going to offer a detailed description of the case chosen in this project and discuss the characteristics of the materials.

2.1 Li Gang Scandal

In late October 2010, a car accident happened at Hebei University in central China which resulted in the injury of one girl and the death of another. The 22-year-old driver, Li Qiming, is the son of Li Gang, a deputy police chief in the Beishi district of Baoding. Li Qiming did not take the accident seriously. Without feeling any remorse or worry, he tried to flee. When the security guards intercepted him, he warned them, "My father is Li Gang!" On the contrary, the girl who died in the car accident came from a poor rural family, meaning there was no way to fight against the powerful one who caused the accident

At the beginning, this news received no attention from the mainstream media; but it was first reported online by the accident witness. On October 17th, 2010, a post named "the child of privileged warned by shouting 'my father is Li Gang, you can accuse me if you are able to!' after hitting two girls by car" appeared on the Tianya Forum (the most famous forum for communication and sharing daily information and experiences in China). It created an immediate outrage among netizens (online citizens), and rumours regarding Li Gang's powerful relations traveled quickly. The Li Gang Scandal became the most salient topic online at the time with the original post on the Tianya Forum receiving over 67 thousand hits and attracting increasing discussion in various threads and chat rooms.

The post title in itself already contains the affective (emotion) words and labels – "warned" "child of privileged". The affective attributes attached to the issue's description may have successfully attracted public attention, but also may have had

substantial influence on the public's attitudes towards this issue. The story was depicted as a 22-year-old young man trying to escape punishment by using his father's (a deputy police chief) power after a car crash. This turned out to be a gripping story on how privileged people try to escape punishment and how helpless ordinary people are. The catch phrase "My father is Li Gang" has already become a bitter inside joke, a national sarcasm for shirking any responsibility – such as washing dishes or being faithful to a girlfriend – with impunity.

The Li Gang Scandal was chosen because it is a typical case of people developing a collective attitude through online mass-communication. The general public had a strong belief that the powerful can flout the rules to which ordinary folk are forced to submit, and their negative attitude towards the government came into being. The increasing conflicts among different social strata and the public demand on accountability and transparency in the political domain stood out in this case. The online public discussion went far beyond the case itself and focused on the abuse of power of the Chinese government officials in general. Frame package about political distrust seemed to be supported by the majority and new power struggles took place in the social interaction. The netizens successfully exerted huge pressure on the government and eventually contributed to a change in the process dealing with this incident and even the result. The Li Gang scandal ended with a correction of the misconduct of government officials (the police officer) and public institutes. The case offers an opportunity to scrutinize which frame packages netizens employed to judge the government, and how these frame packages came into force and contributed to the formation of common beliefs and attitudes.

2.2 Online Public Discussion

The materials that are going to be studied in this research are online public discussions during the Li Gang Scandals. This specific type of material has its own characteristics which are suitable for the study of framing activity and political distrust in China.

Firstly, online public discussion can serve as a supplement to the elite opinion appearing in the mainstream media. The rapid development of communication

technology provides scholars with the opportunity to investigate such public discussions. With the emergence of new media, web 2.0, a channel which is characterized by many-to-many communication and the sharing of experiences, ordinary people get more initiative to set images of the government and discuss their feelings, beliefs and attitudes. Compared to web 1.0, which focuses primarily on one way information flowing from the websites to the public or one-to-one email communication, information in the web 2.0 age is co-produced among the public and is closely related to instant message and experience. The traditional one way communication, in which the government controls the conversations the mainstream media and the public listens, can no longer meet public demands. With the new media, the general public in China could discuss and share experiences with each other. It facilitated rapid, large-scale processes of self-organization through communication (Bekkers, 2004).

Secondly, in the context of China, where public opinions can hardly be tracked in other settings, online public discussions offer valuable information about the public opinion and reveal a typical type of power struggle on the Internet. Often, China is famous for its control of the mainstream media and strict censorship of the news that can be broadcast. Nevertheless, it becomes increasingly impossible with the development of new media and increasing number of Internet users. People use the new media to spread information immediately when something happens and exchange opinions and experiences. Different ways of framing a certain issue might emerge. The news agenda-setting is no longer determined solely by the traditional media organization, but by a wide range of actors. The audience now has the ability to take the initiative to set various frames in the public discussion. The new media can move timely information over vast space at incredible speed. Given that people depend heavily on the Internet to view certain news and to communicate with each other nowadays (CNNIC, 2010), the new media is playing a significant role in people's formation of beliefs. The online forums are full of people's discussions of their bad feelings about the public authority and the social justice in China. Thus, constant

construction and reconstruction of power relations occur on the Internet. Virilio claims that "avenues and public venues from now on are eclipsed by the screen, by electronic displays, in a preview of the `vision machines' just around the corner" (1994, p. 64). The Internet becomes a social space where negotiation of different power takes place along with the communicative interactions (Castells, 2007). It, hence, offers a virtual public community for scholars to examine the framing activity among the "netizens" (online citizens). In addition, because the online discussion is mainly carried out in text, it is easier for the researchers to trace the discussion.

Thirdly, the development of online public discussion has gained substantial power which cannot be ignored. In China, the number of Internet users reached around 485 million (36.3% of the total population) according to a report from the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in 2010. Online discourse has become a source of public opinion that cannot be overlooked. It successfully challenged governmental actions, and sometimes it even becomes the impetus for political reform (Peng, 2005). Frames in the online discourse could serve as a useful source for the understanding of political distrust in China since people's acquisitions of a certain belief are closely related to people's discursive practice in everyday life. A systematic empirical research into the online discourse about the government at this moment can provide us with some insights into how the public perceives the government and how the framing activity works in this specific context in China.

3. Literature Review

In this chapter, a systematical review of related literature will be presented in order to give the readers a basic concept of the theories that this research relates to and how this research is going to be guided. First of all, the framing theory will be discussed. More specifically, (a) the way in which frames and framing are going to be used in this research will be clarified; (b) the interactive models of framing, which are used to develop the theoretical framework of this research, will be elaborated; (c) a theoretical framework that is used to guide the analysis of this research will be developed. Then, the relationship between political distrust, which is the central theme of the framing activity, and framing will be stated. Lastly, how to distinguish different types of political distrust and the possible effects of different types of political distrust will be presented.

3.1 Framing

3.1.1 Defining Frames & Framing

In general, the framing theory originates from two disciplines – psychology and sociology (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). In the fields of sociology, frames are related to concepts such as schema, scripts and themes (Zhou & Moy, 2007). Frames originated from Goffman's work "*Frame Analysis*" in 1974, and they were referred to as constitutive rules that help organize people's everyday life. Goffman also regards frames as a central part of culture, which is shared in the collective memory (Zald (1996) in Gorp，2007). Later on in the extended version of the framing theory, as proposed by scholars such as Gamson (1992), Snow and Benford (1988; 1992) etc., frames are used to refer to the underlying structures that hold together a meaningful text. In this tradition, a frame is a necessary characteristic of a meaningful text. Without the frame, a discursive production cannot be coherent and therefore, not be qualified as a meaningful text. Frame analysis is, thus, used to

research how different frames are used by social actors to interpret and understand a complex social issue. Different frames influence public consciousness and public opinion in different ways.

The psychological origins of framing started from the experiments done by Kahneman and Tversky (1984). Their experiment showed that differently framed decision problems could influence people's evaluation of different options that were presented to them. Framing, therefore, has a common effect on most audience members by automatically leading their attention to a certain direction.

Most framing studies in Western society focus on the power of framing as a tactic for political elites, including politicians, mass media, and scientists, to manipulate the public opinion in order to achieve a certain political goal. Most of the time, framing is viewed as a campaign tool. The basic assumption underlying these studies is that the elites, as the communicators, are manipulating the public opinions by regarding the public as the passive message receivers (Riker, 1986; Kaid, 2005; Sheafer, 2007; Entman, 1989, 2007; Vreese, 2004, 2005; Brants et. al, 2009; Brewer & Gross, 2012). There is, however, another perspective to understanding framing activity, which is as a "learning process in which people acquire common beliefs, as in the coordination of people around a social norm" (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 120). This tradition has recently been sponsored by several scholars (Chong, 2000; Chong & Druckman, 2007). Regarding framing as a learning process leads the study of framing activities forward in the understanding of the effects of framing on the formation of attitudes. Actually, in the framing literature, the conceptualization of frames and framing remain "scattered" (Entman, 1993, p. 51). The basic assumption of "how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p.11) was used in various ways in different fields of study. McCombs (2004) refers to framing as a "second-level agenda setting," which aims at making certain aspects of an issue more salient through the modes of communication and thus, influencing people's attitudes. Chong and Druckman (2007), nevertheless, define framing as the process by which "people

develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (p. 104). They argue that framing is intrinsic to the formation of attitudes and opinions. The former definition emphasizes the great importance of the effects of the media, and its shaping of public opinion while the latter underscores the effects of the framing process on an individual level. Consequently, the definition of framing varies to a certain extent in accordance with the purpose of study.

The goal of the present research is to show the underlying logic between the framing activity of political distrust and the formation of collective attitudes and beliefs on the Internet in China. Therefore, the researcher adopted Chong and Druckman's (2007) definition of framing, regarding framing as people's development of a particular conceptualization of an issue. This definition specifically emphasizes people's meaning-making in society. Following this definition, it is necessary to make distinctions between the two types of frames, "frames in thought" and "frames in communication" (Chong and Druckman, 2007a). The former one refers to the pre-existing beliefs or considerations that an individual holds about a subject (Chong and Druckman, 2007a, p. 105) and the latter one refers to the frames people connect to in order to interpret and evaluate the information in text. Different terminologies are used to describe these two types of frames. Scheufele (1999) named them as "individual frames" and "media frames". Other scholars (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Wicks, 2001; Gorp, 2007), however, called the former type of frames individual schema and the latter ones frames. In order to avoid confusion, the terminology "individual schema" and "frames" are used in this research. The slight difference between the individual schema and a frame should be made clear here. The individual schema is the organized knowledge that is more related to personal experience. They are "mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals' processing of information" (Entman, 1993, p.53). And a frame is a broader concept that is related to the interpretation of reality. A frame is "a central organizing idea" (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987, p.143) that keeps the interpretation of reality coherent and meaningful. They are independent from the individuals in a sense that they are

actually collectively constructed and stored in the collective memory of a society. The frames applied, thus, determine the meaning that can be attached to the text content. They serve as the basis for generating knowledge and meaning of the world. Frames, in this respect, are more stable and become part of a culture, which links the discourse production and discourse consumption (Gorp, 2007). In addition, a framing activity is not necessarily an intended one, it can also be an unconscious one (Gamson, 1989).

Goffman (1974) argues that due to the cognitive constraints, individuals constantly struggle to understand their life experience and the world around them. Individuals need to apply the existing underlying schemas to interpret and make sense of newly received messages. Consequently, framing activity is embedded in the process of social interaction, and it is based on the assumption of social constructionism, which concerns the creation and interpretation of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Following the constructionist approach, frames are not encompassed in text; they are collectively constructed and shared. Therefore，this research emphasizes the interactions among different actors, between actors and the context of the framing activity. In the next section, the researcher is going to discuss the interactive models of the framing activity.

3.1.2 The Interactive Model of Framing Activity

According to Entman (1993), frames can be referred to at four different locations in the framing activity, namely, communicator, text, receiver and culture (Figure 3.1). Each text is created with certain underlying frames and carries certain meanings. Frames, accordingly, provide a context within which the information can be interpreted. Framing could exercise influence from each of these locations. Firstly, the placement of information by the communicator could increase the likelihood that the audience would accept it as truth. Secondly, the existing schema of the receivers would affect the acceptance of an idea. An idea or a piece of information can be highly salient to a receiver if it corresponds with the existing schema of the receiver, even if it is not highlighted in the text. On the contrary, an idea is difficult for

receivers to notice or to interpret if it does not match or even challenges the receiver's existing schema. Last, but not least, the connection between the information and the culturally familiar symbols also play an important role in the framing activity. No matter the communicators or the receivers, they are all social agents; there are always cultural factors behind the agency. Strong frames often rest on culturally familiar symbols and link to culturally related values. They would act as heuristics, thus shaping people's opinions.

Consequently, the essence of framing is in social interaction (Gorp, 2007; Snow & Benford, 1988). The impact of framing can be strong, on one hand, but it is also limited on the other hand (Scheufele, 1999). The interactions among the different locations of framing can limit the framing effect by raising conflicts among different ideas. In sum, the consumption of an idea is a product of communicative interactions between text and receivers, and both the communicators and culture resonance influence this process.
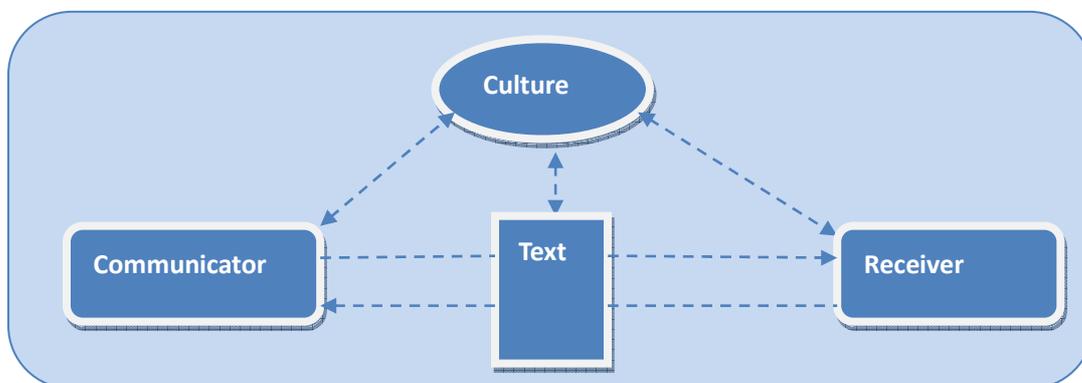
Figure 3.1 Four Locations of Frames

The four locations of frames defined by Entman (1993) provide one with a vivid image of how the framing activity can influence people's information processing. The communicator usually sets frames of reference, no matter consciously or unconsciously, that receivers can use to interpret and discuss public events. As a result, the perception of reality is built upon the interaction between different locations – frames of reference in communication, personal experience, and interactions with

others. Apart from this, the interactive model of framing also requires research on various levels of analysis, especially the interplay between the information communicators and the information receivers who actively construct the frames and socio-cultural processes that offer meanings to the interpretations of the events (Scheufele, 1999).

As discussed above, framing has its sociological and psychological foundations. Some scholars argue that framing is a multilevel construct (Gorp, 2007; Scheufele, 1999; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Framing activity involves interplay at various levels (Figure 3.2).
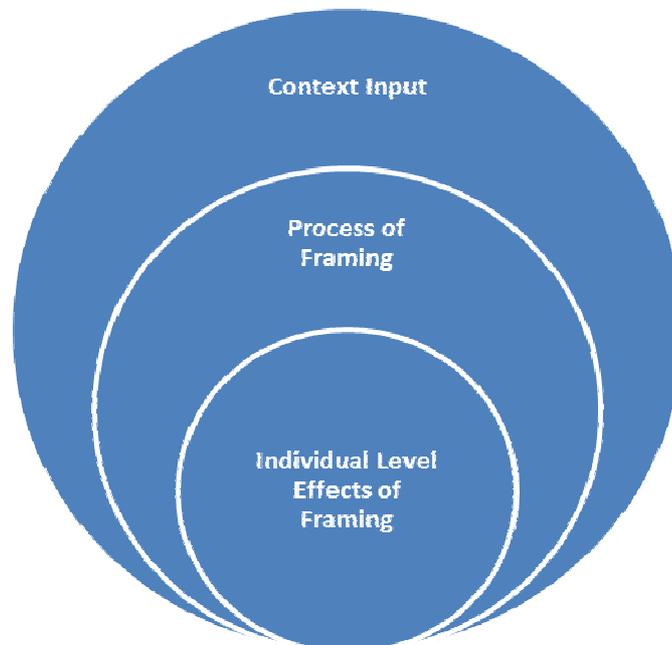
Figure 3.2 Multilevel Interactions of Framing Activity

In the broader context, framing is a necessary tool to reduce the complexity of issues (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007), and the context input, such as cultural norms, social forces, and collective tensions which contribute to the construction and promulgation of frames (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Shibutani, 1966; Gorp, 2007; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Framing thus becomes a macroscopic mechanism that deals with message construction and promulgation, based on a specific context (Gorp, 2007).

Framing, on the macro level, stress the modes of presentation that the information communicators employ (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Since it already contains the interpretation, construction, and evaluation of reality, it is also related to the power relations (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Gamson, 1992; Entman, 1989, 1993). Gamson and Modigliani's research (1987) showed how different social forces deliberately attach different labels to an issue to influence the public discourse. Advocates of different frames attempt to attach their own evaluation to the issue and draw on the culturally available symbols to persuade the audience, aiming at affecting the outcomes. "Their weapons are metaphors, catchphrases, and other condensing symbols that frame the issue in a particular fashion" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 183). Cultural resonance is an indispensable element in the macro level process of framing. As discussed above, in Entman's (1993) four locations of the framing process, culture is also one important location in which frame interaction will take place.

Shibutami (1966) brought up the hypothesis in his study of rumour that "if unsatisfied demand for news is very great, collective excitement is intensified, and rumour construction occurs through spontaneous interchanges" (p. 96). Under this circumstance, information receivers will become suggestible, which means that they are more likely to accept information without critical deliberation. Although Shibutami's study is not specifically on the framing activity, it aimed to understand how popular beliefs are formed. This purpose is in line with Chong and Druckman's (2007a) understanding of the framing activity. Assuming that Shibutami's study added value to the study of framing, this research will regard collective excitement as an important contextual input that affects the promulgation of frames.

On the micro level, framing portrays the way in which people employ different attached labels towards an issue and how they form beliefs and attitudes (Scheufele, 1999; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Chong & Druckman,2007a, 2007b). Chong and Druckman (2007a) employed the conventional expectancy value model of an individual's attitude, developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), to interpret the

psychological mechanisms behind the framing effect. The conventional expectancy model regards people's formulation of an attitude as a summary of a set of evaluations towards an issue (Attitude = $\sum$ v i * w i; v i is the set of evaluations and w i is the salient weight attributed to the evaluation). Any change to the evaluation or the salient weight associated with that evaluation can lead to the change of an attitude.

Frames and the individual schema are, however, highly interactive and framing exerts power by suggesting certain considerations over others. Kahneman and Tversky (1984) suggest, through their empirical experiments, that most people are not so well-informed and are easily influenced by the frames of the texts. Consequently, framing has a common effect on most audience members by automatically leading the audience's attention in a certain direction (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). Although, the presence of frames of reference in the text does not guarantee an influence on the audience's thinking (Entman, 1993; Graber, 1988). Chong and Druckman's research (2007b) showed how different frames competed to get supported by emphasizing the relevant terms over an issue. They argue that all individuals would tend to support stronger frames, that is, frames that are more relevant and apply better to the issues according to the individual schema. In sum, the individual effects of framing are related to the individual belief and attitude formation.

Both the different locations and the various constructions of the framing address the importance of social interactions in the framing activity. The final production of framing activity is produced by joint efforts from all these different parts. Social interactions at different locations and at various levels, therefore, are the core of understanding framing activities. In the next section, the researcher will develop a theoretical framework to study the online framing of political distrust based on the different locations and the various constructions of the framing discussed in this section.

3.1.3 Theoretical Framework of Framing Activity

Figure 3.3 illustrates how different levels of analysis could be combined to explore the answers to the research question and how interactions among different elements can be stressed.
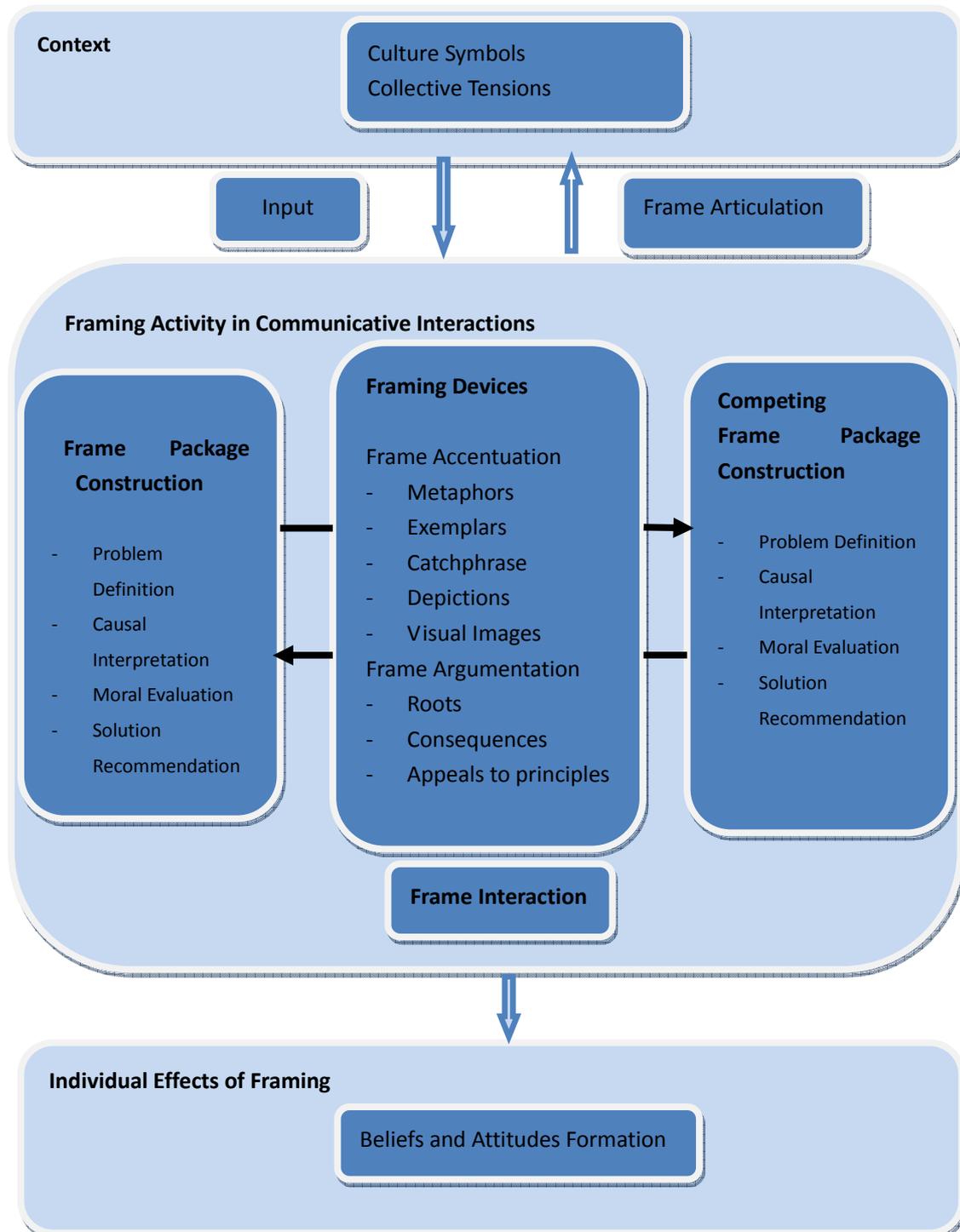

Figure 3.3 Framing among Various Levels and Different Locations

Entman's (1993) four clarifications of frames are used in this framework as a technical tool to restructure different elements in the frame packages and track the core themes of the framing of political trust/distrust. Gamson and Lasch's (1983) signature matrix is used to complement the four clarifications of frames.

To understand framing, one should first sort out the underlying framing logic behind the text. Entman (1993) emphasizes that framing essentially involves selection and salience. Salience, which means "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to audiences" (p. 53), is the core of framing. Through selection and salience, Entman (1993) classified the frames used in four manners – define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies.

> Frames, then, define problems - determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; diagnose causes - identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments - evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies-offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects. (p. 52)

This clarification of frames helps to uncover the frame sponsors' motivations and interests and reveal the deeper logic of the arguments.

Gamson and Lasch (1983, p. 399) came up with a "signature matrix" to sort out the specific elements of framing in a text. They attributed elements into eight categories including metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, visual images, roots, consequences, and appeals to principle, which can be used as symbolic devices to excerpt the power of framing. These devices are held together in a certain frame context, and help keep the frame package coherent. The "signature matrix" can be used as a supplement to the four clarifications of frames to reveal how various elements are packaged in an integrated way. (Creed, Langstraat, & Scully, 2002). The way in which these elements are connected shows the underlying logic of framing.

As stressed several times in this research, framing activity is not static but involves constant interaction between constructing and reconstructing. The interactions between the four frame locations on various levels are going to be addressed and analyzed in this research.

As the application of frames to form a frame package is always subject to negotiation (Gorp, 2007), barriers or resistance may occur sometimes during the interactions. Different frame sponsors compete to construct their own package through a selection of certain frames and rejection of others. Benford and Snow (2011) referred to this effort and state that it "involves the connection and alignment of events and experiences so that they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion" (p.623) as frame articulation. Analysis of framing activity in this research is going to explicitly study frame interaction and frame articulation, meaning how the usage of each of the frames is linked to both of the other frames and wider culture beliefs, what the contradictions and weaknesses in the different frame packages are. By doing the analysis of frame interaction and frame articulation, the implicit meaning and underrepresented voices, and the individual effect of framing, could be discovered as well.

In addition, besides the emphasis on frame articulation, the interplay of framing activity among various levels will be studied by addressing the emotional input from the context and its influence on the individual belief and formation of attitudes. Nowadays, we seem to step into a post-modernity era, that is, a new age characterized by "time-space compression, increasing geo-spatial and social mobility, as well as expressive individualism" (Bessant, 2010, p. 2). A branch of social scientists noticed that there is a current of emotional culture –People are increasingly inclined to the circulation of passion and expression in society. Communication plays an increasingly important role in our everyday life as well as in the political domain. This emotional culture would have an impact on modern democracy (Hendriks, 2009; Hoggett & Thompson, 2002). It could both enhance the quality of public participation through formulating constructive public opinions, as well as trigger certain social movements

through the diffusion of negative emotions. The emotional aspect should not be neglected when we attempt to understand the support of certain frame packages.

The framework developed in this section will work as the central organizing ideas for understanding the underlying logic of the online framing of political distrust in China in this research. In the next two sections, the researcher will discuss how framing activities and political distrust are related to each other, and how political distrust as a central theme of framing can be studied.

3.2 The power of framing and the phenomenon of political distrust

In this study, the central theme of framing activity is the phenomenon of political distrust. The following part aims at displaying the relationship between the power of framing and the phenomenon of political distrust.

As discussed above, the method of communication can be viewed simultaneously with the framing activity. As framing presents "the reality" to us by constructing it with a certain bias, the way in which people think of the world depends heavily on the power of framing. Edelman (1993) claims:

> The social world is a kaleidoscope of potential realities, which can be readily
>
> evoked by altering the ways in which observations are framed and categorized.
>
> Classification schemes are therefore central to political maneuver and political
>
> persuasion. Typically, they are driven by the dominant elite's ideology and
>
> prejudice rather than by rigorous analysis or the aspiration to solve social
>
> problems.   (p.231)

The power relations in the society are therefore constructed and shaped in the process of communication through the power of framing. If a way of framing is supported by

the majority, it might also lead to a change in a system.

This is more so in the mass self-communication age, when people's interactive communication dominates. What exists in the public discussion may also exist in the public mind. Castells (2007) claims that new media "extends the reach of communication media to all domains of social life in a network that is at the same time global and local, generic and customized in an ever-changing pattern" (p.239).

In China, few official channels are available for the general public to express their feelings towards the government. As media is the main channel where the general public can understand the government and framings, media is a direct and important factor that may influence the public attitudes towards the government. The new media, hence, plays a vital role in leading the public to decide whether or not to trust the government. The modes that the information communicators choose to present the government with, interact with the construction of frame packages of the information receivers. Deliberately or extemporaneously, an individual's belief of the government will be affected.

In the past decades, an increasing crisis of political legitimacy was observed all over the worlds as incremental reports of political scandals on the media were shown (Thompson, 2000). Castells (2007) argues that there are two kinds of effects that political scandal may have on a political system. First, it may influence short-term electoral behaviours and decisions towards subjects of the scandal. The impact can be that political scandals will provoke the political indifference among the public or trigger political cynicism. Although the real democratic elections are missing in China, the impact of political scandals on the political attitudes of the public can also be distinguished in China. Second, the scandal may have a lasting impact on democracy. For instance, citizens may tend to distrust the government as a whole. Framings of a political scandal would be a trigger for distrust in the government. Yet, the crisis of political legitimacy cannot be attributed to the framing at all; framing definitely contributes to the collective formation of attitudes, which would then be a potential challenge for the government's maintenance of power. To investigate framing activity

of the general public in the mass self-communication era, one is, then, able to understand how people's perceptions of the government are influenced by different frame packages and how their beliefs towards the government developed.

3.3 Political Trust and Distrust

Political distrust is the central theme of framing in this research project. In order to better understand the framing activity of political distrust, both trust and distrust related frames will be analyzed as a comparison. Literature review in this section will provide the readers with ways to distinguish different types of political trust/distrust, what the features of trust are, and how political trust/distrust can be influenced.

In the academic world, there is no consensus of what exactly political trust or distrust is yet (Levi & Stoker, 2000). Miller (1974) regards political trust as "the belief that the government is operating according to one's normative expectations of how government should function" (p.989). In his study of political cynicism, he used the term political cynicism together with political distrust, given both distrust and cynicism as the opposite of politic trust. Krouwel and Abts (2007) clarify different degrees of discontent towards the government, and view the political attitudes as a continuum including trust, skepticism, distrust, cynicism and alienation. In general, in the field of political science, the use of political distrust always intertwines with concepts such as political cynicism, political alienation and trust in government. Scholars use different notions of political distrust.

In the present research, all political attitudes were classified into two categories: political trust or political distrust. They were considered as two opposite stances on the continuum of political attitudes. The researcher drew information from Schyns, Nuus, and Dekker's (2004) definition of political cynicism and defined political trust or distrust in the same way. Schyns, Nuus, and Dekker (2004) concluded three important elements for the definition of political cynicism – the subject, the orientation and the object—from a systematical study of the political science literature.

The present study, accordingly, developed the definition of political trust or distrust in the following way: the subject of both political trust and distrust is the individual. Concerning the orientation, both concepts are attitudes consisting of cognitive and affective components. Political trust refers to the individual both thinking and feeling that the government, in general, is trustworthy. On the contrary, political distrust refers to the individual thinking the government in general is not trustworthy and feeling discontent about the government. And with regard to the objects of political trust or distrust, it is the government in a broad sense, but distinctions could be made among political officials, political institutions and political regimes. To sum up, the definition of political trust/distrust is quite artificial, in a sense that it is created to serve different goals of research and can be classified into different types and degrees.

Although there is no agreement on how to define political attitudes towards the government yet, there is a consensus in the literature to make distinctions among the different objects or targets of trust and support (Easton, 1965; Krouwel & Abts, 2007; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Schyns, Nuus, & Dekker, 2004). The trust judgment can be based on beliefs about the trustworthiness of a person, an institution or a system. Accordingly, political trust or distrust can be the trustworthiness of political officials, political institutions, and the political regime. These three different objects of trust determine different degrees of trust, various possible effects and different ways to fix them. The former two are incumbent-oriented trust or distrust and the latter one is system-focused. Neither of them are good for the society and polity in the context of China, because in the authoritarian system, it is not only difficult to change the whole political system, but also difficult to change the incumbent arrangement. It is, however, easier to fix incumbent-oriented distrust compared to the system-focused distrust, as revisions done from within the incumbent government are possible.

Levi and Stoker (2000) discovered three commonly accepted features of trust in their review on the studies of political trust. First, trust is relational. In general, the problem of distrust arises when an individual worries himself/herself in a position where there is the possibility of vulnerability. Because trust is always relational, conditional and

involves individual judgment, citizens must face the problem of trust when they find themselves potentially vulnerable in the relationship with the government. Rodgers (1974) found that the individual's perception of the realities of his position vis-a-vis the political system is the best predictor of potential political distrust. The feelings of deprivation and venerability contribute to the formation of political distrust. The concern with trust only exists in relations. Second, trust is conditional. There should be at least a threshold for holding trust. Citizens have their basic expectations of the government. The government is supposed to manage the society well and protect its citizens when their rights are violated. The performance of the government should at least meet the basic expectations of the citizens so that the citizens can maintain trust towards the government. Third, trust is based on individual judgment. After all, trust or distrust is an individual feeling. They depend heavily on the way the image of the government is conveyed and the individual schema.

There are different dimensions of judgment that one can use. There is, however, no agreement achieved yet on what these dimensions should be (Levi and Stoker, 2000). They could be the morality of office holders which determines the responsibility that the officials should hold for their citizens or the institutional process that are related to current incumbents of their administrations, such as governance accords to the rule of law and non-discriminatory practices. They could also be institutional outcomes, such as the performance of the government in managing economic affairs or other matters, or the institutional arrangement which provides the guarantee for transparency in policy making and openness to competing views. In general, the whole map of political trust and distrust is complex, but different dimensions of judgment will be used as the sensitizing concepts to provide directions for coding the materials in this research.

Social issues are another factor that may correlate with political distrust. Miller (1974b) found that the issue of salience and the government responses to the issue influenced the individual judgment of the government. Levi and Stoker (2000) also found that there is a strong correlation over time between political distrust and the

perception that worsening social problems and the unresponsiveness of the politicians. Therefore, particular attention will be paid to the social issues mentioned in the data analysis.

4. Methodology

This research will adopt a qualitative approach to study the framing activity of political distrust in the context of China. Rich information and thick descriptions will be presented in order to provide the reader with an in-depth understanding of the specific phenomenon being studied. The number of coded segments and the number of references will also be counted as a supplement to the qualitative descriptions in order to offer a clear and straight-forward impression of support level of different frames. In this chapter, the researcher will first discuss the specific research method used in this empirical study – frame analysis. Then, brief reflections on the philosophic position of the researcher and the role of the researcher in this study will be mentioned. Following that, concrete procedure of data collection and data analysis will be presented in an attempt to guarantee the transparency of the research.

4.1 Research Method: Frame analysis

Frame analysis is a typical type of rhetorical discourse analysis. It is a sophisticated method developed in sociology to depict the whole discussion, both the arguments and counter arguments, surrounding complex social issues (Gamson & Lasch, 1983). It provides us with richer depictions of the broader environment and helps us understand multiple dimensions of social debate – the context, standing and power. Therefore, frame analysis was chosen in this research to allow systematical investigation into the content and underlying logic of people's daily conversation and thought. One of the advantages of frame analysis is that it allows us to look beyond the taken-for-granted knowledge, and look for critical frames that different people use to ascribe meaning to the world.

4.2 Reflections on Philosophical Position

The basic philosophical assumptions underlying the approach of this paper have roots in social constructionism (Gergen, 1985; Buur, 1995). It regards one's knowledge of the world as products of one's way of constructing the world in discursive terms

rather than the pre-existing truth. It defines the role of language as not mere reflections of reality, but also as a way of constructing reality and a part that constitutes the social world. Physical objects only gain meaning through the use of language in communicative interactions, that is, through discourse. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), hence, argue that "struggles at the discursive level take part in changing, as well as in reproducing, the social reality" (p. 9). One's way of understanding the world is thus constantly created and shaped in the social process of communicative interactions.

Besides, from the social constructive point of view, everyone is historical and cultural specific. Accordingly, one's knowledge about the world is also context based and contingent. A person's view of the reality can change over time. This does not, though, mean everything changes. The majority of contemporary social constructionists consider the social world as very much rule-bound and regulative (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Following Foucault's work (1972), the truth is a discursive construction with a number of rules determining what can be regarded as truth and what cannot. These rules place restrictions on what gives meaning and constitutes what Foucault called "power". Power is accordingly responsible for both constructing the social world and constraining one's ways of construction.

Reality can never be reached without discourse. Discourse can be referred to as both abstract discourse, such as the articulatory practice studied in the field of linguistics, and everyday discourse, such as daily conversation. The latter one is the main object investigated in this research.

4.3 Reflections on the Role of the Researcher

As the analyst, the researcher explored the manner in which people attach meaning to different texts, and discovered patterns based on people's statements. From the constructionist approach, the materials being studied are socially constructed products that could vary The researcher might share the same beliefs which are being analyzed, such as those which originate from the researcher's culture, thus, it is difficult to unmask what is taken for granted and dig for the underlying logic. As both the reader and (re)writer of the information, the researcher tried to distance herself from the

materials when analyzing them, and attempted to reflect on which lenses people used to understand the world, and how they were restricted (Creed, Langstraat, & Scully, 2002). Despite this, it is inevitable to avoid the bias that the researcher might bring into the investigation. The researcher was, actually, imposing her interpretation onto the subjects through her fabrication of analysis. Through the frame analysis, this research presented a way to look upon the world through a particular theoretical perspective within a particular historical and cultural context. It is actually another social construction, which is different from everyday thinking. By analyzing how people's views are shaped, this research shows the researcher's own construction of reality.

The political position of the researcher in this study leans towards the pro-trust frame package, and the researcher supports that the Li Gang Scandal is somehow sensationalized by the netizens. Although the researcher tried to be as objective as possible, her own preferred value might still have some consequence on the research. For instance, the position of the researcher may lead her to be more sensitive to the pro-trust frame package and more attuned to the contradictions and weaknesses in the pro-distrust frame package. Hence, the knowledge produced in this research should be regarded as one possible representation of the world and is open for further discussion. As social constructionists are always questioned about their academic authority, in this research, the process of knowledge production was made as transparent as possible for the readers, both the frame sponsors and academics.

4.3 Procedure

4.3.1 Procedure of data collection

1. Concepts

An online forum is an online discussion site where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages (Internet forum, 2012). Normally, the discussion starts with an original post, in which the forum user can open with any dialogue or

announcement in his/her post. Then, the following discussions are continued with a number of replies, in which all the forum users can respond or comment to the original post or the other replies. The collection of all these posts, both the original post and following replies, usually displayed from the oldest to the latest in time sequence, form a complete thread.

2. Choosing the online forum

Data in this research were collected from the most famous and widely used forum in China – *"Tianya Forum"*. *Tianya Forum* was ranked No. 1 in the Top 100 Most Influential Chinese Forums List published by the Hong Kong-based Mandarin-language channel – Phoenix TV. It is famous for its tolerance and openness, freedom of speech, wide coverage of different topics, frequent updating of news and rapid response from the public. It has been a place where people constantly turn to address the injustice they experience or hear about. Usually, in *Tianya Forum*, there are no restrictions for the visitors about reading all the posts. But only logged in members can reply to a post. People can always get firsthand information about a certain hot topic and have heated discussions with others. Some of the discussions could have a huge impact on the Chinese society and the government. *Tianya Forum* involves Chinese people all over the world. By September 2011, it hosted more than 59 million registered users and received approximately 1 million visitors per day.

This selection was made for two reasons.

First, The Li Gang Scandal was first reported on *Tianya Forum.* It became a topic of intense discussion on *Tianya*. A large number of people followed the development of this scandal on this forum and further elaborations, debates, and arguments about issues could be found here.

Second, *Tianya Forum* is a source for online discussion and online public opinion, whose validity has been demonstrated in several studies already. For instance, Qu et. al used data from *Tianya Forum* to study the online response to the Sichuan Earthquake (Qu, Wu, & Wang, 2009). Yang et. al studied the online discussion about the Sichuan Earthquake in *Tianya Forum* to discover the structural evolution of the online network. (Yang, Chen, & Liu, 2010) Cui et. al investigated the discussion about the "Huanan Tiger" Event, and developed a normative mechanism to guide the online public opinion (Cui, Hu, Ding, Wu, & Wu, 2011). Therefore, *Tianya Forum* is

an appropriate source for data collecting.

3. Collecting data

Data were collected in November 2011 from *Tianya Forum*. They were gathered from multiple threads, which were started at various points in time during the Li Gang Scandal. First, all threads that included the words "Li Gang" in their title were searched. According to the relevance of the key words, an initial sample that consisted of hundreds of searching results was listed. Then, the 9 most relative threads were chosen from the top 10 searching result pages, based on their titles and the publishing time of the original posts. And each chosen thread was numbered. As the most intensive discussion took place within three weeks since the scandal was first reported, only original posts that were made within this period, that is, from 17-10-2010 to 7-11-2010, were included.

All the threads collected started with a long announcement, similar to the length of the original post. The longest thread had as many as 10023 replies and the shortest thread only had 98 replies. In total, there were 20179 replies. These numbers were originally tracked by *Tianya Forum* and were shown on the first page of each original post. This study took both the original posts and the following replies as the unit of analysis. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the data collected.

Table 4.1 Overview of Data Collected

Affective Attributes	Thread Number and Title	Post Author	Post time	Number of Clicks	Number of Replies
Negative	T1: The child of privileged warned by shouting 'my father is Li Gang, you can accuse me if you are able to!' after hitting two girls by car 惊！！！河北大学富二代校内醉驾撞飞两名河大新区女生"有本事你们告去，我爸是李刚"	河大义工	2012-10-17	679008	10023
Negative	T2: Why do we make fun of "My father is Li Gang" – Against the article "The sorrow of national sarcasm on My father is Li Gang" 我们为嘛要娱乐"我爸是李刚"（驳评论"全民娱乐'我爸是李刚'的悲哀"）	Hrs8206	2012-10-22	29889	324

Negative	T3: "Person of the Year – My father is Li Gang: law lose its bearings in front of power" 年度人物 我爸是李刚：法在强权之下没有平衡支点	柳随风 L	2012-11-7	329144	6011
Neutral	T4: From "my father is Li Gang" to Li Gang should resign 从"我爸是李刚"到李刚辞职	鸟衣狐	2012-10-21	77025	768
Neutral	T5: The tragedy of Li Gang? Or the tragedy of the society? 李刚的悲剧？社会的悲剧？	关不羽	2012-10-22	75675	417
Neutral	T6: The game of power behind Li Gang Scandal 李刚事件背后的勾心斗角和权力博弈	保定公务员	2012-10-24	9760	227
Neutral	T7: Compare the Saudi Prince and Li Gang- -- the sorrow of the regime 从沙特王子到李刚门- 看这个社会制度的悲	Maochong23	2012-10-24	4852	98
Positive	T8: This is just a normal accident, those who make vicious statements about Li Gang, please provide the evidence 这不过是一起普通的交通事故，那些借机污蔑李刚的人，请拿出证据来	国观首席愤青2010	2012-10-21	28215	999
Positive	T9: Hit-and-run was wrong, but there was nothing wrong in speaking – I would like to defend Li Gang 撞人不对，说话无罪 – 我为李刚说句话	清昌峰	2012-20-22	21831	1312

Note: Negative: Against LiGang;
      Positive: Defend LiGang;
      Neutral: No clear attitude expressed in the title

4.3.2 Procedure of data analysis

Data in this research are used as illustrations rather than rigid texts of theoretical arguments. However, this is not a shortcoming, as argued by several scholars (Scheufele, 1999; Pan and Kosicki, 1993). Instead, the empirical part is an exploration of how people's views of social reality in China are shaped by the online discursive interaction. It is an initial step towards analyzing the broader discourse process and power struggles as a whole.

The analysis in this research was carried out using MaxQDA software. The design of the analysis in this research was prepared based on the procedure used by Creed et al. (2002). In their paper, Creed, Langstraat and Scully examined the key issues arising in using frame anlysis and defined several steps to do frame analysis – sorting out underlying logics; situating frames in context; surface politics; and making mindful choices. According to their procedure, the design of data analysis in this paper is as follows:

1. Identify different frame packages and sort out underlying logics for each frame

Employing the four clarifications developed by Entman (1993) and the signature matrix by Gamson & Lasch (1983), different text segments were attributed to different codes. In the end, the researcher constructed a working list of both a pro-trust frame package and a pro-distrust frame package from the data. These frame packages can serve as a useful way of packaging the discussion, a heuristic for discovering and systematizing the issue of culture. The function of different frame packages was analyzed as shown in the theoretical model of this research.

Since the ideas that the researcher encountered in the discussion were in packages which draw on culturally available idea elements and symbols (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987), it is difficult to fairly list the frame packages. A package should at least meet the fundamental ground rule that is accepted by its advocate. The researcher tried to satisfy this rule by employing the language that the advocates or sponsors used in their discussion. For example, in order to understand how people discuss political

distrust, an initial set of codes of the target of political trust or distrust was identified inductively, based on the original data. The result of the target of political attitudes may not be exactly the same as those shown in the literature review.

In order to improve the coding quality, the inter-coder reliability was tested by checking one of the nine threads ("The tragedy of Li Gang? Or the tragedy of the society?"). Another coder, along with the researcher, coded the threads independently. Different from quantitative research, qualitative research dose not aim to achieve a standard level of co-efficiency. Instead, the percentage of agreement is to help the researcher develop a reliable instrument to guide the analysis further and move on with more accurate material. Consequently, more important than the percentage of agreement, differences between the two coding processes were discussed and the disagreement of specific coded segments were addressed and edited.

Table 4.2 shows the result of the reliability test. The agreement of code existence in the document is 89%. The agreement on the segment level is, nonetheless, only 33%, which is comparatively low. Taking a closer look at the disagreed segments, both coders found that most of the disagreements at the segment level were due to coding units' accuracy rather than different understandings of the segments. More specifically, one coder might code the accurate words, phrases and sentence that referred to the code, while the other coder could code the whole phrase that a responder said as a segment. Take the variable, "appeals to principles" as an example. The results ran by MaxQDA showed that there were 10 disagreed segments. However, after checking these segments one by one, two coders found that variances occurred only among 2 segments. The other 8 segments actually coded the same thing, however a different number of words were included in one segment. Given the original materials used for coding were in Chinese and most of them were trivial conversations, the accuracy of coding units was difficult to control. As a result, the intercoder reliability at the segment level largely depended on the discussions among the two coders.

Table 4.2 Intercoder Agreement

	Coder A (Researcher)	Coder B
Number of codes used	40	46
Correlation of code existence in the document	89%	
Number of segments coded	200	175
Segment agreement in 70%	33%	

Together, both coders checked all the disagreed upon segments and the disagreements were resolved. In the end, a set of code definitions was created to guide the further coding process. Specific codes used in this research, codes definitions and code procedures about this research can be found in the appendix. In total, the researcher used 55 codes and coded 7235 segments. On average, each code has 132 segments.

2. Evaluate the popular frame package

The dominant frame package was detected and then the individual influence level of framing was evaluated.

3. Define frame articulation and frame interaction

In an attempt to understand how frames work in a broader context that influences people's perceptions of reality and the meaning people attach to certain texts, frame articulations were analyzed. In other words, the way in which the use of each frame was linked to both other frames and wider culture beliefs was specifically detected in the analysis. Frame interaction in terms of contradictions and weaknesses within and between specific frames was also carefully evaluated.

4. Dig for the implicit meaning

In the end, which discourses were present and which voices were missing or underrepresented were analyzed.

Following this procedure, an analysis of framing activity was conducted and results are listed in the next section.

5. Results

The results will be presented and organized to provide an in-depth insight into the following questions: (a) how were the collective attitudes influenced by the frames set in the posts; (b) what types of political trust/distrust can be found in the data; (c) what contextual beliefs or symbols were people related to; (d) how did certain beliefs get strengthened; (e) what kind of solutions did people suggest. The researcher tried to present the data in such a way that readers can tell how different responders in the discussion perceived different "truths" while focusing exclusively on the data in this section. Further discussions and arguments towards the data will be shown in the next chapter.

5.1 Attitudes influenced by the posts

The selected threads started with posts of different framings (Table 5.1). Posts with negative affective attributes towards Li Gang and the government gained different levels of support and no clearly stated opposing opinions. Within these three posts, although problems were defined differently and ranged from improper behavior from government officials to the perceived political powerlessness in reality, problems were defined beyond the case itself. The privileged office holders, in general, and performance of the government were both accused

Table 5.1 Framing of the Posts and the Public Attitudes

Affective Attributes	Thread Number and Title	Framing of the original post	Function	Support/ Opposition
Negative	T1: The child of privileged warned by shouting 'my father is Li Gang, you can accuse me if you are able to!' after hitting two girls by car	The privileged children could easily take advantage of their parents' power to evade the law	Problem definition	921/-
Negative	T2: Why do we make fun of "My father is Li Gang" – Against the article "The sorrow of national sarcasm on My father is Li Gang"	Netizens make fun of "My father is Li Gang" because in real life they can do nothing to affect the government actions	Problem definition and causal interpretation	29/-
Negative	T3: "Person of the Year – My father is Li Gang: law lose its bearings in front of power"	Li Gang, just like other officials in China engaged in corruption, he used their power to control the mainstream media, and hide the truth	Problem definition	364/-
Neutral	T4: From "my father is Li Gang" to Li Gang should resign	The morality of Li Gang is under question, he should resign	Problem definition and solution recommendation	83/25
Neutral	T5: The tragedy of Li Gang? Or the tragedy of the society?	Li Gang got involved because of his son's misconduct, it was a bit unfair. The deeper root of the public anger is the uncertainty they face in public administration.	Problem definition, causal interpretation and moral judgment	48/-
Neutral	T6: The game of power behind Li Gang Scandal	Li Gang Scandal is just the result of political power struggle; the public are used by the politicians.	Problem definition, causal interpretation and moral judgment	36/12
Neutral	T7: Compare the Saudi Prince and Li Gang- -- the sorrow of the regime	Li Gang Scandal could take place in China because our political regime has problems.	Problem definition and causal interpretation	9/-

Positive	T8: This is just a normal accident, those who make vicious statements about Li Gang, please provide the evidence	This is a normal traffic accident. Li Gang is not a good father in family education. But those who accuse Li Gang of corruption should provide evidence and hand them in to the government rather than shouting online.	Problem definition and solution recommendation	6/541
Positive	T9: Hit-and-run was wrong, but there was nothing wrong in speaking – I would like to defend Li Gang	Li Qiming's misconduct is a problem of family education. But the public's accusation of Li Gang is too emotional. To fight against corruption we need set up the system of supervision. There is nothing to tell "my father is Li Gang" when the child was in panic.	Problem definition, moral judgment and solution recommendation	19/183

Note: Negative: Against LiGang;
       Positive: Defend LiGang;
       Neutral: No clear attitude expressed in the title
       -: no clearly stated against opinions

On the contrary, posts with positive affective attributes towards Li Gang and the government received far more opposition than support. Problems were defined as the misconduct of the young boy, rather than Li Gang or the governmental behavior, in these two threads. But most of the following discussions and replies did not agree with this framing, and they contently questioned the identities of the posters and accused the posters of being part of the *"50 cents party"*, the people who were hired by the government to speak for the government online. Following are some responders' replies:

愿夕颜(2010-10-21 15:05:23):

Those members of 50 cents party, you got money to speak for the evils, can you salve your conscience? Your evil deeds will be visited upon you.

hulolo_mengnan (2010-10-23 03:01:05):

Li Gang has hired so many paid posters!

偉君子(2010-10-24 12:37:39):

1. The thread starter you speak for the person who hit two girls and kill one life, why don't you speak for the girls?

2. Please do not use age as an excuse, the troublemaker is over 20, he could be responsible for what he was doing.

3. Please do not shift our focus.

4. Can you explain why they owned so many fabulous houses? You cannot.

So you are a member of 50 cent party, you are here only for the money you got.

The four neutral posts tended to define the problems as the problems of the political regimes and provided arguments in even tones. For instance, in the post of thread 5, the poster argued that:

Nowadays, in China, the government controls almost all the facilities and social resources, such as land, finances, mainstream media and all the other important and good resources. The jurisdiction and public administration have become the weapon in the hands of the government. The government has become such an organization with social superiority. No wonder it will consider itself privileged, as there are no competitors or supervision on it. The problem we encountered in the Li Gang Scandal is not a problem of a single person; rather it's the problem of a social class […] The governmental official group in our society today is not transparent, we don't know what they could do and how much power they could have. It leaves us living in fear.

People's attitudes were not so directly influenced, according to the support/opposition figure within these four threads.

5.2 Objects of political trust/distrust

More interactive discussions and opinions were explained in the following replies to the posts within these threads. Different objects of political trust or distrust were distinguished (Figure 5.1). The number of coded segments provided here is not for statistical generation, but rather to illustrate the comparative support level or ratings of each object.
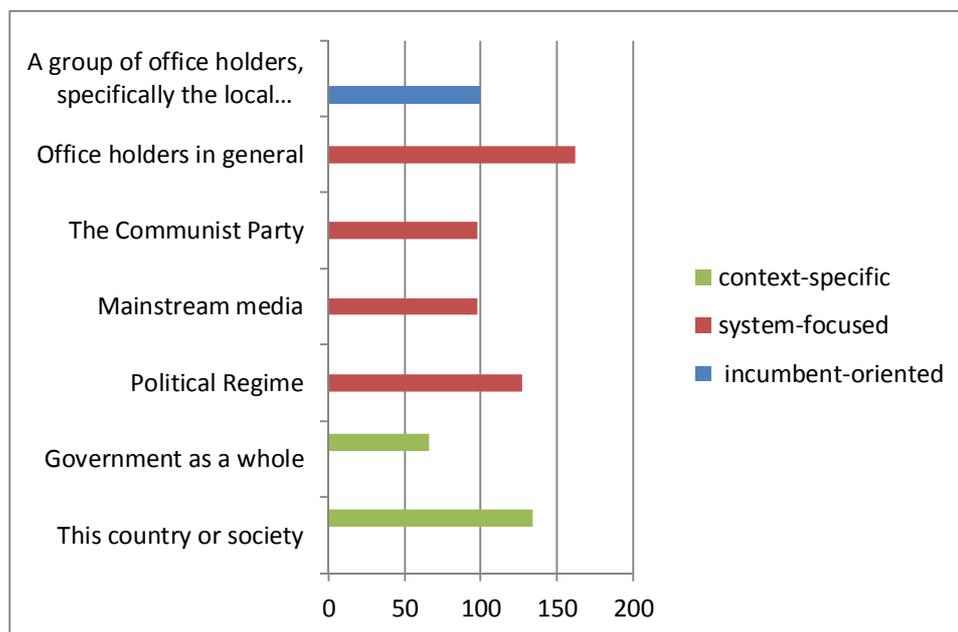
Figure 5.1 Objects of Political Trust/Distrust and Number of Coded Segments

Two new categories of objects of political attitudes were generated from the data that were not included in the literature – *"this country or society"* and *"government as a whole"*. These two categories can be viewed as the context-specific results. Responders constantly referred to what they did not trust or their disappointment as the context of China – the combination of this specific culture, society and lives.

失意兵哥哥(2010-11-07 12:35:10):

This is China, you should adjust to it!

Flybihigh (2012-10-20 11:07:31):

If you were confused about anything that happened, just remind yourself that you are in China, everything is possible in this ridiculous nation.

Catchphrases such as "I love my country, but I don't love China [5]""Life in China is risky, Chinese should be careful [4]" were referred to several times.

Some responders couldn't distinguish between different objects that they felt were (un)trustworthy. They just mentioned that it was the "government" that they didn't trust, without specifically referring to the people, the institution or the regime. Metaphors such as "Tyrant," "Imperial edict," "Red Terror" and "Feudal society" were used to satirize their way of governance.

Normally, the leading party falls into the category of incumbent-oriented objects of political attitudes, because the public has the power to substitute the leading party by voting for other parties. But in the context of China, which is characterized by the authoritarian system, this is not the case. The leading party, the Communist Party, cannot be substituted. Therefore, the researcher attributed the distrust to the system-focus distrust, which can only be fixed by reforming the political system.

"Office holders in general" was also classified as the system-focused distrust. This category represents the skepticism of human nature under the circumstances of being equipped with public power. Without effective restraint on and supervision over the use of power in China, people just regarded all office holders as not trustworthy. Therefore, the distrust towards all the officials is still rooted in the distrust of the system.

The object referring to all the office holders who work in the government was the most frequently stated one, with 162 segments. The country of China was the second repeatedly mentioned category and the political regime was the third. They suggested the potential of the rejection of the institutional arrangement and institutional process of the Chinese people.

5.3 Perception of positions in political reality

"*Social inequality*" was the most frequently used tool (269 segments coded) to punctuate the injustice that normal people were suffering from due to the improper behaviour of the government. Two branches of discussion about the social inequality were found in the data. One branch focused on the case itself, talking about the unequal treatment of Li Gang's family and the dead girl's family. What Li Gang had done was depicted as an abuse of his power in that he threatened the witnesses and prevented the victim's family from accusing his son. By contrast, the victims were portrayed as desperately poor and hopeless. The apologies by Li Gang and his son on TV were described as a deceptive show, as the interview only paid attention to Li Gang and his son with little attention and care to the victim's family. The power inequality was presented in such depictions. The other thread targeted all the powerful and privileged as a group, describing them as having absolute power and enjoying superiority over the ordinary people.

> 只叹缘份 (2010-11-07 09:58:09): Truth will never be found, and the ordinary people are always those who get hurt.
>
> ZWD790830 (2010-10-19 11:46:27): You unimportant people don't be so noisy! Li Gang's family has a lot of influence in the local place; whatever you say here contributes nothing to solving the problems. It's the police who have the final say on whether or not to arrest Li Qiming. Netizens are just like powerless sheep in the eyes of the officials.
>
> 看不清 0 (2010-10-21 00:37:52): Nothing competes with having a father like "Li Gang."

"*Bad social values*" (54 segments coded), which referred to the idea that *society was pillaged by the elites, and that the moral values in society are declining while power and money are the highest,* worked as a supplement to enhance the negative attitudes

towards the government. Responders thought that *"the moral deficiency"* within the country has led to the unhealthy development of the society. The government did not take its responsibility to foster good social values. Other frames, such as *"the influence of the traditional feudal culture"* and *"the ossified interest groups"* were also used to judge the behaviour of the government. Competing frames also emerged here, though. The frame *"bad behaviour of the netizens"* was raised to combat the negative attitudes towards the government. This category of opinions attributed the problems to the collective excitement and emotions. 胡乱搞习以为常 replied that "There were so many replies against the communist party and the governments without telling why. Netizens are just irrational. " (2010-11-01 13:45:02) 解剑独行残月 said that "The powerful and the rich have been the targets of attacks by the netizens online." (2010-10-24 16:33:38)

Public demands on universal public values were high. Netizens appealed to bring and practice values such as transparency, justice and free speech in China. In total, 383 of the segments coded were related to these demands, which in return, indicted that the Chinese government failed to meet these public values in their daily practice.

5.4 Reality testing of the beliefs

Responders constantly referred to the realities that they perceived, experienced or only heard about when questioning the credibility of the government and enhancing their beliefs. Several details of the Li Gang scandal were brought to light and reinforced during the discussion. 1) The focus on the car of the trouble makers (17 segments coded): contradictions existed within the discussion about the brand of the car. Different responders referred to different car brands; though, they agreed on one thing, that is, how could Li Gang afford to buy such an expensive car for his son? 2) The focus on the 5 house properties Li Gang owned (62 segments coded): someone listed all the locations of the five houses and their market values. A small group of responders (5 replies) doubted the credibility of the information, and asked for further investigation. Others just used the information as fact to accuse Li Gang of being

involved in corruption. People argued that ordinary people in China can hardly afford to even buy one house property nowadays. As a civil servant, the expenditure of buying so many houses is far beyond his salary. 3) The focus on Li Gang's father in law (12 segments coded): someone replied that Li Gang's father in law is the vise-governor of Hebei Province, and this reply was referred to several times without the credibility of the information being doubted. Some people argued that, Li Gang, as a vice section chief, could not have had so much power to control the TV news and threaten the witnesses, there must be a more powerful man supporting him. Others argued that Li Gang could not even be called a powerful official; there were so many officials in China, who had much more power than Li Gang. The popularity of the online discussion showed that Li Gang is not powerful enough, because he could not even block the online discussions. If he were a more powerful official, there would have been no chance that this news would be exposed to the public.

Besides the focus on the details of the Li Gang scandal, reality testing also took place by responders' relating to other life experiences they had had or heard. Table 5.2 presented the frequently mentioned social problems and scandals of the responders. The number coded segments provided here are not for statistical generation, but rather to illustrate the comparative support level or ratings of each object.

Table 5.2 Frequent Mentioned Social Problems and Scandals

Social problems referred to	Scandals referred to
- Frequent occurrences of forced demolition [12] - Frequent occurrences of food safety problems [84] - Frequent occurrences of unjust, false and wrong cases [5] - Frequent occurrences of mine disasters [6] - Rapid rise in house price [181] - Rapid rise in commodity price [3] - Medical service becomes difficult to receive and is expensive [3]	- Trans-provincial arrest Scandal（跨省追捕:2009-3): arrested netizens from another province for "improper" speech online [163] - Compulsory mental health treatment Scandal (被精神病:2010-4): sending the people, who came from different localities to appeal to the central authorities for help, to compulsory mental health treatment [87] - Torture prisoners Affair(躲猫猫:2009-2，喝凉水:2009-6)：hide-and-seek; drink water [96] - 70 kph Scandal (70 码:2009-8): the police covered up the real speed of the car in this accident in order to excuse the driver [94]

Several poems were written which sneer at the credibility of the government.

高雅文明 (2010-11-07 01:14:09)

When they said that we have a harmonious society, I know, the society was rampaged.

When they said that socialism is brighter than the sunlight, I know, the sun dropped.

When they said that our development is sustainable, I know, the water was polluted and the sky was darker.

When they said that citizens live in dignity, I know, I am nothing.

Whey they said that restriction would be exerted on the purchase of commercial houses, I know, it was not because there were not enough houses, but we cannot afford them anymore.

This poem was cited 180 times by different responders. Another widely cited scenario with 83 references was from 雷人的黑拉拉 (2010-10-19 11:35:49):

You netizens do not live harmoniously with the society! What do you complain about? Where do you live? Show me your IDs! Don't you know that the government is busy playing? They don't have time for your trivial things. What they do has nothing to do with you. You'd better go back and pay for your mortgage and drink the poisonous milk.

If you feel uncomfortable, you could go play hide-and-seek, you can go 70kph, you can be forced to jump out of the building, or you can even be forced to have mental health treatment!

You live in gangsterdom; do you think you are a good person?

If you are, why should the officials be honored when you would be trans-provincially arrested?

How could they be the people's representatives even after being accused, yet you were deprived of the opportunity to go to the university?

How could they be the mayor with a fake diploma, but you can only commit suicide after fishing your study abroad?

Just remember what our politician said to his citizens: "If you can't figure it out, just go to heaven!"

Different poems and scenarios were compiled to stress the social inequalities and show how reality really is. The typical examples provided speak in extremely cynical tones. Competing frames were seldom found here. Only one reply referred to the news that corruption was also the most serious social problem rated by the European people.

"The goal our ancestors set when China became independent" was used as a good exemplar to question the credibility of the communist party (12 segments). This frame takes advantage of the goal that the founders of the communist party stated: making people become the master of their own. Several citations of impressive newspaper articles which were published before the founding of new China were discovered (5 citations). For instance, 在下姓：交 (2010-11-07 11:50:18) cited the article published on "Liberation Daily" on October 28, 1941:

The key to achieve democracy is to end the situation of ruling the country with a single party […] As long as this situation persists, all the affairs of the state are controlled by one party; there is no way for the intelligent people to participate

in the public administration; there is no way for the good proposal to be implemented. Democracy only exists in name but not in reality. Only by ending the one-party dictatorship can talents of the country take part in the public affairs and display their ambitions. In addition, different parties can compete to progress and maximize the political participation. […] Ending the one-party dictatorship will not weaken the Kuomintang (KMT) but rather make it stronger.

5.5 Solution recommendation

Different consequences were depicted to promote different solutions. With regard to the punishment of Li Gang and his son, 282 replied that they supported the idea that Li Gang and his son should be sent to legal sanctions. The competing frames, however, labelled the governmental officials as helping cover up each other, using the law system as the tool to protect the privileged from the poor. Therefore, nothing is going to happen. 89 replies predicted the result of the case as *"the case is going to end up with nothing solved"*.

成晟 2010 (2010-11-09 13:35:10):

The event even came to light in the media, and huge public pressure was exerted onto the government, so what? They can still play with the law and give a mild punishment by using different terms of punishment. Nothing will be solved in the end. From whom can we ask for justice?

丑狗剩 (2010-10-20 12:47:42):

The event might appear to end up with Li Gang being punished. However, I believe that Li Gang will come back to his office within two years.

The verdict on Li Qiming was also referred to by those who believe the punishment on Li Qiming was too mild (69 references). The credibility of law and government

was questioned again.

Thus, the frame *"take law into our own hands,"* which means *killing or punishing Li Gang and Li Qiming ourselves rather than depending on the law,* was promoted and supported by 390 responders.

Correspondingly, different consequences were framed with regard to the future of China. One group of people punctuated that *"the nation is in peril"* (140 segments coded) if we let these people govern our country in the future. Frames of *"social movements"* were promoted (225 segments coded). Various degrees of social movements were introduced, including movements to fight against corrupt officials (45 replies), willingness to be rescued by the developed countries (13 replies) and revolutions to overthrow the incumbent authorities (167 replies). Although online opinions are different from offline activities, they are disturbing for the reason that they could generate social instability. In contrast to extreme social movements, some people preferred negative resistance to the reality. For example, 341 replies suggested that people should be politically indifferent and 81 replies stated that they would rather migrate from China.

Another group of people agreed with a consequence stating that *"class conflicts would be aggravated if there were no proper improvements of the governmental behaviour, which would, in return, worsen the social turbulence"* (42 segments coded). Suggestions such as *"calling for proper intervention from the (central) government"* (69 replies) and *"democratic reform"* (63 replies) were supported. Different opinions were expressed considering the promotion of democracy in China. 6 replies suggested that we *"need a path of political development with Chinese characteristics."*

空山和尚 (2010-10-24 10:00:01):

Western democracy is not suitable for us. We could learn from Hong Kong and Singapore and develop our own system.

With regard to the inflammatory speeches on extreme social movements, some responders depicted them as "*foreign agent provocateur* [4]".

Instead of becoming politically indifferent, 479 replies explained that they would *fight for basic human rights by supporting the socially vulnerable group online.* They believe that *"Weiguan (gather around and watch) changes China."*Niemöller's best remembered quotation (see below) was frequently (25 times) cited to encourage people to defend civil rights for the vulnerable and for themselves. Similarly, questions like, "if you were the family of the dead girl, what would you do," were raised to force people to think of the importance of the frame suggested.

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me.

6. Discussion

This chapter will begin with a brief summary of the findings by using the technical tools—the four clarifications of frames and a signature matrix—discussed in the theoretical framework. In this way, connections are made between the findings and the theories. Then, in the rest, discussions about the answers to the sub research questions: (a) why did the pro-distrust frame package gain more popularity;(b) how were popular beliefs formed; (c) what was made more salient and what was underrepresented; will be displayed.

6.1 Summary of Findings in relation to the Theoretical Framework

Based on the data the researcher constructed a working list of both pro-trust frame packages and pro-distrust frame packages using the four clarifications developed by Entman (1993) (Table 6.1). One of the most important criteria used to define the pro-trust frame packages and pro-distrust frame packages is whether or not an individual still thinks the current government, both the people and the system of running the country, can live up to the expectations of the public in the future. These packages could serve as a useful way of packaging the discussion, a heuristic for discovering and systematizing the issue of culture. The number of coded segments provided here is not for the statistical generation, but rather to illustrate the comparative support level or ratings of each frame.

Table 6.1 Different Frame Packages Constructed and Number of Coded Segments

	Pro-distrust Frame Package	Pro-trust Frame Package
Problem Definition	- Officials in general [162] - Institutions [150] - Government as a whole [66] - This country [134]	- A group of officials & Local government [100] - Political regime [127]
Causal Interpretation	- Bad social values [54] - Social inequality [269]	- Political regime [127]
Moral Judgment	- The morality of the office holders is under question: Seeks exclusively for power [6] Abuse of power [66] Oppress the people & ignore life [53] - Distinct Chinese characteristics [133] - The nation is in peril [140]	- Discretionary practice in the enforcement of the law due to lack of supervision [191] - Ossified interest group [8] - The influence of a feudal culture [35] - Class conflicts are aggravated, which will worsen the social turbulence [42]
Solution Recommendation	- Political indifference [341] - To migrate abroad [81] - Carry out social movements [225]	- Speaks and fights for the socially vulnerable group [479] - Call for proper intervention from the (central) government [69] - Democratic reform [63] - Need a path of political development with Chinese characteristics [6]

Within the pro-distrust frame package, the problem was defined as the public domain, in general, not being trustworthy, regardless of whether it was the people, the institutions or the regime. All the targets of political distrust intertwined. They constituted the specific context of China, which could not be trusted, according to

some responders. The loss of pride over belonging to China has been a distinct characteristic of the communicative interactions online. The social forces that led to this definition were the perceived unequal positions and the declining morality in society, as depicted by certain frames. The serious consequence that *"the nation is in peril"* was punctuated and solutions including political indifference, migration and social movements were suggested.

In contrast, the pro-trust frame package defined the problem as lies by some people in the government and some parts of the political regime. If we left the situation as it is now and don't try to do anything to improve it, *"class contradiction will aggravate, [and] social turbulence will be worsened."* Different actions need to be taken by the government to re-establish political trust. The central government should supervise the local government more efficiently and effectively. Besides, improvements of the political regime should take place, either through learning from the Western democracies or developing our own way. The transparency of the political regime should be guaranteed, and the exercise of public power should be supervised. Citizens were encouraged to use the public opinion to exert pressure on the government and force them to improve.

Table 6.2 illustrated the framing devices that different frame packages employed during the framing activity. These devices made the given frame package more vivid and more communicative. For example, the metaphors used in the pro-distrust frame package –"Red Terror," which easily triggers a collective memory and associations of what the ordinary people are suffering from now due to the unpleasant experience and memory of that specific historical period. Catch phrases such as "The biggest lie in China: All men are equal before the law" quickly contributed to the rendering of the situation by resonating with individual or collective experiences.

Table 6.2 Framing Devices – Signature Matrix

	Pro-distrust Frame Package	Pro-trust Frame Package
Metaphors	Tyrant; imperial edict; Red Terror; Feudal autocracy	Gravedigger; worms
Exemplars	Many political scandals showed that the government never cared about the people. The government's treatment of the social problems revealed that the government just pretended that everything was going well and did nothing to help the people.	Corruption is a universal problem; European people also thought corruption was the most important problems of Europe. The central government made good policies, but the implementation at the local level was not good.
Catchphrases	"People had never become their own master, they cannot even become the master of their houses" "I love my country, but I don't love China." "The biggest lie in China: All men are equal before the law." "Life in China is risky, Chinese people should be careful."	"Down with Li Gang and down with the corrupt officials." "*Weiguan* (gather around and watch) changes China." "I don't worry about not having enough, but I worry about having disproportionately." "Rise or fall, the people are always worse off."
Depictions	Distinct Chinese characteristics; Abuse of power, set the law at defiance; Oppress people, ignore lives	China in transition; Internet as a channel to vent one's anger; Foreign agent provocateur
Roots	The belief that the perceived unequal positions in political reality will never change with the incumbent government.	The belief that emotional behaviour contributes nothing to the improvement of reality. We should turn to the central government and ask for political reform.
Consequences	The nation is in peril.	Class conflicts are aggravated, which will worsen the social turbulence.
Appeals to principles	Everyone should have equal, basic human rights.	The public domain should be transparent.

Apart from the first four devices that act as the trigger to accentuate certain frames, the last three devices serve as the basis to justify one's judgment (Gamson and Lasch, 1983). By sorting the text into the signature matrix, people's implicit meaning and assumptions underlying the frame activity emerged. The pro-trust frame package sponsors assumed the nature of online political cynicism as irrational, offline pressure relief or even as a foreign agent provocateur. Their understanding about what is currently going on in China is that it is an unavoidable transition period in which many problems are emerging. Their main demand is calling for more transparency in the government. But their voices are small compared to the pro-distrust frame sponsors online. Their basis of judgment about the government seems to be weak in the eyes of the pro-distrust frame sponsors. The pro-distrust frame package sponsors regarded the whole system as "feudal autocracy." The underlying logic of the pro-distrust frame package is that the ordinary people are suffering from the governmental oppression. The pro-distrust frame sponsors prefer a totally new system that can guarantee the ordinary people an invulnerable position in their relationship with the government.

6.2 Why did the pro-distrust frame package gain more popularity?

Findings presented in this study reveal that the framing activity is the same as what was stated in the framing literature. Pan and Kosicki (2001, p. 45) state in their research that, "Resources are not distributed equally. Actors strategically cultivate their resources and translate them into framing power." In this study, the researcher found that the original posts, which were the thread starters, strategically employed different resources to promote different frames. The Pro-distrust frame package worked better than the pro-trust frame package, according to posting rate of the support/opposition posts and the amount of different frame package segments coded. This could be explained by the fact that the pro-distrust frame package appealed more to the netizens (Chong & Druckman, 2007a). In other words, the frames in the posts with the negative affective attributes were more in line with the frames in the thoughts

of the netizens; as a result, they received more supports than opposition.

Another explanation could be that the posts with negative affective attributes raised the collective tension of the public, which would influence the audience's critical thinking, and lead to uncritical acceptance of information without verification (Shibutani, 1966). All the labels used in the posts and the post title, such as the "young privileged generation," "warning," "law loses its bearings" and "netizens are mobs," could easily raise the level of anger among the netizens and immediately cause attacks on the target. This explanation will be elaborated in the next section.

A third explanation has something to do with the media which hosted the public discussion. Inglehart (1990) discovered that the younger generations, in particular, have higher expectations in life and tend to be more emancipated, critical of authority and elite-challenging. This is increasingly noticeable in contemporary China, where younger generations are especially in favour of using the new media for passionate expression. In a report of Internet user habits in Asia-Pacific countries from the U.S. Nielsen Company, which was released in July 2010, 62% of the Chinese Internet users are more used to giving negative comments, much higher than the global average level.. Although this survey was mainly for commercial consumption, many Chinese scholars found that Chinese netizens are severely negative towards politics, economics and culture in China (Zhao, 2011). Younger generations are indeed more critical. Nowadays, in China, there seems to be a severely tempered "public emotion."

Besides, research in the computer mediated communication shows that the Internet plays an important role for people who need support from others due to the afflictions society stigmatizes (Wallace, 1999). Wallace (1999) argues that:

> Interacting with a small subset of like-minded others […] our framework for social comparison could become rather warped. We could quickly acquire an exaggerated perception of the rightness of our views because we found others who not only agreed with us, but who are even further out on the attitudinal limb.

(p.79)

In China, where the compression of free expression went further than elsewhere, the pursuit of free expression also went further. The new media offers a forum for people who feel depressed in real life to talk about their problems with others dealing with the same issues. Besides, when the information available from a formalized channel is questioned, people tend to trust what they heard from the informal channels more (Shibutani, 1966). As shown in the findings, the mainstream media became a major object of political distrust. The public discussion that circulated online became a considerable source of information. Nowadays, politicians can no longer exclude individualism, expressionism or emotion from politics. It is not enough for a policy program to be 'good, 'it must also make people 'feel good' (Hendriks, 2009). This is a big challenge for the Chinese government, because the tension between state and society is building up, as the netizens tend to think of the government in "stereotypes" – the government is not trustworthy (Zhao, 2011). With the wide use of new media in China, the information and feeling spreads over the vast space at an extreme speed. Sometimes, people do not even need to have the same experience to resonate with others. They are just easily affected. Being exposed to such a way of framing in the Li Gang scandal, the public quickly got acquainted with the bad feelings towards the government again. Beck (1996) claims people have become more aware of, and emotionally sensitive to, objects of which they only have mediated experience.

The reason why the individuals employed the pro-distrust frame package resided in the deeper roots of discontent in the situation of social unrest. The evidence could be found in the process of frame articulation. In the findings of this research, the process of frame articulation, which is described by Benford and Snow (2011) as the connection and alignment of events and experiences in order to promote certain frames and strengthen beliefs, were detected. The events and experiences that the audience referred to revealed the upset of the audience. For instance, when judging whether Li Gang engaged in corruption, the public naturally used the frame of the five houses he owned. This frame reflected that owning one's own houses was a big

problem in the society. Actually, housing has been a salient issue highlighted in the news media in China in recent years, and the responses of the government towards the housing issue were not satisfying (Zhou, 2007). People were dissatisfied with the housing situation in China, which also existed as the most frequently mentioned social problem in one of the frames. The top three most frequently referred to social issues were "rapid rising housing prices," "food safety problem" and "forced demolition." Given that social issues correlate with political distrust (Miller, 1974b; Levi and Stoker, 2000), the dissatisfaction over the outcome of these social issues may have led to the negative judgment of the governments.

Another example was the competition between revolution and political reform. Why do so many people prefer revolution rather than political reform? In academia, most of the findings in political distrust focus on the incumbent-specific dissatisfaction. Very few studies have paid attention to the behavioural and system-level consequences of the distrust. The findings in this research presented the possible consequences of the system-level distrust. Although the online public opinion does not necessarily generate social movements in real life, people's opinions represent their attitudes and potential behaviour to some extent. One of the most important reasons is the perceived powerlessness in the political reality mentioned by the responders. The findings in this research supported Rodgers's (1974) explanation – the perceived political reality – for black political efficacy and political cynicism in the US. Since trust is always relational, conditional and based on individual judgment (Levi and Stoker, 2000), it becomes a problem when individuals find themselves powerless in their relationship with others. In the Li Gang Case, ordinary people constantly expressed their experience of being treated unequally and feeling hopeless to change the political reality. In China, the social inequality led to the rapid accumulation of capital among the privileged stratum and the deprivation of rights for the ordinary people. In addition, it seemed that the government made no effective interventions to protecting the vulnerable groups. Some people said, "Law loses its bearings in front of power" (title of thread 3), as they believed that the law was not

always obeyed by the privileged. As a result, the ordinary people lost the weapon with which they could protect themselves when facing the government's authority. People feel unsafe when they face the powerful government, and they do not know what to expect or what they can rely on. When transparency becomes a huge problem in the government, people are flooded with feelings of insecurity. Some people become hostile to all the privileged. The basis of the political legitimacy was eroded. Revolution becomes more suitable than reform, because it can completely change the existing system. Political reform is extremely skeptical in this context, because the reform is likely to be carried out by the government itself. This means that the whole process of reform is dependent on the motivation within the political system. No pressure from the outside is effective if a certain level of transparency is not guaranteed.

In addition, the failure to meet the public demands on the practice of public values in the public domain was an important factor correlating with the support of the pro-distrust frame package, as shown in the data. The proper treatment of the Li Gang scandal may temporarily relieve the public discontent in this situation, but may not eliminate the deeper roots of discontent (Shibutani, 1966). Public values such as freedom of speech, equal treatment in front of the law, transparency and democracy are increasingly important in the individual's judgment of the government. Frames related to these values are global and may have long-term political influence even after a specific event. To improve the credibility of the government, it is essential for the government to improve its performance in the management of social problems and meet the public demands on the practice of public values.

Findings in this research also showed how the meaning of frames is dependent on the context input and how the underlying meaning of a statement is made more salient. A series of key events or scandals were connected to the pro-distrust frame package in the Li Gang case. A key event could activate certain frames if the events were to become part of the collective memory (Brosius & Eps, 1995; Gorp, 2007). Results of this study showed that several scandals were associated to the activation of the

pro-distrust frame package. All the scandals mentioned were still fresh in the public memory when the discussion on the Li Gang Scandal was carried out. Key events were assembled in a manner that provided a certain interpretation of the reality. The discursive interactions may appear like an extemporaneous process, but the selection of key events was quite deliberate. The frame sponsors reported events as well as directing the public perceptions of reality. Consequently, the key events were also used as standard frames to be applied to the Li Gang scandal without any suspicion (Gorp, 2007). The key events functioned as cultural symbols here, which could enhance the application of frames and contribute to the wide acceptance of frames. For instance, some responders related the Li Gang Scandal to the 70 kph Scandal ("70kph" refers to the speed police initially reported in a car accident when the driver – a young man from a very rich family – struck and killed another man. Witnesses said that the driver's speed should have at least been 100 kph. The public was extremely discontent about the report, and they suspected that the police attempted to cover-up the truth in order to excuse the driver). It is likely that the reference to the 70 kph Scandal tried to convince the public that the office holders used their power to cover up their misconduct in order to evade punishment. Such a frame is in accordance with one that already "existed" in the individual's mind, which primed their viewpoints.

Although the researcher constructed two frame packages which appeared in the communicative interactions during the Li Gang Scandal, framing was not processed in a linear way, as presented in the above tables. There were constant frame interactions between the two packages. Sniderman and Theriault (2004) argue that, being exposed to the competing frames, the framing effect can be reduced in the context of real life compared to the context of the laboratory. Competing frames can cancel the framing effect of each other. However, that is not the case in this study. One explanation for this variance could be that although being exposed to competitive framings, the resistance to framing effects could not be guaranteed, because individuals' exposure to alternative frames can be unequal (Chong & Druckman, 2007) . Findings in this

study showed that the pro-distrust frame package disproportionately controlled more resources than the pro-trust frame package. The absence of clear and strong evidence of the government's merits was obvious in the findings. The pro-trust package, hence, became weak, with barren evidence supporting or enhancing it. The lack of enough counter frames being presented enhanced the persuasive power of the pro-distrust frame packages, because it seemed to speak to the public in a single voice.

There are, nevertheless, weaknesses of the pro-distrust frame package. Frame sponsors attempted to promote the concept that the public domain, in general, is not trustworthy. It is difficult to test this belief, because all the scandals or social problems referred to could support the argument that the government is, in part, not good. Then, the question is why people tend to believe that the whole government is untrustworthy rather than consider that only part of the government should be criticized?

6.3 How were popular beliefs formed?

Literature from different fields of study provides different explanations towards why people will accept one belief as truth while rejecting others. In the field of framing study, scholars argue that people believe a frame when they find it is more applicable than others (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Chong & Druckman, 2007a). And the judgment of the applicability of a frame depends on the process of reality testing (Shibutani, 1966), which is called information processing in the framing activity. Chong and Druckman (2007b) claim that individuals with various levels of personal motivation will process information differently. People who are more knowledgeable process information in a systematic manner with careful deliberations while less knowledgeable people process information in a heuristic manner. However, both of them would accept frames that appeal more to the public, if they were stimulated by competitive framing packages.

In the case of this study, the individuals' levels of motivation could not be distinguished. The idea from Scheufele and Tewksbury that "the underlying

interpretive schemas that have been made applicable to the issue," (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007, p.14) could, however, be found. In other words, after being exposed to the communicative texts, individuals tended to accept the connections between two concepts as suggested in the texts. For example, the post of the first thread (The child of privileged warned by shouting 'my father is Li Gang, you can accuse me if you are able to!' after hitting two girls by car) suggested that whether one should obey the laws is dependent on whether or not one's parents are powerful people. The connection between two concepts – people's social status and law abiding – were built. The message delivered here made the considerations of people's high social status applicable to the evasion of law. From this perspective, different elements were highlighted to "tell" the audience that a certain interpretation of the reality is true.

Furthermore, according to Shibutani's study of rumour (1966), emotional reactions to the targets of rumour may persist even after the rumour itself has been forgotten. Accordingly, individuals' emotional judgments triggered towards the objects of framing may influence the accessibility of a frame more than the content of the frame. The research discovered that public negative emotions were likely to be triggered by highlighted labels and key events in the posts. This could be a result of behavioural contagion. Shibutani (1966) defined this term as "a form of social control that provides direction to joint activity among those who are no longer restrained by conventional norms. It might be regarded as a means whereby a number of human beings can act together quickly even when they have little else in common" (p.179). Once the negative emotions were stimulated, the likelihood of suggestibility, which Shibutani referred to as response without crucial reflection, increased, because emotional mood functions as the basis for frame selection. On the other hand, the pressure towards conformity also developed and the great social power, which means the self-enforcement of a frame, was enhanced (Gamson, 1992).

The widespread political indifference and extremely negative solutions recommended displayed in the data supported Castells's (2007) arguments about the possible effects of the political scandals on the political system. Although there was not enough

evidence to show exactly what the short and long-term effects of the political scandal would be, findings did suggest a potential threat to the political system in China. The trend of a rejection of the political system was found in the data, and many of the complaints towards the government were system-level. This impact of the political scandal can last for a long time. Pan and Kosicki (1993) found that specific issue-related frames of reference can have a significant impact on the individuals' interpretation of future information. The individual evaluation of the government's behaviour and the salient weight associated to the specific evaluation can be strongly affected by the political scandal due to the behavioural contagion. Thus, the threshold required for a change of attitude (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) can easily be achieved. Following this argument, system-level distrust will continuously ruin the legitimacy of the government in the future and the willingness to participate in the activities that are encouraged by government.

It is easy for one to distinguish between the group sanctions towards the disagreement within the two threads that started with affectively positive posts. The post authors (the communicators) were often perceived as lacking credibility and depicted as paid posters. Different voices that were inconsistent with the prevailing mood were often rejected. The findings supported that it is risky to raise a different idea when another idea is widely accepted. With widespread acceptance of the pro-distrust frame package, competing frame packages tend to be eliminated and the process of interaction among frames is terminated. It is then that collective beliefs or attitudes come into being.

Therefore, it is easy for one to accept a certain belief, if the frames of references, both the content and emotions, are in accordance to the individual schema. Under normal conditions, individuals with high levels of motivations are more careful with information processing; establishing connections between the different concepts requires justification based on the applicability of the frames, according to their individual schema and reality testing. Less knowledgeable individuals would be easily influenced through a heuristic route. However, under the circumstances of

behavioural contagion, the level of suggestibility of all individuals would be high. But the knowledgeable people, who are aware of the central considerations on the issue, are less likely to be influenced in comparison with the less knowledgeable people. Hence, the formation of popular beliefs not only depends on the frames of reference individuals encountered, it also depends on the context individuals are situated in (Chong and Druckman, 2007b). Both the cultural symbols and the collective tensions have roles to play here. They influence the individuals' attitudes and beliefs through by affecting the individual evaluation of an issue, or the salience one attributed to that evaluation.

6.4 What was made more salient and what was underrepresented?

The framing activity constantly involves power struggles. The range of voices considered, therefore, should be carefully checked. The voices of the ordinary people were made strong by standing in line with the pro-distrust frame packages, while, in this online discourse, the voices from the official part of the government seemed to be missing in this online discourse. Much of the online discussion only focused on the problems of the government, and the arguments provided were from the specific perspective of personal feelings and emotions. No good comments about on the government and no official or objective data about the performance of the government were mentioned. Of course, this can be attributed to the fact that the public does not think the government does any good things and distrusts the so-called official data from the authority. However, this also means that certain aspects of the government were taken away from the discussion. In the occurrence of strong negative public emotions, it is not surprising that the voices of government sponsors are weak or missing from the debate. But, if the pro-distrust frame package sponsors would aim at protecting the rights of all the citizens living in China and leading China to a bright future, they should let the various voices of the stakeholders of this country to be heard. However, rather than promoting various voices, findings in this research revealed that there was a clear boundary on what was allowed in the online discussion.

Strong group sanctions were exerted to the alien voices. Contradictions between practice and rhetoric emerged within the pro-distrust frame package. Creed et. al (2002) argues that "for those of us who view our work as politically engaged, these contradictions and weaknesses provide strategic opportunities for intervention" (p.47).

The media which hosted the public discussion does influence the power construction. In the setting of the new media, the pro-distrust frame sponsors seem to have more power, as the so-called ordinary people composed a dominant group and used their power to make their voice more salient. Whether the frame has power or not, however, is not so easily decided. It heavily depends on the settings too. If the setting of the new media was changed into mainstream media – the newspaper or the TV – in China, the pro-distrust frame sponsors' voice may be underrepresented.

In understanding the framing activity about regarding political distrust in the Chinese context, it is important to recognize that different frame packages emerge from the conflict of interests that one prioritized and also the conflict of perceptions of the legitimacy of the Chinese government. Due to the type of data analyzed in this research, the question, "who is sponsoring different frames?" is difficult to answer. However, the debates on different identities found in the data revealed that the pro-distrust frame package primarily represents the so-called "ordinary" people, who are always in a deprived position in political reality, in contrast with the privileged – the rich and the powerful people—who benefited a lot from the political regime. These ordinary people specifically emphasized the social inequality and injustice, and they questioned the morality of all the governmental officials and the legitimacy of the government. They portrayed themselves as victims or potentially vulnerable. Nevertheless, there are still some questions remaining vague. How large is the group of the so-called "ordinary" people? Who are belonging to this group of "ordinary" people? Do the voices of the pro-distrust frame package sponsors really represent the majority of the ordinary people? And the answers to these questions are closely related to how much power the pro-distrust frame package sponsors could get. Unfortunately, the present research is not able to answer these questions due to the

lack of relevant data.

The functionality of a frame always aims at serving for certain interests (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1992; Gorp, 2007). In the online discussion of the Li Gang Scandal, the survival of the pro-distrust frame package implied the existence of particular sensitivities, may it be victims of the public power who want to share their feelings with their peers, the human rights fighters who stand for the vulnerable group, or just trouble makers who constantly disturb the government. One could tell from the frames retained that they live to justify the acts of these groups of people and promote a certain underlying political agenda (social movements in this case) by leading the interpretation of what is going on now in China into a certain direction. Phrases from different frame packages may not contradict with each other when if standing alone, but it is in the context of a specific frame packages and among the frame sponsors that these phrases take on specific meanings (Creed, Langstraat, & Scully, 2002). For example, the phrase "China is under transition" is not problematic in itself, but it becomes problematic for the pro-distrust frame sponsors if the pro-trust frame sponsors use it as an excuse to explain poor performance of the government.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of findings

This research investigated the online public discussion during the Li Gang Scandal in an attempt to understand the online framing of political distrust in China. The main findings are summarized as follows:

- The pro-distrust frame package gained more popularity in the online discussion about the Li Gang Scandal. More specifically, a collective belief that the government as a whole was untrustworthy rather than the belief that the government in general is fine, except some parts, which of it needs need to be improved, is embedded in the discourse.

- The pro-distrust frame package is primed by resonating with one's individual schema through the framing devices, including the metaphors, catchphrases, depictions and exemplars.

- The pro-distrust frame package is strengthened by using a serious of key events in the collective memory as triggers to activate certain frames. This frame articulation process is the key to understanding the wide acceptance of the pro-distrust frame package.

- The deeper reason for supporting the pro-distrust frame package resides in the dissatisfactions towards the poor management of social issues of the government and the perceived powerlessness of the public in the political reality of China.

- The new media contributes to the spread of political distrust by offering a forum for the Chinese people who feel depressed in real life to talk with each other. Especially when the information available in the formalized channel is questioned by the public, framing of political distrust in the new media gain more popularity.

- Intensive collective tensions triggered by particular labels used in the posts

increases the suggestibility of the public and leads to the behavioural contagion. The emotional atmosphere makes the public accept the extreme frames in the pro-distrust frame packages much easier and quicker. And group sanctions are established to get rid of the disagreement.

-   Power struggles can be found in the online framing of political distrust. Sponsors of pro-distrust frame package make their voice more salient in the new media, when voices of those who support the pro-trust frame package are weak and voices from the government authority are missing.

7.2 Implications for practitioners in public administration

Findings in this research have implications for the practitioners in public administration in China. The potential effect of political distrust in China is that it might cause withdrawal of political support of the citizens and generate social instability. This research reveals that deeper root of political distrust are the dissatisfactions towards the poor management of social issues of the Chinese government and the perceived powerlessness of the public in the political reality in China. The general debate that circulates in the Chinese society nowadays on how to reform the government should be re-established based on this deeper root of political distrust. Whether or not to copy the experience of western democracy is not the essence. The essence is to keep the government as a tool for good, an instrument that help take care of the citizens in the country by solving the social problems properly and providing the general public with a basic human dignity.

Peoples' belief that the government is not trustworthy comes into being through communicative interactions with others. Framing plays an important role in priming and enhancing such beliefs online. However, communicative interaction is a continuous process. As the reality perceived develops, the common beliefs might also change. Thus, collective beliefs and attitudes are always evolving. Everyone has his own construction of the reality he lives in, and what he perceives depends much on

his own experience and the communicative interactions with others. Consequently, the political distrust could also change through the public communication. So in essence, to change the public political attitudes is to improve the social situations in China, and then, the communicative interaction could work as a bridge to fill in the gaps of the individuals' perception of the reality. And what's more important in the era of mass self-communication, just as what Hendriks (2009) argues, the politicians should now respect the individualism, expressionism and emotionality. Policy makers should both make good projects and make the public feel good.

7.3 Limitations and further research

There are several weaknesses in this research. First, it ignored the time dimension of the framing process. It may, thus, lose some valuable information about the evolution of the frames. Further research could incorporate this time dimension into the analysis to provide more insight into the framing activity. Second, the characteristics of the online individuals were not included in the research, which according to the literature is an important factor to explain the acceptance of different frames (Chong and Druckman, 2007b). This weakness was due to the typical feature of online data, it was almost impossible to get the demographic information of the online responders. This weakness might be solved by the combination of research on netizens' behaviour and Internet communication. An alternative solution can be that carrying out follow-up interviews with these online individuals. A comparison of attitudes can be made between the face-to-face interviews and online discussions. People who do not often use Internet to express their feelings towards the government can also be selected as a contrast group to provide a broader map of how much power the pro-distrust frame package sponsors get. Third, no crossover studies between mainstream media and new media were conducted; therefore, it was not clear how the evolution of frames was influenced by the media framing. Further research could be carried out with regard to this problem.

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Appendix

Appendix I: Rules for Coding

1. If the responder just repeated the words that someone else had said before, his/her repeated words were coded, because these words represented his/her opinion.

2. If the responder just repeated his/her own words, his/her words were not coded repeatedly, as these words represented the opinion from the same person.

3. Catchphrase frequency was counted. Those catchphrases which were cited by a large number of people were counted.

Appendix II: Code Scheme

Attitudes towards the original posts
    Negative
        refer back to "年度人物 我爸是李刚，法在强权下没有支点" [364]
        refer back to "我们为嘛要娱乐我爸是李刚" [29]
        refer back to "惊！河北大学富二代校内醉驾撞飞两名河大新区女生" [921]
    Neutral
        refer back to "李刚的悲剧？社会的悲剧" [48]
        refer back to "从沙特王子到李刚门 – 看这个社会制度的悲哀" [9]
        refer back to "李刚事件背后勾心斗角的权利博弈" [36]
          against "李刚事件背后勾心斗角的权利博弈" [12]
        refer back to "我爸是李刚 到李刚辞职" [83]
          against "我爸是李刚，到李刚辞职" [25]
    Positive
        refer back to "这不过是普通的交通事故" [6]
          against "这是不过普通的交通事故" [453]
            Depict as "50 cents" [88]
        refer back to "撞人不对，说话无罪" [19]
          against "撞人不对，说话无罪" [135]
            Depict as "50 cents" [48]

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Solution recommendation

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Democratic reform [63]
Call for intervention from the central government [69]
Speak and fight for the social vulnerable group [430]
    Negative side of new media [49]
Political indifference [341]
To migrate abroad [81]
Call on a social movement [225]

Problem definition

This country or society [134]
Government as a whole [66]
Institution
    Main stream media [52]
    The Communist Party [98]
People
    Office holders in general [162]
    A group of office holders, specifically the local government [100]
Regime [127]

Catchphrase frequency

refer back to "他说社会和谐了，我知道，社会一定横行了" [180]
refer back to "免责声明" [24]
refer back to "你们这帮子人都不和谐" [83]
refer back to "不在沉默中爆发，就在沉默中灭亡" [15]
 refer back to "马丁.尼莫拉"的诗 [25]
refer back to "看帖看多了，麻木了" [20]

Appendix III: Some Codes Definitions

Ask for more investigation and clear report:
Responders think there were many differences between the official reports and the rumours online, and ask for further investigation into the accident and response to the online rumours.

Ask for administrative punishment on Li Gang and Li Qiming

Responders suggest punishment on Li Gang and Li Qiming through the legal way.

Take the law into our own hands
Responders perceive that the actions of established authorities are insufficient, they suggest to kill or to punish Li Gang and Li Qiming directly rather than depending on the law.

Relate to other social problems
Responders employ other social problems as arguments to support their opinions.

Relate to other scandals
Responders employ other sandals as arguments to support their opinions.

Relate to history
Responders employ historical events and examples strengthen their arguments and resonate with certain emotions and attitude.

Comparison
Responders make comparison with what happened now in China with that happened in other countries.

Universal public value
Those universal public values do not belong to the above list values, such as human rights, freedom and democracy.

Bad social values
The society was pillaged by the elites, the moral values in society are declining and power and money are the highest.

Bad behaviours of the netizens
Netizens are hostile to all the rich and powerful, and tend to attack them verbally online.

The influence of a feudal culture
The traditional Chinese feudal culture that "politics of being emperors" and prerogatives and privileges go with position

Need a path of political development with Chinese characteristic
Against the western democracy, and suggest that China needs its own path of political development.

Political reform
Suggestions including democratic election,

Speak and fight for the social vulnerable group

Use the force of public opinion to help the victims in order to protect everyone's civil rights.

Political indifference
Responders feel that they cannot affect the actions of the government therefore they do not really care what happens in the political domain.

Call on a social movement
Suggest overthrowing the incumbent government from outside of the regime, such as revolution or war.

This country or society
This is a new object of political trust or distrust added based on the responders' expression. The believed that it is because the specific Chinese culture that nothing of the political domain in China is trustworthy.