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News media influence on public trust in bike-sharing operators in Singapore

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Abstract

Purpose – The overnight introduction of tens of thousands of dockless bike-share bicycles in Singapore with its indiscriminate parking drew the attention of the media, which generated extensive news reports on the activities carried out by bike-sharing operators. Given the meteoric rise and fall of the industry, this study examines the influence of agenda-setting of news reporting on the public's perception of the industry and the impact on the firms' corporate reputation.

Design/methodology/approach – Utilizing the Reputation Quotient Index, the study content analyzed 147 textual data of online reports which were crawled over two years between 2017 and 2018 from six mainstream news organizations.

Findings – Our findings showed that the news reports carried more negative frames in the headlines and body content. It also found that only five out of six dimensions of the Index were emphasized with varying degrees of importance, indicating that the corporate reputation as determined by the media reports did not collectively represent the operators' past actions and results with valued outcomes.

Practical implications – Practical implications discussed included the need to integrate corporate strategies into public relations programs and the importance of engaging the media to demonstrate congruence between business objectives and positive social impact on society.

Originality/value – Although the study limited its data collection only to online media reports, it is one of the few research to provide empirical evidence concerning the media's influence on the public's perceptions and reputation of the nascent bike-sharing industry.

Keywords Bike-sharing operators, Singapore, Corporate reputation, News media, Agenda-setting, Reputation Quotient Index

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The news media have the potential to act as a powerful influence on the corporate reputation by shaping the public's perception of organizations' activities and their impact on society. Gaining information from news reporting is, after all, one of the primary ways for the public to learn about companies' corporate strategy or social responsibility that matters to the public's interests (Einwiller *et al.*, 2010). Given that the media have the capability to agenda-set and frame stories by way of deciding on the frequency, visibility and favorability of presenting corporate news, their evaluation and assessment of companies' desired or undesired attributes make it possible for them to shape public's perceptions of the companies they choose to bring to prominence (Carroll and McCombs, 2003).

One group of companies whose activities have been in the full glare of media scrutiny in recent years in Singapore has been the bike-sharing operators (BSOs). The dockless bike-sharing concept, considered to be one of the fastest growing business trends, is one commerce in today's digital era that has rapidly expanded into major cities and transformed urban modes of public transportation worldwide (Bachand-Marleau *et al.*, 2012). The sharing economy, which "burst into the scene" and promises to offer an alternative for individuals to

earn an income by sharing their resources, hence began its meteoric rise across the globe (Cheng, 2019a, b).

While bike-share programs may promote sustainable travel alternatives and encourage a healthier form of transportation, dockless bike-share bicycles have also cluttered streets, obstructed pedestrians, and further degraded urban aesthetic environment (Lim and Mack, 2018). Given its “overnight” popularity and impact on city life and mobility, such a phenomenon drew the attention of the mainstream media in Singapore. Its excess supply of bikes which produced “garbage” and indirectly promoted moral hazards and resource wastage inevitably generated substantial media reports, which subsequently influenced public’s perceptions of bike-sharing operators and trust in these companies to help eradicate the “ills” of the shared services industry (Jaipragas, 2017). In view of the rampant indiscriminate parking by users, public’s unhappiness, and the inability of operators to comply with regulatory demands to carry out stringent measures to curb abuse of bikes, the industry was plagued with multiple problems, and many operators exited the business scene as abruptly as it entered. Within about two years of operation from January 2017 to March 2019, six BSOs either declared bankrupt or announced that they had to fold (Co, 2019). Today, only one firm survives the beleaguered industry to continue operating in the city-state (Channel NewsAsia, 2019).

Given the extensive publicity that BSOs have been receiving from the mainstream media since the bike-share market was created in Singapore, this study is keen to examine the influence of agenda-setting of news reporting and their impact on the corporate reputation of BSOs in Singapore. It aims to utilize the Reputation Quotient Index by employing content analysis to determine the presence of the Index’s main and sub-attributes in the news articles that reported on the activities carried out by the BSOs.

Literature review

Influence of agenda-setting in media

Agenda-setting in media suggests that media influence the public’s opinions by highlighting issues and raising the importance of a topic for people to think about, and in the process, steer their thoughts and attitudes toward the subject (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). This phenomenon occurs through a cognitive process by way of transfer of issue salience. The perceived importance of issues by media coverage takes place via two levels. The first-level agenda-setting maintains that the media decide on the topics for the public to think about. In so doing, the media gives the public the impression that the event reported is more important than all other happenings in society (Kim *et al.*, 2017). The second level agenda-setting concerns the issues discussed in the media having an impact over the way the public thinks by framing the discussion that resonates with the gatekeepers’ agenda. By so doing, the media influence the public agenda and subsequently set the national policy agenda (Wu and Coleman, 2009). The agenda-setting theory, taken together, suggests that media influence the public by telling them what to think about and by emphasizing or not focusing on certain attributes and aspects of the issue, further prod the public to think and act according to the purposes that the media subtly recommend (Kioussis *et al.*, 2011).

Although the effects of agenda-setting were frequently applied to understand the influence of news agenda in the formation of public opinion in politics, the literature on agenda-setting effects have been demonstrated in many other studies related to corporate reputation and strategic management (e.g., Staw and Epstein, 2000). Carroll and McCombs (2003), for instance, uncovered that the “transfer of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda fit equally well in the world of business communication” (p. 36). Essentially, news coverage on organizations and their efforts to manage issues that affect key stakeholders and the general public influence how the public perceives the trustworthiness of the businesses, which affect corporate reputation (Kim *et al.*, 2015). Corporate reputation

ultimately remains in the central domain of agenda-setting effects since stakeholders rely on media content to learn about corporations' deeds or misdeeds, and the transfer of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda will only serve to influence perceptions (Carroll and McCombs, 2003).

Bike-sharing industry and reputation of BSOs in Singapore

Corporate reputation and earned media. According to corporate reputation scholars (e.g., Griffin, 2014), corporate reputation is the sum of all stakeholders' perceptions and an intangible asset that offers organizations multiple benefits. A multidimensional concept, reputation is the track record of an organization in the public's mind (Ettensen and Knowles, 2008; Fombrun *et al.*, 2000). It is "owned" by the public, and it concerns everything that an organization does, from the way it manages its finances to the way it manages employees and handles conflicts with external parties (Roper and Fill, 2012). A company's overall image of itself is communicated via imparting or exchanging of information across multiple communication channels and platforms, with earned media being the most influential in today's digital era (Weber, 2019). With social media driving information dissemination based on popularity rather than accuracy, corporate reputation has never been more fragile as trust in businesses and governments continues to be on the decline (Harrington, 2017). As the public seeks the truth, there has been a renewed focus on earned media as people look to experts like trusted journalists as sources of credible information. Setting the agenda for the public by trusted news media will only increasingly become more critical and influential in deciding the "fate" of companies' reputations (Weber, 2019).

Bike-share in sharing economy. Frenken and Schor (2017) define the sharing economy as consumers granting each other temporary access to underutilized physical assets in exchange for financial returns. The idea behind the sharing economy concept is based on a socioeconomic ecosystem to reduce consumption and depletion of shareable goods (Frenken and Schor, 2017). Unlike home-sharing and car-sharing, where users share their personal assets with the public, bike-sharing is a service where bicycles are made available by private firms for common public usage on a very short-term rental basis at an affordable price (Benkler, 2004). This concept was popularized because of the growing concerns of global motorization and climate change. In high-density cities like Singapore, this sustainable transportation offers a good alternative and solution to help relieve traffic congestion and reduce carbon emissions (Abdullah, 2018).

BSOs in Singapore. The introduction of BSOs in Singapore started with three companies offering a dockless bike-sharing scheme in January 2017. For two of the overseas-based BSOs, Singapore was an international market where the bike-sharing concept holds a great business potential for expansion. Offering a new concept that challenges the way Singapore residents commute, BSOs received extensive media attention due to their highly visible activities, particularly the "sudden" appearance of tens of thousands of bicycles for rent that sprouted up almost overnight in the city-state (Lim and Low, 2018). However, the bike-sharing concept was met with different levels of acceptance from the public and media in Singapore. Some considered it a blessing, while many deemed it a public nuisance. Complaints by citizens of not being able to get back deposits after using the bikes and images of indiscriminate parking in social and mainstream media led to fierce debates on unethical business behaviors and "litter" in the city-state as public questioned the rationale behind the sustainability of bike-sharing (Lim and Hong, 2017).

As the public's agenda soon became the state's agenda and national concerns for the authorities, stricter regulations were subsequently introduced (Yang, 2018). BSOs had to start complying with new requirements that included making refund policies more transparent and the need to manage indiscriminate parking and bike utilization. Non-compliance would result in stiff penalties, and license to operate would be revoked (Channel NewsAsia, 2018).

As the majority of the BSOs were unable to meet the terms of the new requirements and achieve financial gains at the same time, six BSOs had to shut down and discontinue their business operations within about two and a half years of introducing bike-share in Singapore (Cheng, 2019a, b). Given that the Singapore public places more trust in their local mainstream news media and the government compared to other citizens in other countries (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2019; Quah, 2013), we question the extent to which the influence of agenda-setting and transfer of issue salience in the mainstream media contributed to damaged reputation and the rapid “fall” of many BSOs in Singapore.

Corporate reputation and the Reputation Quotient Index

The Reputation Quotient Index (RQ Index), developed by Fombrun *et al.* (2000), is well cited and a frequently used measurement for corporate reputation. It is a multidimensional construct composed of six dimensions that captured stakeholders’ overall perceptions of companies’ reputation. It is multidimensional because scholars argued that “corporate reputation is a collective construct that describes the aggregate perceptions of multiple stakeholders about a company’s performance” (Fombrun *et al.*, 2000, p. 242). The six dimensions offered by RQ Index are (1) emotional appeal, (2) products and services, (3) financial performance, (4) workplace environment, (5) vision and leadership and (6) social responsibility. Each of these six dimensions has an accompanied three or four sub-attributes or factors considered to contribute to the dimensions (see Table 1). Taken together, the RQ

	Presence of mentions	
	Number of articles	%
<i>Dimension 1: vision and leadership</i>	40	27.2
(3 attributes: marketing opportunities, excellent leadership, clear vision of future)		
1 mention	20	13.6
2 mentions	7	4.8
3 mentions	13	8.8
<i>Dimension 2: social responsibility</i>	29	19.7
(3 attributes: supports good causes, environmentally responsible, community responsibility)		
1 mention	19	12.9
2 mentions	7	4.8
3 mentions	3	2.0
<i>Dimension 3: emotional appeal</i>	13	8.8
(3 attributes: feel good about, admiration and respect, trust)		
1 mention	4	2.7
2 mentions	7	4.8
3 mentions	2	1.4
<i>Dimension 4: products and services</i>	30	20.4
(4 attributes: high quality, innovative, value for money, stands behind)		
1 mention	7	4.8
2 mentions	16	10.9
3 mentions	5	3.4
4 mentions	2	1.4
<i>Dimension 5: financial performance</i>	34	23.1
(4 attributes: outperforms competitors, a record of being profitable, low-risk investments, growth prospects)		
1 mention	20	13.6
2 mentions	10	6.8
3 mentions	4	2.7
4 mentions	0	0
<i>Dimension 6: workplace environment</i>	0	0
(3 attributes: rewards employees fairly, good place to work, good employees)		

Table 1.
RQ Index dimensions
and attributes in 147
media articles

Index has been argued to be one of the most robust measurements of corporate reputation that establishes multidimensionality and is capable of eliciting perceptions that impact the corporate reputation (Fombrun *et al.*, 2000).

As we are keen to uncover the presence of transfer of issue salience in the media reports which gave the Singapore public certain perceptions of BSOs, this study utilizes the RQ Index framework to examine the presence of the 20 attributes of the six dimensions of the RQ Index and how these attributes and the six dimensions were “portrayed” and “framed” (positively or negatively) collectively in the news reports. We operationalize the Index to align with literature, which argued that corporate reputation is about calibrating “a firm’s relative standing internally with employees and externally with its other stakeholders . . . and is therefore a collective assessment of a company’s ability to provide valued outcomes to a representative group of stakeholders” (Fombrun *et al.*, 2000, p. 243). The immediate group of stakeholders, in this case, are the journalists whose reports we are interested in examining so as to understand better the extent they agenda-set and influenced the public’s trust in the BSOs (Jaipragas, 2017).

Method

The study employed content analysis to examine the portrayal of BSOs in Singapore’s mainstream online media from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2018. Online news reports generated by mainstream media were selected for three reasons (1) many Singaporeans today prefer to get their news and read them online with a digital readership of mainstream media registering high growth as print declines (Lim, 2019), (2) according to the Edelman Trust Barometer Survey (2019), public’s trust in traditional media in 2019 is at a five-year high in Singapore, and (3) online provides greater accessibility and accuracy when locating news reports published by mainstream media for this study which needs to analyze coverage across different mainstream dailies. As for selecting the two-year period, it coincided with the introduction of the bike-share scheme in Singapore in January 2017 and the decline of the industry at the end of 2018.

Online news crawling

The sampling unit for this study was the BSOs relevant online news reported by the mainstream media in Singapore. A total of 147 textual data in the form of published news articles were crawled between 2017 and 2018 from six news organizations – Business Times Singapore ($n = 4$), Channel News Asia ($n = 9$), The Straits Times ($n = 73$), Reuters News ($n = 48$), The New Paper ($n = 8$), and TODAY ($n = 5$). These six mainstream news dailies are the most trusted and frequently read by Singaporeans (Tay, 2018). The news crawling tool used was the Factiva database, which is a global news and data archive employed by numerous social science and marketing research (e.g., Chatterjee and Shaw, 2012; Uotila *et al.*, 2009). The term, bike share or bike-share, was used as the search keyword, and the report language was limited to English. The type of sources was set without restrictions to get a comprehensive picture of the news portrayals of bike-share operators in Singapore. The search yielded 147 textual stories representing the aggregate media agenda.

Coding procedures and intercoder reliability

As the study aims to examine how the media’s portrayal of bike-share operators will likely affect a company’s reputation, the RQ Index (Fombrun *et al.*, 2000; Kioussis *et al.*, 2011) was utilized to provide a guiding framework to measure corporate reputation according to the six dimensions outlined in the Index. The presence and sentiments value for both headlines and body content of the media articles were coded. It was important that headlines were coded too, as past studies have shown that media headlines are highly influential in determining if

readers continue to read the text. Headlines were also found to positively or negatively affect readers' response to the news articles (Scacco and Muddiman, 2016). Thereafter, the latent analysis was adopted to establish and answer three research questions:

- RQ1. Did the media headlines and body content positively or negatively portray the BSOs?
- RQ2. Were the six dimensions and 20 attributes offered by the RQ Index salient in the media reporting of BSOs?
- RQ3. Which of the six dimensions were most and least emphasized by the news reports, and how did the media agenda-set the aggregate perceptions of the corporate reputation of the BSOs?

For measuring the sentiments of media headlines and body contents portrayed by reporters, a three-point coding scheme was developed ranging from 0 (negative sentiment), 1 (positive sentiment), to 2 (neutral). For instance, if the article reported the bike-share company in a negative tone in the headline and a neutral tone in its body content, the sentiment of the headline was coded with 0, and the body sentiment was coded as 2.

To measure the corporate reputation of media body contents, we coded the six dimensions according to the presence of the attributes in each dimension. In other words, we coded the presence of any of the attributes of each dimension. For example, for dimension "Vision and Leadership" that has three attributes (marketing opportunities, excellent leadership and clear vision of future), if we found no mention of any of the three, it was coded as 0. If any of the three was mentioned, it was coded as 1, if two of the three were mentioned, it was coded as 2, and if all three were mentioned, it was coded as 3. Thereafter, we aggregated the frequency of all mentions and provided a percentage to give an estimated sense of the importance of that attribute and emphasis by the 147 news reports. The same coding procedure goes for dimensions with four attributes. As shown in Table 1, four dimensions have three accompanied attributes, and two have four attributes. This coding process was adopted because text-based analyses of media content present a distinctive discursive characteristic of the textual analysis method. According to Fursich (2009), the impact of media content is that "mediated reality necessitates interpretation in its own right" (p. 238).

To facilitate the coding process and to achieve consistency between coders, a codebook was developed to provide detailed instructions and descriptions of the sampling units. Two trained graduate students were hired to analyze the 147 media articles. In the trial briefing, they were informed of the purpose, research questions, definitions of media articles and the RQ Index measurement tool. For assessing the rigor of the coding scheme, a pre-test was conducted using ten random articles, which were not included in the 147 articles. After confirming that the intercoder reliability of the pre-test exercise was acceptable, two coders subsequently worked independently, with each one coding all 147 articles according to instructions outlined in the codebook. The articles were arranged chronologically according to the time and in the order that they were published or posted.

After coding 100% of the full set of articles, every fifth article of the 147 articles (20%) was selected to be subjected to intercoder reliability checks according to the κ coefficient, as proposed by Scott (1955). The final intercoder reliability κ for the portrayal and framing of headlines was 0.89, the portrayal and framing of article bodies was 0.72, the presence of the six dimensions was 0.85, and the attributes was 0.88. These coefficients were considered acceptable in content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002).

Results

After ensuring that we achieved healthy coefficients for intercoder reliability, we proceeded to calculate the absolute numbers of all articles. We aggregated the results of articles coded

by the two coders and divided the number by two to get the comparison averages and percentages in order to answer our RQs. The same computation was also carried out for each of the six dimensions and their attributes in the RQ Index.

RQ1 asked if the news media headlines and body content positively or negatively portray the BSOs. Results showed that, of the 147 coded headlines, 59.5 (40.5%) contained a negative writ, 55 (37.1%) were written with a neutral tone, and 33 (22.4%) were framed positively. As for the article content, 69 (46.9%) contained a negative writ, 37 (25.2%) were written with a neutral tone, and 41 (27.9%) were positioned positively (see Figure 1). The findings here indicated that the headlines and body content of the media articles were framed more negatively as only 1 in about 5 media reports presented the BSOs in a positive light.

RQ2 asked if the six dimensions and 20 attributes offered by the RQ Index were salient in the media reporting of BSOs. Results showed that mentions of *vision and leadership* were present in 40 articles (27.2%), *social responsibility* was present in 29 (19.7%), *emotional appeal* in 13 (8.8%), *products and services* in 30 (20.4%), and *financial performance* in 34 (23.1%). The dimension *workplace environment* was absent from all articles. This indicated that not all the six dimensions of corporate reputation were salient.

RQ3 asked which of the six dimensions were most and least emphasized by the news reports and how did the media agenda-set the aggregate perceptions of the corporate reputation of the BSOs. Extending the answers provided in RQ2, findings showed that, according to the degree of emphasis, the media tended to focus more on *vision and leadership*, followed by *financial performance* and *product and services* and *social responsibility*. Emotional appeals were dismal, and the *workplace environment* was not mentioned at all (see Table 1). Given that our study only found five out of six dimensions emphasized with varying degrees of importance by the media, we are of the view that the corporate reputation, as determined by the media reports, did not collectively represent BSO's past actions and results with valued outcomes. By so doing, the media's influence on the public's perceptions were also affected due to the transfer of issue salience present in agenda-setting effects. Interestingly, our findings that showed only five dimensions were emphasized by the media and concurred with the study conducted by Kanto *et al.* (2016) in Malaysia. As Singapore and Malaysia share similar cultural traits, suggesting that the RQ Index failed to confirm workplace environment as a dimension of corporate reputation in the Malaysian banking industry may suggest that this dimension is not salient in the sum of stakeholders' perceptions of companies' corporate reputations in this part of the world.

Discussion

This study examined the impact of media influence on the public's perception and trust in BSOs in Singapore. Given that reputation is the sum of all perceptions and the result of having to meet all the six dimensions suggested by the RQ Index, the perceptions of BSOs, according to our findings, were not portrayed favorably by the news media in Singapore.

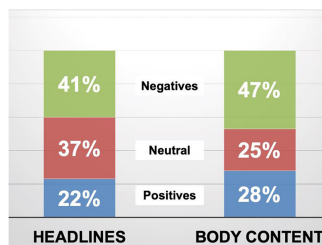


Figure 1.
Percentages of headlines and body content portrayal of BSOs in 147 media articles

More articles were found to have negative frames for both headlines and body content. Arguably, this could have contributed to an overall poorer corporate reputation as the public's perceptions of BSOs could be equally dismal. Further, the presence of articles with neutral frames is to be expected. [Martins et al \(2013\)](#), argued that journalists today are compelled to maintain objectivity as they seek out sources that represent both sides of an issue in order to provide a balanced viewpoint.

One possible argument that may explain for the less favorable news reports of BSOs by the mainstream media in Singapore could be attributed to the collective values in Asian societies like Singapore, which are underpinned by the ideology of communitarianism that seeks to promote the needs and interests of "others" over the "self" ([Tan, 2013](#)). A social philosophy that emphasized the interests of the community, communitarianism has often been linked to Confucian values in Asian societies ([Jiang, 2000](#)). Essentially, communitarianism rejects the view that the self is detached from society and independent of all moral and political obligations, asserting that the self is always constituted through a community that exists in shared social and cultural understandings and practices ([Tan, 2013](#)).

The portrayal of BSOs by the Singapore media reflected this ideology, which also resonated with the Singapore public, who tend to put the community over self-interest ([Tan, 2018](#)). One contribution by a netizen, which was published in The Straits Times online testified to the need for BSOs to uphold this important societal value. Summing up perhaps the rationale for the media's negative frames, the article headline stated that "Bike-sharing companies need to think about the community." The netizen criticized the BSOs for ignoring the interests of the community in which they operate and harshly remarked that companies that do not have the interests of the community at heart have no right to operate in the city-state ([Tan, 2018](#)).

The results of this study further supported scholars' (e.g., [Carroll and McCombs, 2003](#); [McCombs and Shaw, 1972](#)) theoretical assertions that media agenda-building and agenda-setting in news reporting increase the salience of issues in the public's minds and shape the opinion of organizations. As corporate trust and reputation are crucial for the longevity of organizations, the BSO's sole focus to gain market share during the bike-sharing phenomena indicated that BSOs' efforts to engage with key stakeholders such as the media were either neglected or de-prioritized during the early days of operations in Singapore. This neglect inevitably resulted in negative news articles around bike-share. Not engaging with media simply allowed the media to have full reign to agenda-set and frame the bike-sharing industry as a "nuisance" and an "eyesore" to the public, and in the process hinders the industry from being able to recover and build public trust.

Practical implications for public relations practitioners in Singapore

In today's digital era, this study reinforced the need for corporate strategies to be proactively built to positively engage key stakeholders like the media, both online and offline. Corporate messages should also be crafted to better resonate with the "values" of mainstream media, which will likely frame stories that echo readers' interests. Practitioners should also be mindful that an Asian society like Singapore, which places community over self, providing proof points to support and emphasize similar attributes, will likely result in more favorable perception and trust among stakeholders. The importance of carrying out research on perceived brand image and corporate reputation of the organization by the media and the public is further encouraged as this acts as a hygiene check to ensure that the public's trust and perception of the company are within healthy levels.

For communication practitioners working for companies like BSOs, the messages to the media and the public should have been one which demonstrates that the firms do not only

care about growing its business margins, they are also companies that have a heart for the community. Since the bike-sharing concept was originally driven by the idea of sustainability, media conversations that discuss how the industry can bring about positive social changes and impact on the communities and environment would have been ideal. This includes the communication of the company's corporate social responsibility efforts or participation in socially impactful initiatives. As mentioned by *David et al., (2013)*, an increase in perceived interactivity leading to higher message credibility and stronger feelings of identification with the company would certainly boost corporate reputation. Equally beneficial for the BSOs' business development would be to partner with other like-minded institutions to initiate more socially impactful activities so that the public relations department can proactively communicate the companies' activities and pitch stories to the media and the public.

As our findings showed that not all six dimensions had been equally emphasized in the news report, practitioners should actively pitch stories to the media to generate greater awareness of all the dimensions and their accompanying attributes, including workplace environment. For the media to pay attention to the latter, companies like BSOs may also wish to invest resources into employee communication so that employees can act as the firms' ambassadors, and contribute to better perceptions and an improved corporate reputation.

Limitations of study and conclusion

This study has several limitations. First, we limited our data collection to only digital media (web 1.0) and omitted social media (digital web 2.0 platforms). According to *McFarland and Ployhurt (2015)*, the advent of social media with its videos and visuals have changed the context of the formation of companies' reputation. The Internet affords visibility and interaction potential, and in turn, magnifies the impact and speed of impact of corporate reputation (*Floreddu et al., 2014*). The interactive social media platform provides users the means to freely interact with one another and even share their personal feelings, thoughts or sentiments about companies (*Floreddu et al., 2014*). This important channel of communication poses great risks for companies and would definitely require firms to actively monitor conversations in social media in order to improve their brand and reputation.

Second, our study did not measure the transfer of salience from the media agenda to individual agenda as our results could only infer from the media's agenda on the public's perceptions. A survey to triangulate our content analysis to understand better the relationship between the news reports and readers would have better predicted outcomes and offered insights into the interplay between the agenda of the news media, the public and that of the state or authorities.

Despite the limitations of this study, this research filled an existing gap in the literature. A nascent industry and a new addition to the sharing economy, few studies explored the public's perceptions of BSOs. We hope that this study has contributed to knowledge by providing empirical evidence surrounding the media's influence on the public's opinion towards the reputation of the dockless BSOs and the bike-sharing industry.

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