

The Restructuring of the Gaming Community's Online Agenda Through Crisis PR Strategies: A PR Analysis Based on “Roco Kingdom: World”

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ABSTRACT

In the modern era of digital social media, the tremendous connectivity and deep emotional connections in online gaming communities make them susceptible to irrational public opinion cascades caused by occasional glitches or product controversies. This analysis takes the compound dilemma caused by the clandestine changes in the Season 2 update of Tencent's Magic Cube Studio's new game as the case study. This study contributes to the understanding of evolutionary dynamics of public opinion networks in gaming communities by introducing the concept of online agenda-setting and applying a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative content analysis and quantitative text mining. It measures how much the official's two rounds of crisis rhetoric, from two different angles, altered public perception. According to the study, crisis public relations is the process in which firms develop new information nodes to restructure and reduce the public agenda. In addition, the long-term “scar effect” after major disruptions in highly engaged communities is mirrored in the online agenda, and the rehabilitation of brand trust has distinct phased constraints. This article provides risk prevention and control insights, including issue relationship management, for the pre-crisis, initial outbreak, dissemination, and recovery stages to frame decision making on digital entertainment item risk management.

KEYWORDS: Online agenda-setting; Online games; Crisis public relations; Chi-square test

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I. Research Background

The public opinion environment in online gaming communities is changing rapidly in the era of distributed and decentralized digital social media [1,2]. Algorithmic content recommendations and expert groups are the driving forces behind this trend, as even slight product design disagreements or occasional technical problems can be exaggerated to become significant threats to brand trust [3]. A typical case of a complex public opinion problem in the digital era occurred in May 2026 while working on the Season 2 upgrade for made by Tencent's Magic Cube Studio. Meanwhile, a small alteration to a female character's defeat animation, coupled with a technical setback in the update, led to a conspiracy theory swiftly blowing up online, calling for a “complete overhaul of the development team.”

According to the theory of networked agenda-setting, an audience's cognitive agenda [4] is not a linear list but rather a network made up of different nodes and connections [5]. The logical loops in the public's subconscious are altered when self-media outlets or communities regularly connect disparate clues. In this instance, participants used the network agenda-setting process to forcefully connect characteristics like “covert changes” and “bugs,” which led to the illogical conclusion that “the development team had been completely overhauled” in the public debate.

Thus, using the May dispute surrounding “Roco Kingdom: World” as a single case study, this work combines qualitative content analysis with quantitative text mining. This study mainly examines how the online agenda-setting mechanism works in the cascade of public opinion within the gaming community by gathering a significant amount of player comments from the Weibo platform and using techniques like NVivo, Gephi semantic network mapping, and SPSS chi-square tests. Additionally, it offers a scientific assessment of how players' cognitive networks are altered by the official's crisis rhetoric in various dimensions, providing new decision-making models and micro-level mathematical evidence for risk control in digital entertainment products within the new media environment.

II. Theoretical Foundation

(I) The Evolution of Agenda-Setting Theory

In the era of Web 1.0, research on online agenda-setting mainly centered on BBS forums and blogs to examine the influence of decentralization on traditional agenda-setting in a digital media environment, and the third-level agenda-setting model with complex network topologies had not yet been established. Early Chinese scholars believed that the development of traditional media was gradually slowing down, but the advent of internet technology had awakened the agency of the audience [6]. Empirical studies on important political communication events and public opinion on social hot topics show that online public opinion can deeply interact with mainstream media agendas within digital networks, and media texts may even play a reverse role in traditional public discourse [7, 8].

Social network analysis became the standard approach in domestic research during this time after McCombs and others formally proposed the “third-order agenda-setting” (Network Agenda Setting, NAS) academic paradigm, which caused domestic scholars to refocus their attention from earlier studies of the media environment to the analysis of network structures. There were two ways that domestic research went deeper at this time of the paradigm’s explosive expansion. The first was theoretical reflection and genealogical analysis: scholars verified the academic legitimacy and methodological prospects of network-structured research from a macro perspective by looking at the developmental trajectory of classical agenda-setting theory and interviewing its academic founders [10, 12, 14]. The second was the empirical application of standardized network mapping. Researchers started looking at new ways to assess the impact of online public opinion through network agenda-setting [9]. They also obtained results about structural mappings between media association matrices and public perception neural networks, as well as evaluations of effectiveness metrics, by methodically applying association calculations [11, 13]. A new paradigm for network agenda-setting in China was established by the research accomplishments of this era, moving from “qualitative technical descriptions” to “hard-core computational science.”

In the last two years, there have been two innovative developments in online agenda-setting theory in domestic research that have significant practical implications: a move toward emotionality and a move toward micro-verticalization. In contrast, research on emerging technology narratives and the community ecosystems of vertical cultural tourism and vertical pan-entertainment sectors adopts a more micro-level and agile approach, primarily elucidating the mechanisms of networked construction—such as those involving vertical niche communities and technology-centric topics—on social networking platforms [18]. In studies of sudden incidents and public disasters, the theory has evolved from rational lexical networks toward irrational emotional cascade networks, primarily illustrating how the media subtly directs and co-occurs online [17]. The most direct theoretical foundation for this thesis’s use of Weibo’s vertical gamer comment data to examine the reversal of community sentiment polarity and the general positive shift in cognitive maps under crisis management initiatives is provided by this change in study focus at this point.

(2) The Theory of Agenda-Setting in Online Gaming

Online gaming communities have a strong influence on people’s views and emotions toward digital media. Unlike traditional cultural and tourism commodities and mass-market consumer products, video games embody the emotional attachment and virtual identities of players, creating a non-tangible psychological attachment to the brand. When a game faces a PR crisis, users flock to social media. Although Generation Z exhibits a strong reliance on communities and a strong desire to be heard, the algorithmic recommendation system and social media circle segmentation can easily lead to players’ irrational emotions resonating within information silos. The nature of this emotionally invested and highly interconnected audience can lead to swift public relations calamities.

In May 2026, <Rock Kingdom>: [Sensor Tower data shows that from March 24 to April 27, 2026, <Rock Kingdom: World> led the global open-world role-playing game revenue chart, surpassing a number of well-known rivals and becoming the highest-grossing title internationally during that time. On May 21, 2026, talks about <Rock Kingdom: World> on Weibo hit 230,602 mentions, marking the pinnacle of its official discussion volume for that month, according to data from “Wei Index.” This resulted in a PR storm for <https://sensortower.com/>World. With 129,822 mentions on Weibo’s trending list on May 24, the topic reached its second-highest peak of the month after game designer “Kai Shui” responded. This occurrence served as a famous case study for NAS theory. Technical issues and ideological disagreement combined to create a cascading crisis. Initially, these two significant occurrences took place on distinct dimensions. However, the player community developed a system for establishing the online agenda during the time when the official team failed to carry out prompt and efficient evaluations, investigations, and clarifications, resulting in the two events appearing side by side. Public opinion once again shifted toward conspiracy theories regarding the “sudden appointment of a game designer” amid intensely emotional reactions and unclear statements. However, the negative emotional associations that had previously existed were broken and diluted following the publication of

the lead designer's lengthy open letter.

Despite its widespread usage in digital public opinion research, network agenda-setting still has certain drawbacks. The majority of the research on NAS, both domestically and abroad, concentrates on macro-level political and social concerns such as public disasters, international relations, and national elections, according to a review of empirical studies on the subject. However, audiences and companies invest a great deal of time and money in vertical, widely virtual communities like online games, and the rate at which illogical public opinion spreads is significantly faster than that of traditional public concerns. The fragmented hints within highly engaged communities can quickly develop into conspiracy theory networks in a very short amount of time, a phenomenon that is not sufficiently explained by existing studies. Nevertheless, in order to show isomorphism between the public and the media, the majority of current research gathers data from a macro-level temporal viewpoint, producing a static or flat semantic relationship map.

In conclusion, the theory of online agenda-setting can be used to explain and clarify public opinion crises in online gaming. The function of online agenda-setting in public opinion events at various times is examined in this study. Additionally, the study examines the degree of changes in the players' sentiment network before and after the public relations intervention by gathering player comments both during the outbreak of gaming-related public opinion and after the publication of "Boiling Water's" long statement. The following theories are put forth: H0 asserts that there are no appreciable variations between the emotional inclinations of the online agenda of the gaming community and the various phases of crisis public relations. According to H1, there are notable distinctions between the emotional inclinations of the online agenda of the gaming community and the various phases of crisis public relations; in other words, a change in official crisis public relations tactics will result in a reversal of the emotional sentiment of the community's public opinion.

Summary of Key Milestones in the Incident

(1) Phase One: Outbreak of the Crisis

On May 20, all servers were shut down for maintenance at 9:00 PM to upgrade to the "S2 Season: Carnival of Ghost Stories" version. The updated version was officially released on the 21st at 10:00 AM. The official update notice, which nearly reached 30,000 characters in length, made no mention of character animation, spirit movement, skill stats, and other related factors. After the servers went online, players gradually discovered many secret changes (hereinafter referred to as "covert changes") that were not mentioned in the announcement. PVP defeat poses for female characters changed from squatting to standing with hands on hips; PVE victory animations and alchemy settlement animations were removed or simplified; some spirit mount poses were changed; facial expressions disappeared; and bugs that had been fixed in Season 1 resurfaced.

(2) Phase Two: Initial PR Response

The official team issued its first emergency apologetic statement in the early morning of May 22, roughly 36 hours after the situation broke out. They promised they would offer a function for users to adjust character animations, admitted to communication issues, agreed to change the handling of some disputes, and compensated all gamers with two Prism Orbs, equivalent to about 320 yuan. However, this statement had many shortcomings: Firstly, the main point of dispute was that the developers did not provide an explanation for their secret and unannounced adjustments. Secondly, they did not respond to customer complaints about gameplay problems, including stat reductions and Pokémon bugs. Thirdly, they did not clarify whether gender-related concerns were the driving force behind the character animation modifications.

(3) Phase Three: Public Sentiment Spiral Out of Control

The creators went into a period of silence that lasted longer than 48 hours after the original apology was deemed inadequate. They encountered two primary forms of player criticism on the site during this period. In the first, rumors were circulated. Claims that the original designers had erased the source code in revenge, that the S2 version was a discarded beta build that had been forced to launch, and that the original design team had been replaced by an "outsider" team were among the false information that went around the community. These tales increased players' resistance by making them doubt the makers' communication. Mismanagement of the community fell into the second group. Extremely misogynistic comments were made by the moderator of the game's Weibo super topic, and the platform's ID verification procedure was accused of being biased. The player population swiftly divided into opposing factions after earlier changes to the animations of female characters, and regular conversations regarding the game update were overshadowed by verbal abuse based on gender. The super subject moderator was later changed by the developers, but the conflict's focus switched from the game itself to issues of gender perception because it was hard to rapidly disperse the anger.

(4) Phase Four: Follow-up PR Efforts

"Kaishui," the chief designer of the game, sent an in-game email on May 24 with a handwritten apologetic message that was almost 4,000 characters long. This action turned out to be the incident's pivotal moment. There were five key points in the letter of apology. First, the lead designer categorically refuted allegations that the team had been replaced by outsiders, claiming that there had been no "team shake-up" or "parachute

appointments” and that the issues were internal to the team. Second, he openly acknowledged that Season 1’s repaired data had not been combined with the updated version and that time constraints had forced the testing process to be shortened, which resulted in the reemergence of numerous outdated issues and unapproved hidden modifications. Third, he declared that the deployment of the custom feature that was initially planned for May 28 had been postponed and that two emergency upgrades had been rolled back to address all contentious covert changes, resolving scores of faults. Fourth, the corporation gave out ten more Prism Orbs and a number of limited-edition, discontinued items in addition to the two Prism Orbs that were given out in the first round. The total compensation value for each player was close to 2,000 yuan. Fifth, in order to avoid future unexpected changes, a procedure was put in place to announce version update details seven days in advance.

(5) Phase Five: Aftermath of the Incident

The developers carried out corrective actions even after the situation had mostly passed. The debate around the actions was entirely resolved when the custom action option was formally introduced ahead of the May 28 deadline, giving gamers the freedom to select between new and old actions. A little incident involving the silent modification of a feature icon occurred during this time, but the developers promptly undid the change. Community moderation efforts were intensified along with the rigorous enforcement of the advance version announcement mechanism. But it was impossible to completely undo the emotional harm brought on by the initial crises. The opinions of players became distinctly divided into three categories: those who stopped making in-app purchases to wait to see how things worked out, those who forgave the developers, and those who departed the game. The game’s daily revenue decreased by 42% month over month, and by early June, its final stable rating on TapTap was 3.5, significantly lower than the original 8.2. In the meantime, extreme comments in the community decreased from a peak of 354 to 39, and the number of conversations about the covert changes decreased from a peak of 10.3 to 0.82. Although the crisis has mostly been resolved and corrective actions have been put in place, brand trust has only been partially restored, and the emotional capital that was previously built up has been permanently harmed.

III. Data Collection and Sentiment Analysis

First of all, according to the empirical results of the theory of online agenda setting, we used web crawling technology to collect the comment data of the Weibo gaming group. After collecting and cleaning the data, we used NVivo to establish a three-level coding system with two dimensions, namely sentiment and topic. We then performed reliability tests to ensure consistency. To measure the strength of the relationship between nodes and edges, we constructed a word frequency co-occurrence network using Gephi. We then used quantitative statistics to demonstrate the sentiment reversal effect in community public opinion by performing cross-tabulations and Pearson's chi-square tests on player comments at each step of the PR response using SPSS software.

(I) Data Collection and Coding

Player comments were crawled according to the time of public opinion outbreaks and keyword extraction. Media Crawler was the main tool for comment crawling in this study. Signature parameters were obtained through JavaScript expressions by simulating the login process and maintaining the browser’s logged-in context via the Playwright browser automation framework. Among many social media platforms, Weibo was selected as the sample source platform based on the short-term intensity of public opinion outbreaks, user age, and the degree of comment intensity. A total of 50 keywords related to public opinion were selected for this data crawl, and they were divided into five broad topics based on their subject matter.

Table 1 Weibo Keyword Crawling Summary

Weibo Keyword Data Crawling				
Game IPs and Official Entities				
Roco Kingdom	Roco Kingdom: The World	Roco Kingdom Mobile Game	Rubik’s Cube Studio	Tencent Magic Cube
Roco Mobile Game	Roco Official	Tencent Mobile Games		
Trigger: The “Duke Squat” Pose and Controversy Over Covert Changes				
Defeat Animations	Female Characters Moves	Covert Changes to Movements	Make a quiet change	Motion Optimization
Official Sliding Track	Roco Sliding Track	Gender Discrimination	Insulting Women	Crying in the Duck Position
After Losing, Switch to Standing	Gender Conflict			
Season Update and Technical Setback				
Roco S2	S2 Season	Update on 5.21	Rollback	A Step Back in the

Roco Bug	Critical Bug	Beta Package	Data Rollback	Update Roco Update
Conspiracy Theories About the Team's Roster Overhaul				
Team Overhaul	Key Personnel Departure	Rubik's Cube Overhaul	Parachute Appointments of Croines	Cost Reduction and Efficiency Improvement
The Same Team	The Roco Conspiracy Theory	Replace Top Management	The Team behind the Scenes	Resignation for R&D
A Long Apology				
A Long Post by Kai Shui	Kai Shui's Long Letter	Kai Shui's Apology	Roco's Response	Rubik's Cube Apology
Chaotic Version Control	Roco Public Relations	Debunking Rumors by Kai Shui	Roco Kingdom Announcement	Update Announcement

Between May 21 and May 27, the web crawler gathered 1,940 Weibo comments. 265 comments were left after two rounds of manual data cleaning, which eliminated duplicate, hashtag-only, and sensitive comments.

Table 2. Sample Distribution by Public Opinion Stage

Public Opinion Phase	Time Range	Number of Comments	Percentage
The Crisis Erupts	5.20-5.21	33	12.45%
First Round of PR	5.22	32	12.08%
Public Opinion Spiral Out of Control	5.22-5.24	122	46.04%
Second-Round PR	5.24	16	6.04%
Residual of the event	5.25-6.1	62	23.40%
Total		265	100%

(2) Coding System and Reliability and Validity Testing

The study developed a two-level coding scheme. Level-1 coding (emotional dimension) classifies each comment as good, neutral, or negative. Neutral comments are objective descriptions, technical discussions, or unbiased recommendations; negative comments express discontent, rage, disappointment, or mistrust toward official actions or the game itself; positive comments express understanding, support, or approval toward official actions or the game itself. Level-2 coding (issue dimension) classifies the specific topics raised in the comments based on the first-level coding to identify the main grounds of dispute at each stage.

Apart from the 265 remarks, 27 comments were reserved for assessing validity and reliability. After pre-coding the sample, two coders computed the Kappa coefficients. A high level of coding consistency was shown by the Kappa values for first-level coding (0.86) and second-level coding (0.81), both of which were greater than 0.80.

Table 3: Comparison Table of the Two-Level Coding System

No.	Emotional Attributes	Specific Topics	Explanation of the Corresponding Comment
1	Positive Topics	Acceptance of Leader Designer's Apology	Accept the lead designer's 4000-character apology letter; the tone is sincere.
2		Approve the corrective actions.	Satisfactory fixes for issues such as silent rollbacks and custom actions
3		Approval of the Compensation Plan	Expressed satisfaction with the compensation for items such as Prism Ball
4		Staying True to the Spirit of Gaming	Expresses a willingness to continue supporting the game
5	Neutral Topics	Suggestions for Customizing Actions	Proposal to add an action selection feature
6		Technical Analysis of the Version	Discuss technical issues such as version merging and beta packages.

No.	Emotional Attributes	Specific Topics	Explanation of the Corresponding Comment
7		Discussion on the Pace of Public Opinion	Analyzing public opinion trends and debates on group positions
8	Negative Topics	Unannounced Changes	Dissatisfaction with the authorities for modifying the content without prior public notice
9		Deterioration of Character /Sprite Animations	Ranting about changes like female roco's pose and Qilihua's mount
10		Game Bugs, Stat Issues	Old bugs recurring, abnormal sprites' stats
11		ID Verification, Chaos on Online Communities	Criticizing double standards in user IDs, comments in Super Topics, and gender polarization
12		Rumors of Team Overhaul	Questions about the team's sudden arrival and staff changes
13		A Half-Hearted First Round of PR Efforts	Dissatisfied with the initial apology and the small compensation

(3) Word Frequency Statistics and Analysis

Table 4. Summary Table of High-Frequency Terms from All Reviews (Top 20)

Ranking	High-Frequency Words	Frequency of Occurrence	Ranking	High-Frequency Words	Frequency of Occurrence
1	Covert Changes	187	11	Prism Ball	47
2	Official	156	12	Kai Shui	45
3	Apology	132	13	Rollback	43
4	Compensation	118	14	Deleted	41
5	Female Roco	94	15	Sprite	40
6	Action	89	16	Announcement	38
7	Designer	76	17	Perfunctory	36
8	Attitude	68	18	Qili	34
9	Player	61	19	Trust	33
10	BUG	52	20	Riding	31

The public described the occurrence as “secret modifications made without public notice” rather than a standard version update, as evidenced by the fact that “covert changes” (187 occasions) scored #1 among the most commonly used terms, vastly outnumbering “announcement” (38 instances). The difference in frequency itself is a reflection of public opinion. In the top five, “compensation” (118 times) and “apology” (132 times) were tied. The public focused much more on whether the official response included an apology and how compensation would be given than on discussions regarding the specific game material, based on how the incident transpired. In fact, this is consistent with the typical features of crisis events: once trust is betrayed, the public's focus switches from the product to the brand's mindset. Public opinion is mixed, as seen by the frequent occurrences of “perfunctory response” (36 times) and “trust” (33 times). Some people think the official answer was superficial, while others started talking about rebuilding trust after the second round of PR campaigns. This sets the stage for the phased analysis that follows.

All 265 comments' text content was sentiment-coded in NVivo, allowing for the assignment of numerous sentiment labels (positive, negative, or mixed). Table 6 displays the distribution of the 1,702 coding points among the sentiment categories.

Table 5: Statistics on Overall Sentiment Coding

Emotional Categories	Reference Points	Percentage (%)
Negative	630	37.0
Mixed	580	34.1
Neutral	366	21.5
Positive	126	7.4
Total	1702	100

The largest percentage (37.0%) was attributed to negative coding, which was followed by mixed coding (34.1%). When combined, these two groups accounted for almost 70% of the total, suggesting that public opinion about the incident was primarily unfavorable and conflicted. Only 7.4% of codes were positive, indicating that players hardly ever gave favorable reviews of the game or its producers. 21.5% of the conversations were classified as neutral, meaning that they included technical analysis or objective factual assertions devoid of any overtly sentimental undertones.

IV. Building an Agenda Network

According to agenda-setting theory, a network's structural features and agenda-setting efficacy are systematically related. Previous studies show that different indicators have varying degrees of association with agenda-setting.

A measure of the overall connectivity between issue nodes in an agenda network is called graph density; the higher the density, the more the public integrates different sub-issues into a single cognitive framework, and the stronger the correlation with agenda-setting effects. Graph density undergoes structural modifications when officially available agenda information is effectively integrated into the public network. The presence of distinguishable subgroups within the network is reflected in its modularity. The modularity value increases dramatically when there is problem fragmentation in the public agenda; hence, this measure has a strong correlation with the phenomenon of issue fragmentation in agenda management. The degree of local clustering within the agenda network is indicated by the average clustering coefficient; a high clustering coefficient suggests that public discussions have produced many close-knit issue clusters, which is in line with the cognitive structuring process outlined in agenda-setting theory. The average weight can show variations in the severity of a crisis as well as shifts in agenda noise because it represents the frequency of issue co-occurrence and the level of conversation. The effectiveness of information transmission across problems is measured by both average path length and network diameter; the shorter the distance, the more quickly information travels throughout the agenda network.

We will perform a step-by-step study of the agenda evolution process around the "covert amendment" incident using the node composition and network metric data from the five stages mentioned above. Based on this, we will next assess how the two government public relations approaches differ in terms of agenda-setting efficacy.

(1) Phase One: Outbreak of the Crisis

The public defined the core of the crisis as a procedural violation. We will perform a step-by-step study of the agenda evolution process around the "covert amendment" incident using the node composition and network metric data from the five stages mentioned above. Based on this, we will next assess how the two government public relations approaches differ in terms of agenda-setting efficacy. —" changes made without an announcement"—rather than the content of the changes themselves, according to the network of high-frequency keywords centered on "announcement" and "change," with a high co-occurrence rate between the two. The fact that "suggestions" and "official" appear together suggests that the public was still negotiating at this point. The public's agenda was concentrated within the main framework of procedural justice; the modularity was 0, indicating no discernible subgroup differentiation; and the network density was 0.653, the lowest of the five stages, suggesting that the various sub-issues were still in the process of formation.

(2) Phase Two: Initial Response

The term "announcement," which was crucial to the public's initial agenda, completely disappeared during this phase, to be replaced by the officially introduced terms "apology" and "compensation." The term "suggestion,"

which indicated a willingness to negotiate, also disappeared, to be replaced by descriptive terms like “problem” and “adjustment.” The graph density increased from 0.653 to 0.814, suggesting that discussions did not stop after the authorities entered the discourse, instead becoming more concerned with whether the official response was sufficient. One of the highest values among the five phases, modularity increased significantly from 0 to 0.066, indicating the emergence of minor indicators of issue fragmentation. In comparison to the first phase, the weighted degree dramatically increased, suggesting that public opinion was still becoming more intense. In conclusion, even though the authorities substituted “apologies” and “compensation” for the public’s demands for “announcements” and “changes,” the disappearance of these demands suggests that no meaningful relationship was formed between the two parties, which resulted in a further escalation of public sentiment.

(3) Phase Three: Public Sentiment Spiral Out of Control

Three secondary agendas — the rumor-based “parachute appointment — scheming — team,” the identity politics-based “gender—women—opposition,” and the game quality-based “ecosystem—version—content”—quickly filled the void in the agenda after officials entered a period of silence lasting more than 48 hours. Although official announcements reappeared, they had been pushed to the periphery, and terms like “apology” and “compensation” had completely vanished from official communications. The weighted degree reached 74.5, a relatively high level, indicating that the intensity of the discussion and emotional intensity were intertwined; the graph density reached 0.995, approaching full connectivity, indicating that any change in a single topic could spread throughout the entire network via relatively short paths. As a result, holding parties responsible and voicing one’s position took precedence over the initial objective of getting an official response.

(4) Phase Four: Secondary Response

Terms from the official agenda, such as “boiling water,” “apology,” “remediation,” “update,” “compensation,” and “announcement,” replaced the confrontational terms that dominated the online discourse in Phase Three, such as “gender,” “women,” and “opposition.” The fact that “announcement,” which had vanished in Phase Two and been marginalized in Phase Three, returned to the center of online discourse shows that the public’s demand for “procedural justice” was formally incorporated into the official agenda. Nearing a state of total integration, the modularity reduced from 0.061 to 0.003, the weighted degree dropped from 74.5 to 37.6, and the network density marginally decreased from 0.995 to 0.979. In conclusion, the official agenda has moved from merely expressing opinions to presenting a rational framework, embedding and integrating the previously dispersed public network. The public can follow this logic and experience a cognitive shift from skepticism to acceptance by being presented with a comprehensive chain of reasoning that covers “problems, causes, responsibilities, countermeasures, compensation, and prevention.”

(5) Phase Five: Long-Term Recovery

This phase’s agenda items are distinguished by their cohabitation of renewal and continuity. Certain response-oriented terms like “compensation,” “apology,” and “announcement” have vanished, while agenda items like “team,” “planning,” “recovery,” and “renewal” have mostly been kept. Terms like “expectation” and “trust” also appear for the first time, indicating the emergence of positive, future-oriented emotional vocabulary in the public agenda. The weighted degree increased to 81.6, and the graph density hit 1.000, signifying a completely linked state. However, the public’s “assessment-style discussion” of the government’s pledges to improve the situation was what caused this increase rather than an exacerbation of the problem. However, trust restoration was only partially successful; online controversy continued, and the weighted values of “believe” and “expect” remained lower than those of important nodes like “team” and “planning.”

(6) Analysis of Differences in Agenda-Setting Between the Two Public Relations Campaigns

There are systematic differences in agenda-setting between the first and second public relations campaigns, according to the evolutionary study of the five stages mentioned above. When combined, these distinctions help to explain why the second effort was comparatively effective while the first failed.

Phase Two used a substitution method, substituting “apology” for “announcement” and “compensation” for “modifications.” Nevertheless, the new framework’s explanatory power was inferior to that of the previous one. Phase Four used an incorporation method, broadening the framework while honoring the public’s preexisting cognitive structures, changing the meaning of “team” by dispelling rumors, and presenting the “announcement” within a larger context.

Regarding the verifiability of agenda items, every item in Phase Two was a promise that could not be instantly validated because it was stated in the future tense. The elements in Phase Four, on the other hand, were accomplished acts: the problem had been resolved, and two emergency updates had already been released. These actions were all represented in the present perfect tense and could be independently checked. Agenda embedding benefits more from verifiable, executed activities than from unverifiable promises.

In Phase Four, the graph density dropped from 0.995 to 0.979, the weighted degree fell from 74.5 to 37.6, and the modularity dropped from 0.061 to 0.003 after the introduction of “boiling water,” apologies, fixes, and compensation. From the standpoint of network metrics, the graph density increased from 0.653 to 0.814, indicating that the official agenda had not been embedded in the public network. This suggests that the official agenda has been incorporated into the disjointed public network. When assessing the efficacy of crisis response, the direction of changes in graph density can be used as a guide. The agenda embedding has not produced the desired results if graph density keeps increasing after the answer; if graph density slightly reduces and the weighted degree decreases, then the public has accepted the agenda.

From an agenda management standpoint, the public agenda management model completes the transition from negotiation to confrontation and subsequently from confrontation to compliance between Stages 1 and 5. Stage 1 is an example of a negotiation paradigm; the door to negotiation was closed when the response in Stage 2 failed. The public returned to a compliance model in Stage 4 after the principal planner’s handwritten letter, but the opposition and disagreements in Stage 3 indicated a trend toward a complete transition to a confrontational model. This trajectory demonstrates the trends in crisis agenda management: the negotiating model depends on officials’ genuine reactions to be viable. The public is more likely to enter a confrontational mode if the negotiation window is closed in a superficial way; on the other hand, the transition from confrontation to compliance necessitates a greater expense than that incurred at the beginning of negotiations in order to accomplish the reconstruction of the agenda framework.

(7) Chi-Square Test

This study uses mathematical and statistical techniques to perform a chi-square test on the changes in sentiment in player comments caused by the two public relations interventions in order to scientifically confirm the efficacy of various official public relations strategies in reshaping the game community’s network agenda.

Independent Variable: The official’s initial response and the ensuing period of silence and loss of control make up the first round of public relations, which is treated as a single phase. The lead designer’s statement and the recuperation period after corrective measures are put in place make up the second round of public relations, which is treated as a separate phase.

Dependent Variable: Negative and non-negative remarks are the two mutually exclusive groups into which the emotional characteristics of player comments are reduced.

Table 6 Chi-Square Test Results

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	29.337 ^a	1	<0.001		
Continuity Correction ^b	27.729	1	<0.001		
Likelihood Ratio	28.570	1	<0.001		
Fisher’s Exact Test				<0.001	<0.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	29.210	1	<0.001		

a. The expected count for 0 cells (0.0%) is less than 5; the minimum expected count is 24.02.

b. Calculations are performed only for 2×2 tables.

The results show that the data match the requirements for the Pearson chi-square test and exhibit remarkable robustness because the percentage of cells with predicted counts less than 5 is 0.0%. With degrees of freedom $df = 1$ and an asymptotic significance level (two-tailed) of $p < 0.001$, the experiment ultimately produced a Pearson chi-square value of $\chi^2 = 29.337$ (continuity-corrected value $\chi^2 = 27.729$). The research hypothesis is accepted, and the null hypothesis is rejected since the p-value is significantly below the academic significance threshold of 0.05.

Consequently, there was an extremely pronounced structural shift in the emotional network agenda of the player community between the first and second PR phases, resulting in an emotional reversal effect in community sentiment.

A persistent information fog among the user community resulted from the official apology statement’s avoidance of the fundamental problems and inadequate attention to procedural justice and fundamental technological interests during the first PR phase [19]. The “attribute bundling” method of online agenda-setting was spontaneously activated by the public in a high-stakes, high-ambiguity public opinion environment [11]. Players instinctively connected the pain point of unexpected, covert changes to other behaviors that had developed naturally within the community, such as team overhauls and the abrupt hiring of leaders, through protracted, disjointed conversations that were exacerbated by algorithmic recommendations. However, these symbolic associations were infinitely magnified in the minds of netizens in the absence of convincing official facts to refute this, creating a closed loop of conspiracy theories alleging intentional official deception that

allowed negative emotional nodes to dominate the early community's online agenda. The lengthy handwritten letter that lead designer "Kai Shui" released during the second round of public relations turned out to be a very important turning point for favorable outcomes [20]. It departed from the icy, impersonal tone of the original PR statement by bringing genuine gestures into the public conversation, including admitting the version merge blunder and providing significant cash compensation. This letter successfully attracted players' attention within the framework of third-level agenda-setting due to its high degree of sincerity and transparency. It also caused a shift in public sentiment toward rationality and understanding by realigning the public's mental semantic map around neutral and reasonable nodes like "the lead designer heeded advice" [21].

VI. Research Conclusions

According to the study, a brand crisis in digital social media is mainly caused by the interconnection of negative attribute nodes in the public's cognitive network. The public does not reside in a cognitive vacuum during the early public relations phase of a crisis—when official information is inadequate, and the information environment is very ambiguous—but instead naturally associates characteristics with the problem. Influenced by protracted, disjointed conversations in social circles and algorithmic suggestions, audiences—based on their personal interests—often associate surface-level technical errors with underlying subjective malice. The public agenda quickly changes from "addressing the issue at hand" to "factional confrontation" [23] once such symbolic connections are continuously reinforced in netizens' minds without factual intervention [22]. This eventually results in a high-density, low-modularity conspiracy theory cognitive network that becomes ingrained in participants' emotions and eventually takes over the community.

The disparities in public opinion between the two PR campaigns show that the core of crisis PR is an organization's use of "agenda pruning" and structural reorganization [25] of the public's already established cognitive networks by adding completely new information nodes [24]. The official message of "apology and modest compensation" constituted, from an academic standpoint, a rhetorical node in the future tense that could not be immediately verified; its symbolic appeal was very weak, and it failed to break the public's preexisting connections to conspiracy theories, which is why the first round of public relations efforts failed. Because the main strategist's long letter effectively presented extremely significant public opinion leaders and high-value social currency, the second round of public relations was successful in causing a mathematical reversal of sentiment at the SPSS level. In order to achieve an overall positive shift in the online agenda map, such highly transparent, instantly verifiable, and strong positive nodes can forcefully monopolize the audience's attention, break the initial chain of malicious causality, and cause the semantic map to rearrange itself around "sincere accountability."

However, this does not guarantee that the public conversation will revert to its pre-crisis form, even if a crisis PR plan is successful in reversing the situation. Even though the second round of PR efforts neutralized confrontational negative terminology and returned the public to a compliant mode, the breakdown of the psychological contract between stakeholders and the brand has objectively created structural cognitive disparities within a highly connected network. The online agenda will show a prolonged "scar effect" following a severe trust crisis in highly engaged communities. Rebuilding trust is a long-term and progressive process after a brand's emotional capital has been seriously harmed; therefore, the restorative impacts of online agenda-setting are restricted and phased.

V. Research Implications

(1) Pre-Crisis Phase

Game companies should set up a more thorough issue early-warning system around critical time periods, taking into account the overall trajectory of this crisis. Brands need to keep an eye on high-frequency terms, co-occurring terms, and emotional keywords in the player community, closely monitoring whether product change-related topics co-occur with negative evaluative terms like "deception," "evasion," "betrayal," and "distrust." They also need to spot early indicators of rumor-based, confrontational, and attribution-based issues, such as whether terms like "sudden changes," "overhaul," "source code," and "gender conflict" have emerged as new topics of conversation. Issue-based early warning systems provide a more accurate picture of the actual course of a crisis than merely counting the number of discussions.

From the standpoint of crisis management, early warning is important since it gives time for a subsequent response rather than merely identifying negative attitudes. In order to stop players from creating their own explanatory narratives based on insufficient information, a brand should take action through subsequent announcements, updates, technical explanations, and community engagement when it recognizes an early correlation between user dissatisfaction with particular products and skepticism toward the team. Therefore, from the standpoint of online agenda-setting, the emphasis of crisis prevention for gaming brands should change from "suppressing the volume of public sentiment" to "managing issue relationships." The risk of crisis spread can only be effectively decreased by taking action before negative topics have established a stable

cognitive network.

(2) The Initial Stage of a Crisis

Public opinion will be shaped by official reactions throughout the early phases of a crisis. The first round of responses from game brands should go beyond just making a statement or providing compensation; instead, they should pinpoint the main concerns that players are currently facing and make sure that the response's content attempts to address these issues as much as possible. A misalignment will occur if the official response is not in line with the participants' concerns, and the PR campaign itself can even become a new source of conflict.

Players' primary grievances in this instance included queries like "Why were adjustments implemented without an announcement?" and "What components were covertly changed?" The official's first response admitted communication flaws and suggested actions like reversing some changes, creating a custom action feature, and paying Prism Sphere compensation, but it didn't go into great detail about fundamental problems like version bugs, secret changes without notice, and the reasons for the changes. Additionally, the first response was criticized for ignoring important problems and providing only partial solutions, which did not successfully calm public opinion and instead strengthened players' impression that the developers were adopting a superficial strategy.

When it comes to particular response tactics, the developers ought to start by addressing the most urgent issues brought up by players, followed by an explanation of the problems' root causes, a clarification of accountability, and an outline of potential fixes. Vague phrases like "poor user experience" or "insufficient communication" cannot adequately address sensitive subjects like version updates, character animations, and numerical mechanics; instead, the developers should, whenever feasible, provide a list of changes, a fix plan, and a timeline. Even if the initial answer might not immediately address every problem, it might give gamers the idea that the developers are aware of the main points of contention, which can stop unfavorable opinions from spreading.

(3) Crisis Escalation Phase

At this point, the brand can't just reiterate its original reaction or wait for public opinion to naturally decline. In order to prevent factual rumors from replacing the official explanation, it is more effective to first distinguish between various secondary issues: for product issues, simultaneously announce the scope and timeline of fixes; for community issues, specific corrective actions should be taken; these should not be treated as regular disputes among players; and for factual rumors, provide prompt and clear clarifications.

Secondary issues are dangerous from the standpoint of online agenda-setting because they can connect what was initially a minor product controversy into a larger narrative: "lack of transparency from the official side—problems with the development team—deteriorating game quality—community spiraling out of control." Instead of stifling all negative voices, brand PR should break down these distinct issues, which are not exactly the same, and address and handle them separately. Then and only then will we be able to keep public opinion from further deteriorating into a more complicated crisis of confidence and make space for a later, more methodical response.

(4) Crisis Response and Recovery Phase

In essence, a follow-up PR campaign is an agenda restructuring. The player community's focus has changed as a result of the lead designer's lengthy letter, which gradually changed the narrative from "secret changes—evasive responses—a collapse in game quality due to a major team shake-up" to "the head of the company stepping forward—acknowledging the problems—explaining the causes—offering additional compensation." As a result, a game company shouldn't limit its response to a crisis to token actions like compensation and an apology. Rather, it should actively change the way public discourse is structured by outlining who is responsible, providing a list of remedial measures, outlining the factual causes, and making follow-up promises.

The brand's PR efforts shouldn't end with just calming public opinion when the crisis response has had some success. Long-term version updates and daily operations help gaming brands gradually gain players' trust, but a single instance of poor management may potentially rekindle that trust. After a second response, the recuperation phase is also critical. Players will bring up previous complaints the next time a problem occurs in a new edition if the developers offer one-time, significant compensation for the controversy but neglect to take further corrective action.

In general, the goal of the crisis recovery phase should be to gradually restore players' fundamental expectations of the brand by consistent, verifiable behaviors rather than creating fresh PR talking points. The negative narrative resulting from the original crisis won't be fully resolved until players witness the makers continuously keeping their commitments in later upgrades.

Due to the fact that all sample data came from the particular social media site Sina Weibo, this study still has certain limitations. The public opinion ecosystem within online gaming communities is marked by significant fragmentation and cross-platform disconnects, despite Weibo's high public opinion impact and high level of public discussion—making it suitable for capturing the irrational cascades in the early stages of a crisis. This paper's main data-gathering period was May 21 – 27, 2026, when public opinion flared and the second wave of responses sharply conflicted. Will changes in new game versions eventually revive the psychological contract that players created? Will there be indications of regression in the network structure following a favorable transition? Time-series analysis or longitudinal tracking investigations are needed to further explore these dynamic evolutionary pathways.

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