Political Satire and Collective Reproduction: The Power of Political Nicknames in Hong Kong

Ying-ho Kwong, *Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong*

ABSTRACT

The existing literature on political satire has focused primarily on the effects on audiences and their responses to satirical messages, neglecting the exploration of the implications of these effects. This article takes a reproduction perspective and argues that audiences regenerate and spread satirical messages to continuously denounce a political figure. By examining the circulation of "689," the humorous nickname of former chief executive C. Y. Leung in Hong Kong, this article introduces a new conceptual framework called the "collective reproduction" process, which includes three processes: (1) production, (2) circulation, and (3) reproduction. This framework is used to analyze how the opposition effectively utilized this nickname to criticize the leader throughout his term of office. Theoretical contributions include providing political satire with an ongoing approach that facilitates its circulation. Empirically, the case of Hong Kong enriches the understanding of opposition movements within the context of political satire.

Political satire serves as a means of conveying criticism against political figures, policy decisions, or the established political system through the use of humorous signs (Spicer 2011; Tesnohlidkova 2021). It functions as a "medium of value" that connects supporters with similar political values in the political sphere (Lewis 2023). Current discussions focus predominantly

Contact Ying-ho Kwong at the Department of Social Science, M522, Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, Siu Lek Yuen, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong (yhkwong@hsu.edu.hk).

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on the linear perspective of how audiences receive and respond to satirical messages. However, the implications of these responses have not been thoroughly explored. As argued by Yang and Jiang (2015), political satire has the potential to invigorate the participatory spirit of citizens and encourage mass reproduction. This article adopts a collective reproduction approach, encompassing three processes: (1) production, (2) circulation, and (3) reproduction, to examine the collective re-creation of political satire and provide researchers with new theoretical and empirical insights. The research question addressed in this article is how the opposition camp continuously utilizes political satire to denounce a political figure. The case of Hong Kong is selected to offer theoretical insights on political memes from a supporters' reproduction perspective.

Taking the governance era of the third chief executive, C. Y. Leung, in Hong Kong (July 2012–June 2017) as a case study, this article argues that the opposition camp regenerated and integrated satirical messages into daily use to sustainably denounce their leader. Throughout his administration, the opposition created and circulated the political nickname 689 to question the legitimacy of C. Y. Leung. This nickname was used to denounce C. Y. Leung, who received only 689 votes out of 1,200 in a "small-circle" election but still became the chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). The sign of 689 was continuously developed and redeveloped by the opposition camp, linking supporters for political participation through its image circulation on social media, real-life protests, and product design. This article adopts a collective reproduction perspective to analyze the creation and circulation of this political sign.

Political Satire in the Theoretical Context: From a Linear to Ongoing Perspective

Political satire has emerged as a significant research topic in the field of political communication, focusing on how political signs are used to deliver humorous criticism against the hegemony, political status quo, opponents, or specific subjects (Agha 2003; Gray et al. 2009). While political signs refer to the "products" used to denounce targets, political satire goes beyond this by explaining the process of using these signs with humorous meaning for circulation (Kulkarni 2017). The purposes of political satire can be summarized as exposing criticisms, using humor and memes to persuade and motivate audiences, and encouraging political participation (Nabi et al. 2007; Cao and Brewer 2008). Political satire serves as a communicative method to deliver persuasive criticisms against opponents in a "soft" manner, aiming to attract attention and foster civic engagement (Jones 2009).

However, the existing literature on political satire primarily adopts a linear perspective, focusing on the effects on audiences and their responses to satirical messages. The studies of *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart and *The Colbert Report* are some classic examples. Researchers adopted quantitative methods, mainly in experiments and surveys, to test the response of audiences in these two programs (e.g., effects of security levels and message persuasiveness results [LaMarre et al. 2014], perceptions of the role of money in politics [Hardy et al. 2011], effects of attentiveness and knowledge [Xenos and Becker 2009], effects of age and education [Cao 2008], level of political participation [Cao and Brewer 2008], support for political institutions and leaders [Baumgartner and Morris 2006], etc.). This linear perspective follows a three-phase process: (1) production (e.g., messages from *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*), (2) message delivery (e.g., experiments and surveys), and (3) response (e.g., response of audiences). The effects on audiences are the main focus. Figure 1 summarizes the approach of a linear perspective.

This linear perspective neglects the rise of social media and the circulation of satirical content. The emergence of social media and user-generated websites has provided individuals with more channels and platforms in which to engage in politics, resulting in political satire being replaced by other forms of engagement (Luqui 2017). As argued by Yang and Jiang (2015), the significance of online political satire goes beyond content and becomes a participatory activity involving multiple people interacting through digital networks. Social media enables people to read and share satirical content and, more importantly, encourages more "user-generated" practices of re-creating distinct content in the political sign (Shifman 2014). In other words, audiences have the potential to become "reproducers" reacting and circulating political signs that can have lasting effects on society. As concluded by Shao (2009), users reproduce their own content for self-expression and self-actualization, leading to the construction of collective identity. This identity building motivates more audiences to become supporters.

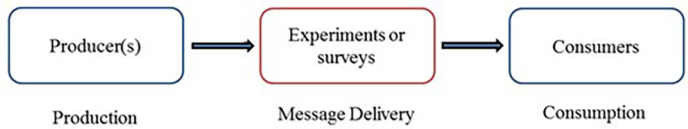

Figure 1. Political satire in a linear perspective. Source: Author's analysis.

Although the trend of reproduction has been recognized, a systemic theoretical framework is seldom explored. It is admitted that the concept of reproduction is not totally new (e.g., Spitulnik 1997; Rossolatos 2015). One of the pioneering frameworks was proposed by Agha (2011), who adopts the concept of "mediatization" and argues that communication is not a linear model from mediation to circulation (e.g., media talk in the article). Indeed, communication is an ongoing process that refers to the audience responding to the signs and making new meanings. This article builds on Agha's framework and proposes a new framework that consists of three processes: (1) production, (2) message delivery and (3) reproduction. First, production involves the creation of satire. With the use of social media, production is not limited to mainstream media, politicians, and commentators; anonymous Internet users can also be creators (Yang and Jiang 2015).

The second process is message delivery, which focuses on how satirical messages circulate to the public through mainstream and social media. Many studies have found that the "most attentive" sign is to circulate negative views and criticisms of the selected opponents that facilitate message delivery (Moody-Ramirez and Church 2019). When users identify the most "circulative" satire, this facilitates networked circulation and interaction (Rahimi 2015).

Reproduction is the third process. When audiences receive satirical messages, some of them may recognize political problems and become motivated to reproduce and circulate satirical messages (Shao 2009). In other words, reproduction involves a self-motivated process by ordinary audiences to re-create satirical messages. This bottom-up process of collective reproduction attracts new supporters and sustains dissatisfaction with the authorities (Parsloe and Holton 2018). In this process, audiences are no longer purely "recipients" for reading satirical messages but become "reproducers" for facilitating circulation. This is an ongoing model to attract new supporters to be reproducers for re-creation that is also known as "collective reproduction." Shifman (2014) summarizes that "operative signs" have two functions: (1) modes of hypersignification (the code becomes the focus of attention): the most direct way is to make use of this sign to generate new forms, meanings, and combinations for online circulation; and (2) prospective meme (the sign is perceived as the raw material for further circulation): supporters involve in transferring online memes into real-life political participation (e.g., Veg 2016). This article adopts this framework to analyze the reproduction in (1) protests, (2) images, and (3) product designs.

In summary, political satire should be examined from an ongoing rather than a linear perspective, considering its lasting effects on audiences (Yang and Jiang 2015). From this perspective, this article adopts an ongoing approach to analyze

political satire through the case of Hong Kong. The concept of "collective reproduction" emphasizes the bottom-up process in which audiences become supporters and extend their influence by re-creating political signs. Figure 2 summarizes this alternative approach. It is proposed that political satire can be analyzed in three processes: (1) production (politicians, commentaries, or Internet users make use of a political sign and create a satirical message), (2) message delivery (both online and traditional media circulate the message throughout society), and (3) reproduction (audiences receive and become supporters to regenerate other forms for further circulation and exposure). After that, the ongoing process goes from supporters who make use of political signs to create new forms for further circulation. This figure is also adopted as the theoretical framework of this article.

Method

Previous studies have predominantly utilized quantitative methodologies to examine the responses of viewers, but these approaches do not capture the extent to which audiences generate and circulate satirical messages in their daily lives. In this study, qualitative explanations are primarily employed to investigate the proposed framework (fig. 2). Content analysis and interviews serve as the key research methods. The timeframe of analysis spans from the creation of the nickname 689 on December 11, 2012, to the end of C. Y. Leung's tenure as chief executive on June 30, 2017.

Content analysis is employed to examine media coverage of political satire (Young 2013). Specifically, this method allows for an exploration of how frequently the mainstream media utilized the political sign and how often the nickname appeared in online forum websites. Data on media coverage was primarily gathered from the Wisenews search engine, which focuses on mainstream Chinese newspapers in Hong Kong. Data on social media coverage was obtained from the Wiselive search engine, which records activities on social media platforms, including online forums. This study analyzed 10 pay-to-read

Figure 2. Political satire in an ongoing perspective. Source: Author's analysis.

newspapers, including one prodemocracy newspaper, two neutral newspapers, and seven pro-Beijing newspapers, as well as three online forums. The keyword 689 was inputted into the search engines to assess trends and frequency. Only political news articles related to Hong Kong politics were included, resulting in an examination of 3,349 articles in all. I further analyzed media coverage based on political stances.

Additionally, 18 semistructured interviews were conducted with prodemocracy supporters, ranging from activists to participants, in order to gain insights into the implications of this political satire (see the list of interviewees in table A1 in the appendix). Prodemocracy supporters were selected as key interviewees to understand how they interpret the political sign, how they utilize it in their campaigns, and how they evaluate its effects. Snowball sampling was employed to invite interviewees to suggest other potential subjects for further study, facilitating the inclusion of stakeholders with diverse backgrounds (Noy 2008).

The Politics of Hong Kong

Since the transfer of sovereignty from the British to the Chinese government in 1997, the HKSAR has maintained a nondemocratic regime with limited electoral rights and civil liberties (Kwong and Wong 2017; Kwong 2018). The chief executive holds significant political power within the HKSAR political system, and the composition of the Chief Executive Election Committee has important implications for the distribution of this power. The committee is comprised of elites from the business, professional, social service, and political sectors, in line with the principle of "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong." In the 2017 election, the committee consisted of 1,200 elites, and according to the Basic Law Annex 1, any candidate for the position of chief executive must receive at least one-eighth of the nominations from committee members in order to run for election. In May 2020, electoral reforms increased the size of the committee to 1,500 members from the business, professional, social service, political, and China-affiliated sectors. Only members of the Chief Executive Election Committee have the power to nominate and vote for candidates for the position of chief executive. This institutional design allows the Chinese government to exert strict control over the composition of the committee, ensuring a majority of pro-China members.

Since 1997, Tung Chee-hwa and Donald Tsang were elected uncontested in 2002 and 2005, respectively, and competition for the position of chief executive began in 2007. In 2007, Donald Tsang received 649 votes (82.3 percent) out of 800; in 2012, Leung Chun-ying (C. Y. Leung) won 689 votes (60.9 percent) out of 1,200; and in 2017, Carrie Lam received 777 votes (65.5 percent) out of

1,200 and became the chief executive. For the current term, John Lee won 1,416 votes (99.16 percent) out of 1,500 in May 2022, with no competitors under the new electoral reform. The opposition has long criticized this chief executive election system as a "small-circle" election, as only a select few privileged individuals are able to participate (Wong and Kwong 2020). This article focuses specifically on the political satire that took place during the administration of C. Y. Leung from July 2012 to June 2017.

Production: The Creation of the Political Nickname 689

In the context of Hong Kong, the use of political nicknames emerged as a prominent method for the opposition to deliver satirical messages about C. Y. Leung. After assuming the position of HKSAR chief executive in July 2012, C. Y. Leung faced a series of governance crises. In response, the opposition camp sought to strengthen their resistance and directly criticize the authorities. Wong Yuk-man, a legislator at the time and also a veteran journalist and former professor, played a pivotal role in advocating for radical forms of resistance, including filibusters and physical clashes in the Legislative Council. Drawing on his expertise in journalism and political satire, Wong created a political nickname to mock C. Y. Leung. This nickname was first revealed during a formal meeting of the Legislative Council on December 10, 2012, when Wong delivered a speech criticizing Leung as follows:

> I will only call him "689" because he only received 689 votes in a "small-circle" chief executive election. . . . You are a liar, ignoble in character and completely devoid of integrity. . . . Here is my question. I ask you how many strokes there are in the traditional Chinese character *shame*? [This refers to whether one has any sense of shame.] (Legislative Council 2012; my translation)

This speech caught the public's attention, as it was unexpected for a legislator to use humor and a nickname to denounce the head of the HKSAR in a formal and open meeting. The speech quickly spread on both social and traditional media platforms. On Wong's official YouTube channel alone, the video of the speech garnered over 275,000 views, a significant number for a political speech. Over the course of five years, 689 became a widely recognized nickname to refer to C. Y. Leung and the undemocratic system. Wong frequently mentioned this term in his speeches during Legislative Council meetings to remind the public and draw attention to the underlying message. On October 22, 2015, during C. Y. Leung's last two question-and-answer sessions in the Legislative Council,

Wong Yuk-man summarized the circulations for around three years and once again criticized the chief executive:

> Three years ago, I used the term "689" and strongly condemned this man for being a despicable liar who had no credibility and was not qualified to govern Hong Kong. . . . After three years, his actions have clearly proven that my comments were objective and fair. . . . God have pity on us! How unfortunate we are to have a "betrayer" of Hong Kong called "689." . . . Since I am a democratically elected legislator and many voters have pressured me, they want me to ask you, "When are you going to die?" (Legislative Council 2015; my translation)

Message Delivery: Spread of 689 by Opposition Media

The next aspect to consider is the spread of the term 689 through the media. In Hong Kong, mainstream media can generally be divided into two political spectrums: pro-Beijing and prodemocracy. Similar to many nondemocratic regimes, the pro-Beijing media in Hong Kong have greater resources, and the Chinese government has effectively brought almost all mainstream media outlets into a united front (Fong 2017). On the other hand, prodemocracy media outlets are limited in number and often face resource constraints. To expand their influence, prodemocracy media often employ satirical messages to criticize the authorities. Over the past few years, 689 has become a common term used by the opposition to communicate with the public and denounce C. Y. Leung's performance.

Apple Daily, the only prodemocracy newspaper (ranked 12 by Alexa in Hong Kong on July 1, 2017), extensively utilized this form of satire, with 2,287 mentions of 689 in their news reports from December 11, 2021, to June 30, 2017. Two relatively neutral newspapers also featured reports and commentaries mentioning this nickname (824), while the pro-Beijing newspapers had the fewest mentions (238). This clearly demonstrates that 689 was a recurring term in the political narrative of prodemocracy media. They frequently used this term as a substitute for C. Y. Leung's full name to capture people's attention and remind the public that the chief executive was elected with only 689 votes.

During interviews, all the participants acknowledged the significance of mainstream media in terms of reach and circulation. With the spread of opposition media, the general population in Hong Kong, regardless of their political affiliations, had heard of and become familiar with 689. The consensus among the interviewees was that mainstream media remained an important channel for conveying opposition messages to supporters and facilitating further circulation.

Political satire such as 689 served to encapsulate an "inherent distrust in the Chief Executive" (interview 13), express "strong demands for democratic reforms" (interview 3), and encourage citizens to "share and circulate the content" (interview 6). This sentiment was reflected in the remarks of an interviewee regarding the role of mainstream media in message delivery:

> While mainstream media, such as *Apple Daily*, may face criticism on online platforms, it is undeniable that they still have a large readership. . . . As a member of the prodemocracy party, I must admit that their influence is the strongest compared to any online platform. The role of *Apple Daily* remains significant in amplifying the voice of the opposition. (Interview 1)

Reproduction: Political Satire from an Ongoing Perspective

One crucial function of political satire is to wait for people to discover, circulate, and engage with it (Yang and Jiang 2015). Political satire covered by the media is recognized as originating from everyday interactions, spreading throughout society and allowing the audience to conceptualize politics in everyday terms (Tsakona and Popa 2011). In the context of this article, collective reproduction refers to how ordinary citizens regenerate and integrate the political nickname to criticize the chief executive. In this regard, political memes can be reproduced by supporters in three ways: through (1) real-life protests, (2) the creation of new images for online circulation, and (3) product design (e.g., Shifman 2014). These three methods reflect how supporters further engage with and participate in politics through the use of 689.

The first indicator is the integration of 689 into political protests. Since the 1980s, Hong Kong people have become increasingly active in pressuring the government for a better quality of life and greater political rights. This wave of civil society activism intensified after 1997, and political protests have become the most common tactic used by the opposition to exert pressure on the government. As a result, some international media and Western researchers have labeled Hong Kong a "city of protest" (Dapiran 2017). In recent years, social movement organizations have intentionally incorporated the nickname of C. Y. Leung into their protest slogans, framing their hatred and dissatisfaction with the chief executive. As one interviewee explained, "'689' has become a symbol of political protests" (interview 13). Table 1 and figure 3 provide further illustrations of this trend.

The second indicator involves the creation of new images for online circulation. Table 2 and figure 4 showcase significant events on platforms like Facebook

Table 1. Major Political Campaigns Adopting the Term 689 by Social Movement Organizations

Date	689 in Protests	Nature of Reproduction
January 2014	Slogans: "Good night, 689!" and "We want universal suffrage for the chief executive"	The Civil Human Rights Front annually organizes the New Year's Day protest. Scholarism, a youth association, co-operated with other student associations to create a slogan and banner with "Good night 689!" and "we want universal suffrage without screening."
September 2014	Banner: "Come out, 689!"	During the Umbrella Movement in September 2014, a big banner with the words "Come out, 689!" (689 in traditional Chinese characters) was posted on the occupying site in Admiralty. The banner included the main character of Pokémon, a popular cartoon, who was throwing a "Poké Ball." This banner referred to "Come out and face the masses, C. Y. Leung!"
July 2016	Slogan: "Final Battle with 689"	In the July 1 Rally of 2016, the Civil Human Rights Front urged Hong Kong people to continue to take part in the street protest against C. Y. Leung and the current election system (fig. 3).
June 2017	Slogan: "From 689 to 777"	More than five prodemocracy parties and labor unions organized a protest against contractual working hours. They criticized the government for delaying the labor protection policies from 689 (C. Y. Leung's term) to "777" (Carrie Lam's term).

Source.—Author's analysis. Data adapted from Wisenews search engine.

where ordinary citizens generate content to condemn the chief executive. Some political signs are intentionally posted to criticize 689 (e.g., "Down with 689 Café") while others (e.g., CY689 and D7689) may reflect supporters coincidentally coming across this term in their daily lives and finding it amusing and worthy of circulation. Consequently, these signs are embedded in unrelated contexts and nonpolitical products. As one interviewee noted, "Anonymous citizens have integrated this satire into their daily lives to continuously express their dissatisfaction" (interview 4).

The third indicator of supporters' reproduction can be seen in "product design." Some opposition parties and retailers have attempted to reprint the political nickname 689 on their products, further facilitating its circulation.

Figure 3. 689 in protest. Protesters used "Final battle with 689! Unite and defend our Hong Kong" as a protest slogan. Source: HK01 (2016).

Table 3 and figure 5 highlight important examples of how this message has been integrated.

Collective Reproduction of 689

In many political contexts, leaders are often denounced with various nicknames by opponents, commentators, and the media. Similarly, opposition politicians and media in Hong Kong have coined numerous nicknames for C. Y. Leung, raising the academic question of which one is more popularly used and why. Bippus (2007) conducted empirical research on audience perceptions of political humor and identified the timing of production and the amusement it generates as two key factors in determining the effectiveness and "high quality" of satire. These factors can also be applied to the case of Hong Kong.

Throughout his administration, C. Y. Leung was denounced by four main nicknames: 689 (referring to the chief executive having received only 689 votes), "Wolf Ying" (cunning wolf), "Lufsig" (cunning wolf and a three-word phrase in Cantonese associated with female genitalia), and "Liar Ying" (a liar). Among these, 689 is the most popular nickname used by both the media and ordinary people. Figure 6 demonstrates the media coverage of these nicknames during C. Y. Leung's term in office, clearly showing that 689 received the most coverage compared to the other three. Additionally, figure 7 reveals the nickname coverage on the three largest online forums in Hong Kong.

The popularity of 689 can be explained by the timing of its production. During the chief executive election of 2012, Henry Tang, the former chief secretary for administration and initially seen as the preferred candidate of the Chinese government, was defeated due to scandals involving illegal structures at his home. Although C. Y. Leung eventually emerged as the victor, he faced challenges in the election debates from both Henry Tang and Albert Ho, a prodemocracy candidate, regarding his alleged mention of deploying antiriot police and using

Table 2. Re-creation of 689 though Online Promotion

Date	Content	Nature of Re-creation
January 2013	CY689	A photo of a car with the license plate "CY689" was posted on the Internet and showed the car was under repair in a garage. "Repair" in Cantonese can be understood as "hospitalized" or "punished" so a car with this plate refers to "C. Y. Leung punished."
January 2015	D7689	A photo posted on the official Facebook page of sportswear company Puma indicated a cat pawing at a runner's t-shirt with the marathon entrant number "D7689" attached to the front. "D7" in Cantonese sounds similar to a vulgar expression (see, e.g., fig. 4).
March 2016	Down 689 cafe	The imaginary and fake eatery, named "Down 689," featured on a Google Map of the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront. "Down 689" refers to calling for the stepping down of C. Y. Leung.

Source.—Author's analysis; Data adapted from Wisenews search engine.

tear gas to handle protests. At that time, there was also a soundbite from Henry Tang criticizing C. Y. Leung as a "liar" that initially shaped people's perception of his integrity. About 10 days before he officially took office, it was revealed that C. Y. Leung had built two unauthorized structures at his luxury houses (*Ming Pao Daily News* 2012). This controversy received significant attention, providing an excellent opportunity for Wong Yuk-man to label Leung as "Mr. 689" in his speech and shift the focus from the illegal structures to Leung's integrity. This political satire successfully captured the attention of both the media and ordinary Hong Kong people, making it memorable and attractive.

The amusement caused by 689 is another factor contributing to its popularity. Effective political satire can reduce the time costs associated with learning about political issues by providing entertainment (Baum 2003) and attract supporters for creative reproduction to extend circulation (Rahimi 2015). As observed from the interviews, the opposition integrated a humorous nickname into their criticisms, linking them to the existing legitimacy problems of the chief executive and the undemocratic political system. During the interviews, most participants acknowledged that this message had a "persuasive effect" on the audience regarding the political challenges they faced. The process of satirical reproduction infused new and creative elements into the original satire, enhancing its

Figure 4. D7689 in Facebook post. Prodemocracy supporters cleverly incorporated the sign "D7689" into a Puma t-shirt, a registered trademark for a supposedly nonpolitical product, on Puma's official Facebook page. As a result, Puma was compelled to issue an official apology for their ill-advised marketing stunt. Source: *Hong Kong Free Press* 2016.

"circulation sustainability" and fueling continuous dissatisfaction with the administration (interviews 11 and 15). One participant explained this phenomenon:

> In my experience, using memes is the easiest way to draw public attention, especially the elderly. . . . Supporters seem motivated to compete with others and create innovative versions of "689" to gain more attention. . . . The power of supporters' self-motivation is long-lasting and circulative. (Interview 6)

During the interviews, most interviewees expressed positive views on circulating the 689 sign to foster collective solidarity among prodemocracy supporters. One participant explained why this meme can stimulate political participation:

> For me, these three numbers provide a lot of room for re-creation. . . . Supporters can easily find this sign in their daily lives or intentionally incorporate it into protests. When supporters find this meme amusing, they discover and regenerate it. . . . This enhances the opportunities for them to join political protests. (Interview 8)

Another interviewee shared observations that this meme facilitates solidarity building within the prodemocracy camp:

Table 3. 689 in Product Regeneration

Date	689 in Products	Nature of Regeneration
January 2014	Toilet paper and towels	The Democratic Party designed and sold toilet paper and towels with C. Y. Leung's image that referred to the use of the face of C. Y. Leung for cleaning (fig. 5).
February 2015	Tees and snapbacks	A Facebook shop with the name D7689 Tee sold black tees printed with the logo "D7689."
December 2016	Free drink	The restaurant Sam Siu Bar + Grill launched number-related promotions where consumers could get a free can of beer by saying "I want the '689' wine" (referring to "Get out, 689!").

Source.—Author's analysis. Data adapted from Wisenews search engine.

> When people use 689 to refer to C. Y. Leung, we already know their political stance. This creates a clear distinction between allies [prodemocracy supporters who use 689] and enemies [progovernment supporters who use "C. Y." or "Mr. Leung"]. (Interview 7)

However, it is important to note that a political sign like 689 is unlikely to have any substantive effect compared with other stronger political factors. This article primarily relies on qualitative methods to examine the mechanisms of satirical production, message delivery, and reproduction. The next step would be to systematically test the correlation between the usage of satire and political participation in a quantitative study, considering the characteristics of "user-generated" content.

Conclusion

This study on the collective reproduction of 689 politics in Hong Kong offers valuable insights into the field of political communication and social movement studies. It challenges the linear perspective traditionally used to analyze audience responses to political satire and highlights the ongoing nature of satire as a means of continuous denouncement and dissatisfaction with political leaders. Internet users are not passive audiences but active reproducers who infuse new meanings into political signs, leading to the creation and circulation of continuous satire.

Political satire is a subject of interest in democratic regimes, where freedom of speech is typically protected, allowing for the existence of satirical shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* in the United States. In nondemocratic regimes, political satire can serve as a potential outlet outside the confines of a restricted public sphere (Shomova 2022). It is noteworthy that political memes emerge even in authoritarian regimes with strict censorship, but content that

Figure 5. 689 in towels. The Democratic Party marketed towels featuring the image of C. Y. Leung, with the intention of "cleaning with 689 faces." Source: RTHK (2015).

criticizes the authorities is usually prohibited (Fang 2020). For instance, in China, the image of Winnie the Pooh was censored due to its humorous resemblance to President Xi Jinping (Gueorguiev and Malesky 2019). The creators of political memes and individuals who share such content may face greater political and legal risks. In hybrid regimes, citizens may have more leeway to employ political satire as a means to express dissatisfaction and mobilize support. By encompassing a broader range of voices, memes possess the potential to challenge and authenticate the state's ideological positions (Miazhevich 2015). Prodemocracy supporters in Hong Kong may use such political satire as 689 to avoid scrutiny. As of now, no individuals have been arrested for creating or sharing the 689 meme on social media or during protests.

This article has potential implications for political communication and social movement studies in the future. First, political satire can be considered an ongoing instead of linear perspective only (e.g., Yang and Jiang 2015). Internet users should no longer be treated as "audiences" whose responses can be assessed; rather, internet users can be considered potential "reproducers" who re-create new meanings of political sign for further circulation. Second, the findings show that the mainstream media remains an important platform for delivering political satire. Many studies of protests have explained that the influence of the mainstream media has declined as the importance of social media has increased. This implies an oppositional stance between "mainstream and online alternative media" (e.g., Boyle and Schmierbach 2009). According to interviews with prodemocracy activists, the coverage in mainstream media is still important. The mainstream media, which is arguably biased, is still capturing a huge number of supporters and potential supporters. This is consistent with the findings of Poell (2020) that social media protest communication reproduces and reinforces the episodic focus of the mainstream media. Mainstream media and social media do not fundamentally challenge each other. Third, this article also enriches the literature of protest linguistics. Political meme makes use of political sign for

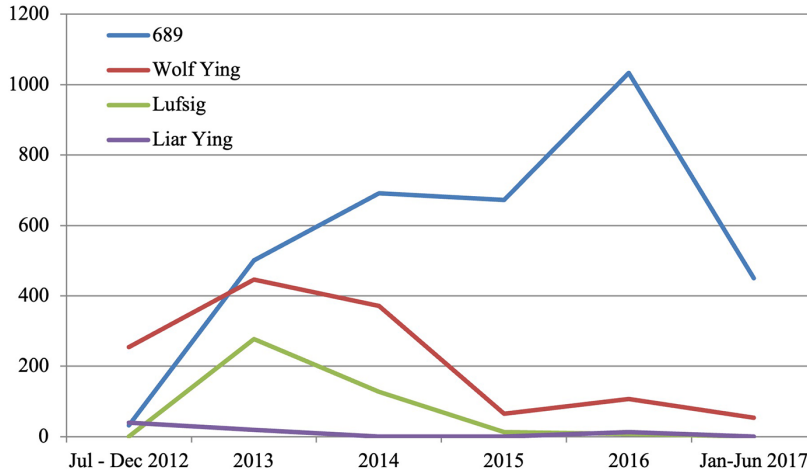

Figure 6. C. Y. Leung's nickname coverage in newspapers from July 2012 to June 2017 (N = 4,855). Source: Author's analysis. Data is based on the analysis of thirteen newspapers in Hong Kong. Of the 4,855 newspaper articles, 3,349 are from "689," 1,044 are from "Wolf Ying," 426 are from "Lufsig," and 36 are from "Liar Ying."

delegitimating a target. Literature has found that a political sign that focuses mostly on the target's (1) bad character, (2) bad behavior, and (3) negative performance can gain usage and circulation among a greater number of supporters (Hansson et al. 2022). The findings in this article show that the simplest political sign (e.g., 689) is favorable for memory and attracts room for reproduction. After C. Y. Leung's administration, prodemocracy supporters continuously used "777," another political sign, to denounce Carrie Lam, the next chief executive, for receiving a small number of votes. Ultimately, such political sign created "reflexivity," turning audiences to supporters and supporters to reproducers (Agha 2006). This implies that a political sign that provides space for regenerating new meanings is more participatory than one that purely shares negativity of politicians.

While this study provides valuable insights into the collective reproduction of political satire in Hong Kong, there are certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the effects of political memes on actual protest participation have not been fully explored. While the general consensus among interviewees suggests that the use of memes fosters collective solidarity, a quantitative study involving both participants and nonparticipants would provide a more comprehensive understanding in the future. Second, the potential for political memes to contribute to further political polarization warrants further investigation. The use of memes often signifies collective solidarity within a specific group while

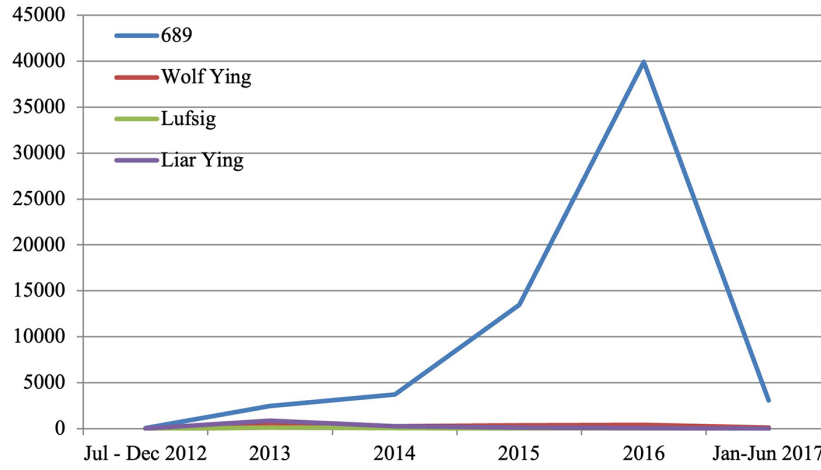

Figure 7. C. Y. Leung's nickname coverage in online forums from July 2012 to June 2017 (N = 66,231). Source: Author's analysis. Data is based on the analysis of discuss.com.hk (ranked 5 by Alexa in Hong Kong on July 1, 2017), hkgolden.com (ranked 25 by Alexa in Hong Kong on July 1, 2017), and uwants.com (ranked 32 by Alexa in Hong Kong on July 1, 2017). Among all coverage, 62,853 posts are from "689," 1,710 are from "Wolf Ying," 265 are from "Lufsig," and 1,403 are from "Liar Ying."

simultaneously creating distance from others who use different signs and narratives. It is important to examine whether the use of political satire led to an increase in conflicts. However, this topic falls beyond the scope of the current study. Third, it is important to note that the data collection and analysis for this study were conducted from January 2017 to June 2019, during a relatively moderate political environment in Hong Kong. Since the implementation of the National Security Law on July 1, 2020, Hong Kong has experienced a perceived "democratic backsliding," with increased suppression (e.g., Lee and Chan 2022; Kwong 2023). The creation and spread of political satire now face higher risks, as the new law deems speeches and actions denouncing government authorities as potentially conspiring to incite hatred against the government. This raises the question of whether the creation and circulation of political memes will remain an important subject for future research.

Appendix

Table A1. List of Interviewees

Number	Interviewee	Date
1	Legislative councilor 1 of Civic Party	July 1, 2018
2	Legislative councilor of a pro-autonomist party	July 1, 2018

Table A1. (*Continued*)

Number	Interviewee	Date
3	Member of Hong Kong Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood	July 1, 2018
4	Legislative councilor of Democratic Party	July 1, 2018
5	Member of Labour Party	July 1, 2018
6	Member of People's People	July 1, 2018
7	Member of a localist group	July 1, 2018
8	Member of Demosistō	July 1, 2018
9	Member of Youngspiration	July 1, 2018
10	Member of a localist group	July 1, 2018
11	Member of Progressive Lawyers Group	July 1, 2018
12	Member of League of Social Democrats	July 2, 2018
13	Member of Civic Passion	July 5, 2018
14	Senior member of Democratic Party	July 13, 2018
15	Member of Civic Party	November 2, 2018
16	Member of the Civil Human Rights Front	June 26, 2019
17	Member of the Civil Human Rights Front	June 26, 2019
18	Legislative Councilor 2 of Civic Party	June 26, 2019

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