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Stakeholders and Stakeseekers' Perceptions of Cultural Violations and International Crisis Communication

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Najwa Nishaa Albaqami entitled "Stakeholders and Stakeseekers' Perceptions of Cultural Violations and International Crisis Communication." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communication and Information.

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Stakeholders and Stakeseekers' Perceptions of Cultural Violations and International
Crisis Communication

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Najwa Nishaa Albaqami
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those who believed in me when I doubted myself. My parents,
siblings, and friends.

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The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the help of my incredible committee, including Dr. Michael Palenchar, Dr. Moonhee Cho, and Dr. Sifan Xu. The support of the College of Communication and Information has been astounding since the beginning of my first semester.

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ABSTRACT

Applying the expectancy violation theory (EVT) to the crisis communication context, this research explores to what extent stakeholders and stakeholders' perceive violations in an international crisis context. Specifically, this study investigated to what extent organizations stakeholders and stakeholders' perceive cultural and expectancy violations in an international crisis. Through a case study that analyzed tweets, web blogs, and *The New York Times* articles, this study identified that the cultural violation theme has two components, including (1) perceived responsibility and harshness of the violation and (2) damage done by the company's transgression. Whereas expectancy violation theme included (1) frequent use of verbal tactics and (2) highlighting the situation with irony. The results reveal that stakeholders and stakeholders' perceptions were affected significantly by the organizations' violation of culture and expectations. Additionally, the findings suggest that stakeholders and stakeholders are uncomfortable toward any negative violation conveyed by organizations, (especially if it is related to culture), which may be disappointing, and therefore generate more negative responses to the organization. This study offers a new perspective on EVT by examining how stakeholders and stakeholders perceive cultural and expectancy violations during an international crisis. It also delves into a new area of research on crisis communication and public relations.

Key words: *International public relations, Expectancy violation theory (EVT), Crisis communication, Cultural violation, Stakeholders, Stakeholders*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Stakeholders and Stakeseekers' Perceptions of Cultural Violations and International Crisis Communication

Part of the continuing trend of organizations operating internationally is globalization, which is increasing economic, social, and political interdependencies among global stakeholders. Consequently, public relations as a discipline is more often charged with managing communication and relationships among organizations and their stakeholders on an international level (Verčič et al., 2015), and recognizing and satisfying publics' expectations of an organization is critical for effective public relations management (e.g., Cho et al., 2021).

Multinational organizations, which utilize international public relations, are uniquely subject to the risk of unintentional assumptions and violations of expectations and other cultures. Corporations face unique challenges while communicating with their publics because of a variety of cultural and societal forces, including violations of cultural norms within those forces, and thus risks and crises have become more international (Coombs et al., 2010; Pinsdorf, 2004; Rogers & Pearce, 2016; Trosborg, 2010). In fact, S. Kim (2014) suggested that all crises can be considered violations of stakeholders' expectations of an organization when applying expectancy theory.

Other studies found that negative violations increase uncertainty that raise ambiguities and discomfort in relationships; hence, unfavorable relational attributions (S. Kim, 2014; White, 1989). Therefore, it is crucial for international public relations researchers and practitioners to better understand the differences among countries and

cultures in order to communicate with and build relationships with their publics, and most importantly their key stakeholders (Alaimo, 2020; Botan, 1992; Wakefield, 2000).

However, there has been a limited amount of research that has explored publics' perceptions of cultural and expectancy violations in an international crisis. The existing public relations research (e.g., Kim & Sung, 2014; Park et al., 2021; Rim et al., 2020) has primarily focused on reputation management and corporate social responsibility. By applying expectancy violation theory (EVT; Burgoon, 1993) to an international crisis context, the purpose of this study is to explore stakeholders and stakeholders' perceptions of cultural and expectancy violations in an international crisis.

Through a case study of a Dolce & Gabbana (D&G) international crisis, this study found the cultural violation theme has two components, including perceived responsibility and harshness of the violation, and damage done by the company's transgression; whereas expectancy violation themes included frequent use of verbal tactics and highlighting the situation with irony. Results reveal that stakeholders and stakeholders' perceptions were affected significantly by the organizations' violation of culture and expectations. Additionally, findings suggest that stakeholders and stakeholders are uncomfortable toward any negative violation done by organizations (especially if it is related to culture), which can be disappointing and generate more negative responses and attitudes toward the organization. This study offers a new perspective on EVT by examining how stakeholders and stakeholders perceive cultural and expectancy violations during an international crisis. It also delves into a new area of research on crisis communication and public relations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

International Public Relations

International public relations has been described as “the practice and study of public relations across international boundaries and cultures” (Curtin & Gaither, 2007, p.19). One of the most widely cited definitions of international public relations is by Wilcox et al. (2001): “the planned or organized effort of a company, institution or government to establish mutually beneficial relations with the publics of other nations” (p. 283). According to Wakefield (2000), public relations practice is considered international when an organization and its publics with which the organization aims to have a relationship are in different countries. He (2003) later described it as “a multinational program that has certain coordination between headquarters and various countries where offices and/or publics are located, and that has potential consequences or results in more than one country” (p. 180).

As stated by Botan (1992), history shows that public relations has flourished worldwide, with more development in the United States and Europe. The internationalization of the practice of public relations has developed as a global profession. This is demonstrated in numerous ways, including the increase in related international and global associations, such as the International Public Relations Associations (PRA), European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA), Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, and the International Communication Consultancy Organization (ICCO).

More traditional concepts of international public relations are challenged, according to Golan (2019), by a globalized market where communication is amplified internationally through various media channels, including social media, and that all contemporary communication among organizations and stakeholders is both domestic and international in nature. “It is difficult to imagine any large organization that only engages domestic stakeholders and whose success is limited to its own national borders. As such, one can argue that the lines between domestic and international public relations have blurred to the point of little difference” (p. 1600). However, according to Botan (1992), U.S. and European public relations practitioners often engage in public relations activity based on their ethnocentric assumptions and understanding of developed countries that limits the efficacy and understanding of other cultures.

International public relations can also be viewed from the lens of intercultural public relations, which is influenced by culture, politics, and socioeconomics among other factors. Multinational corporations are subject to the risk of unintentional assumptions and violations of other cultures. Thus, it is crucial for international public relations practitioners to understand the differences between countries and cultures to more effectively communicate and build relationships with their publics (Alaimo, 2020; Botan, 1992; Wakefield, 2000).

According to Falkheimer and Heide (2006), misunderstanding multicultural and cross-cultural communication is an obstacle to successful communication. Nevertheless, a large number of international organizations devalue the importance of understanding their multicultural stakeholders. Many organizations have failed to cope with complex

and often contradictory demands, and some large organizations suffer major losses and even abandon business (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002).

Additionally, significant cultural differences between international organizations and its publics who wish to communicate in a global context mean that the appropriate experiential knowledge is missing or limited to communicators and intuitive decisions located within a foreign culture can be misdirected (Macnamara, 2004). Alaimo (2020) argued that "different countries and cultures are so different that they require strategies that are specifically designed to respond to local opportunities and challenges" (p. 4). The interaction of international corporations and local culture creates heterogeneity between the two. In other words, "the interjection of global brands into local cultures paradoxically produces heterogeneity as global brands take on a variety of localized meanings" (Thompson & Arsel, 2004, p. 631).

International Crisis Communication

Crisis is "the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2010, p. 19). Crisis communication is a professional and academic field that has significant areas for applying theories and research. Crisis communication scholars (e.g., Avery et al., 2010; Bundy et al., 2017; Manias-Muñoz et al., 2019) found that the theoretical side of crisis communication in the public relations field has had tremendous development.

Sellnow and Seeger (2021) defined crisis communication as the organizations' continuous procedure to create and share meaning among its stakeholders and community

within the ecological context of a crisis to minimize and respond to threats and harm. From a similar orientation, Fearn-Banks (2016) defined crisis communication as "the dialog between the organization and its publics prior to, during, and after the negative occurrence. The dialog details strategies and tactics designed to minimize damage to the image of the organization" (p. 2).

On the other hand, Coombs (2010) argued that the definition should not be limited to minimizing the harm to the organizations, but reducing stakeholders' harm, which includes physical, financial, and psychological, has to be the most significant outcome. Coombs also emphasized that the way publics perceive a situation has ramifications of what even can become a crisis. Meaning that crisis communication needs to draw attention to the perceptual nature of the crisis itself, which is socially constructed. Coombs's crisis definition highlight publics' role and perspective on co-creating the crisis meaning.

Scholars argue that communication processes are not limited to national contexts anymore (e.g., Rogers & Pearce, 2016; Sigala, 2011). Additionally, risk and crisis communication have become increasingly international in the last decade (Coombs et al., 2010; Rogers & Pearce, 2016; Pinsdorf, 2004; Trosborg, 2010). Pinsdorf (2004) argued that all crises are international, referring to the idea that countries have no borders in a functional sense in relation to crises. According to Rogers and Pearce (2016), the idea of international crisis communications has been linked to the globalization continuing process that affects social, political, and economic activities worldwide since international crises transcend cultural borders regarding their causes and consequences.

Similar to Rogers and Pearce, Trosborg (2010) stated that “today everything circulates; people, capital, communication, diseases, without noticing where a nation-state begins or ends” (p. 552).

More recently, international media, web-based and mobile communication infrastructures have increased the crisis spread globally (Rogers & Pearce, 2016; Sigala, 2011). Social media affordances of information and networking are increasingly utilized to disseminate crisis communication and for mobilizing a variety of publics to take-action and assist with crisis management (Sigala, 2011). Valentini and Kruckeberg (2016) argued that because of social media's involvement in everyone's daily lives it is increasingly not only used but also abused in international crisis communication.

Stakeholders and Stakeseekers

Freeman (1984) introduced stakeholder theory by defining stakeholders as "any group or individual that can influence or be affected by the achievement of the organization's goals" (p. 46). Ever since, stakeholder theory has been analyzed and discussed heavily in public relations and international public relations (e.g., Fassin, 2009; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Waters et al., 2009). More specifically, scholars discussed stakeholders in crisis contexts (e.g., Alpaslan et al., 2009; H. Kim & Yang, 2009; McDonald et al., 2010; Stephens et al., 2005; van der Meer et al., 2017). Fassin (2009) refined the definition of stakeholders as "any individual or group that maintains a stake in an organization in the way that a shareholder possesses shares" (p. 116).

Scholars suggest using the stakeholder-relation approach is a valuable framework to study crisis communication even though stakeholder theory faced criticism since it failed covering crisis events (Alpaslan et al., 2009; Van der Meer et al., 2017). According to Van der Meer et al. (2017), adopting the principles of stakeholder theory will encourage organizations to engage in proactive and/or accommodating crisis management behavior more frequently, which helps to explain why stakeholder relationships can assist organizations in preventing crisis escalation and recovering from them more successfully. Alpaslan et al. (2009) suggested that during times of crisis affected stakeholders become more crucial, and the urgency and intensity of their demands for prompt attention are heightened, compared to regular times. Whereas non-stakeholders, who are not directly affected by organizations' actions, are usually treated reactively.

Holzer (2008) defined those who are not affected directly by organizations' actions as external observers or stakeseekers. Fassin (2010) explicated stakeseekers as "the representatives of secondary stakeholders who want to have a voice and who want to achieve the status of stakeholder (p. 41)". Stakeseekers are interested in the unintended outcomes and potential dangers that arise as by-products. Additionally, stakeseekers refer to individuals or entities that aim to introduce new topics or concerns to the forefront of the business agenda (Holzer, 2008).

Heath and Palenchar (2009) made a clear distinction between stakeholders and stakeseekers. Stakeholders are any persons, groups or organizations that retain something of value that can be used as rewards or constraints in exchange for goods, services or

more aligned organizational policies and operating standards. Stakeholders who have stakes that can directly influence the objectives and success of the organization are primary, whereas those whose stakes are less likely to have immediate impact or bear any impact are secondary or indirect.

Stakeseekers want something of value from stakeholders, and these are the stakes held by those stakeholders (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). For example, according to Heath and Palenchar, consumers can be stakeseekers and stakeholders – they want products and services of value. Consumers hold resources, such as purchasing power, that is sought by businesses. How these interests are balanced is the essence of stakeholder exchange. According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders and stakeseekers are “groups and individuals who can affect, or are affected by, the achievement of an organization’s mission” (p. 52).

Taking it a step further, organizations are resource (stake) dependent; stakeholders hold resources which as stakes can be wielded as power-agency, a rationale for collaborative searches for order. Synergistically, stakeholders hold stakes (power resources) which stakeseekers need and want (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). “For these reasons, the functional, strategic, and moral value of public relations depends on its constitutive legitimacy gained by serving community, culture, and society through narrative engagement of identity, identification, and place as institutionalized stakeholder/stakeseekers tensions” (Heath, 2022, p. 8).

The Linkages Between Culture and Crisis

Culture

Falkheimer and Heide (2006) stated that the concept of culture had been discussed heavily among scholars as early as the mid-20th-century. According to Spencer-Oatey (2012), by the year 1952 anthropologists Kluckhohn & Kroeber had reviewed a list of 164 different definitions of culture; each definition draws attention to certain characteristics and approaches. Hofstede (1994) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another” (p. 1). Even though culture has been under intense discussion for a long time and has several definitions and approaches scholars have not come to a consensus on a single definition (Falkheimer & Heide, 2006).

Wilkins (1983) emphasized the importance of culture as a significant variable that influences the way people see the world unconsciously. Culture also affects publics' acceptance of different behavior (Chang et al., 2011). However, this view of the world can be changed or influenced by new environments where publics adjust their traditions, morals and behavioral patterns based on adaptation to the environment's demands (Huff et al., 2021). In other words, when shifting to a new cultural environment with unfamiliar learned behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, values, and ideals people should adapt and adjust to the new cultural demands accordingly (Berry, 1997).

From an organizational perspective, “culture imposes a worldview on the organization” (Sriramesh & Takasaki, 1999, p. 340). Studies have shown that culture has a great influence on international organizations and public relations processes and activities (e.g., Sriramesh, 2006; Sriramesh & Takasaki, 1999; Sriramesh et al., 1999). Additionally, some scholars see culture as an out force that influences managers' and

workers' practices and attitudes (e.g., Kim, 2003; Sriramesh et al., 1999). Culture has strong connections with organizations, communications, and public relations; hence, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) suggested that public relations practitioners must understand stakeholders' culture in all dimensions. In an international context, some public relations campaigns could fail because of cultural differences. Zaharna (2001) suggested that "practitioners must overcome in order to effectively engage the client and communicate with diverse audiences" (p. 139).

Cross-Culture Crisis

Sriramesh (1992) found that public relations is linked to society's cultural idiosyncrasies. Social culture and traditions are one of the six major environmental variables that affect the growth and development of public relations (Molleda & Kochhar, 2019). That makes international market perceived as an opportunity and challenge at the same time for international corporations.

Since cultural and societal differences impact the communication between multicultural organizations and the publics in the host nations (Taylor, 2000), corporations may have challenges in which way organizations communicate with their publics depending on a variety of cultural and societal forces. According to Alaimo (2020), "if your public relations strategies, tactics, and messages and your workplace behavior are not adapted for the cultures in which you work, you are almost certain to fail" (p. 24). Additionally, understanding the culture where the organizations work is a core concept of international public relations. Fatima Oliveira (2013) found that public relations practitioners were not ready to manage multicultural crises; neither they used

culturally sensitive crisis strategies frequently even though practitioners believed that culture is an important element while managing crises.

Stakeholders' perspective and response toward a situation is influenced by their culture, which adds a new challenge for international corporations to deal with crises in an appropriate way culturally and sensitive for stakeholders in local markets (Zhu et al., 2017). According to Lee (2009), when a corporation deals with stakeholders from different cultures during a crisis who have disparate expressions, communications, reactions, and expectations to those of the corporation, the corporation should manage the crisis both locally and internationally. Even though culture is a dynamic force that influences publics during times of crisis, Lee noted that it was neglected in the crisis communication literature.

Alaimo (2020) emphasized the importance of reputations for organizations stating that a good reputation is vital for business. In other words, nothing is more crucial for an organization than its reputation. Significant financial loss, reputation damage, and loss of stakeholders' trust and support could be a result of crisis threats (Lee, 2009). For instance, Dolce & Gabbana (D&G) faced severe damage to its reputation in late 2018 when a D&G crisis in China occurred. The crisis caused D&G's reputation damage, increased brand hate and negatively affected purchase intention ("China Crisis," 2021; Maslikhan, 2019). On the other hand, Beheshti Far and Korouki (2013) pointed out the linkage between corporate reputation and profits. Corporate reputation can support the continuation of above-average yields. The majority of interviewees in Fatima's Oliveira (2013) study stated that reputation damage is one of the most significant challenges when

a crisis occurs. Moreover, the interviewees of the study identified that if a corporation's reputation is severely affected, the corporation's survival will be threatened by the lack of confidence.

Theoretical Framework

Expectancy Violation Theory

The expectancy violation theory (EVT) was formulated depending on expectations as a core concept of the theory (Burgoon, 2015; Burgoon & Jones, 1976; Burgoon & Hubbard, 2005; Burgoon & Walther, 1990). According to Burgoon (2015), EVT was originally developed to account for the communicative effects of proxemics violations within groups and interpersonal interaction. However, several scholars have applied EVT in the context of public relations (e.g., Cho et al., 2021; Olkkonen & Luoma-Aho, 2015; S. Kim, 2014; Park et al., 2021). Olkkonen and Luoma-Aho (2015) worked on broadening the concept of expectations in the field of public relations, finding that expectations are linked with essential topics in public relations literature. Some public relations scholars applied EVT with a focus on sustainability communication (e.g., Cho et al., 2021), focus on the relational satisfaction role of prior crises (e.g., S. Kim, 2014) or CSR and non-profits (e.g., Rim et al., 2020; Park et al., 2021), whereas Fediuk et al. (2010) studied violation of stakeholders' expectations as a trigger event of crisis.

Both Cho et al. (2021) and S. Kim (2014) explained two different types of expectancy violation in organizational context in their studies. S. Kim (2014) defined prescriptive expectancy as "expectations based on social norms related to corporations' appropriate behaviors, e.g., respect others' personal space " (p.141). On the other hand,

predictive expectancies refer to projected activities customized to a specific individual, often based on the individual's prior behavior or particular interaction style (Burgoon, 1995; S. Kim, 2014). Cho et al. (2021) explained that prescriptive expectancy can be applicable to all organizations, whereas predictive expectancies are mainly applied to a specific organization.

Burgoon and Jones (1976) suggested that people evaluate others through interaction whether based on first impression or their history of interaction. People categorize others with whom they interact either as a negative or positive value. They frame this evaluation as punishment and reward. Furthermore, people are more attracted to those who give them a sense of being liked, accepted, or approved of, and who represent a reward. On the contrary, being considered powerless, unattractive, unpleasant, or deviant is perceived as a punishment since they have nothing to offer in the interaction process. Cho et al. (2021) addressed how the public's perception of the organization and its activities interact with the organization's communication efforts to influence the public's response focusing on the negative and positive violations.

Scholars suggest that the violation might be either positive or negative (e.g., Burgoon & Jones, 1976). To determine behavioral appropriateness, individuals often use expectations that serve as societal norms or cultural standards. This behavior impacts people's schemes of interaction and behavior (Burgoon, 1995). In other words, according to EVT, the valence of a violation is affected by pre-existing expectations towards the violator. There are two types of expectancy violation and conformity positive and negative (S. Kim, 2014).

According to Fediuk et al. (2010), positive violations refer to instances where an organization surpasses the perceived psychological contract held by stakeholders, such as engaging in corporate social responsibility that was not expected. Such positive violations can result in increased positive affect towards the organization, and thus crisis situations are less likely to arise. However, different stakeholders may view incidents differently, and what is positive for some may be negative for others. On the contrary, negative expectation violations occur when the behavior of the organization contradicts stakeholder expectations in a negative way, triggering information seeking and cognitive processing during crisis events.

According to Rim et al. (2020), stakeholders' expectations are formed by a company's actions, which can result in either positive or negative violations. Corporate crises can therefore be considered violations of stakeholders' expectations of an organization when applying expectancy theory (S. Kim, 2014). Similar to how partners' transgressions work in close relationships, crises can be considered expectancy violations between organizations and their publics because crises frequently involve rules violations (S. Kim, 2014).

White (1989) tested the effect of expectancy violations on relationship growth. White found that negative violations increase uncertainty, which raises ambiguities and discomfort in relationships; hence, unfavorable relational attributions occur between the two parties. According to Fediuk's et al. (2010) model, incidents that violate the value expectations of stakeholders are expected to trigger a sense of moral indignation towards the organization. When stakeholders experience anger towards an organization, it is

anticipated that their perceptions of the organization will be adversely impacted.

Therefore, Fediuk's et al. model proposes that in crisis situations, stakeholders' affective responses will be associated with damage to the organization's reputation, such that the more negative the affective response the greater the reputation damage that the organization will experience.

Cultural Violation

This study also intends to throw new light on cultural violations by offering a variety of studies on violation as a phenomenon related to international crisis. Cultural violation, as defined in this study, is *any verbal or nonverbal violation of culture in the communication process between an organization and its stakeholders and stakeholders, especially if the organization and its stakeholders are located in different nations with differing cultures* (e.g., disrespecting other cultures by mimicking them and/or using sarcasm and/or generalizing stereotypes on other cultures). This might appear to be a trivial observation and is often described as such; however, while the phenomenon of violation is pervasive in interpersonal and organizational communication, the issue of how to explain cultural violations is challenging. At the same time, what is a cultural violation is becoming a question more frequently posed to and within international public relations scholarship.

Several studies have covered violations in terms of anthropology, psychology, interpersonal relationships and more (e.g. identity violation see Glasford et al., 2008; Grant & Brown, 1995; Kraak et al., 2017; Mayer et al., 2009), (e.g. trust violation see Bansal & Zahedi, 2015; Goles et al., 2009; Haselhuhn et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2006), (e.g.

expectancy violation see Burgoon, 2015; Burgoon & Jones, 1976; Burgoon & Hubbard, 2005; Burgoon & Walther, 1990) and (e.g. privacy violation see Kuo et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2015; Wright & Xie, 2019). Yet very few studies have linked cultural violations to international crises in the global context.

In the first part, before the violation is indicated, stakeholders start their relationship with an organization with a certain level of expansion in terms of communicative behavior, social norms, and culture (Burgoon & Walther, 1990). The perceived seriousness of violation and the level of expectations (prior violation) influence the relationship after violation as discussed below (Bansal & Zahedi, 2015). People have different levels of perception about how serious they are with cultural expectations (Itoh, 1991). The expectancy violation indicates that people's expectations define their given relationships and those who have their expectations met are more invested in the relationship than those who have their expectations violated (Burgoon, 1993). Stakeholders and organizations, Fediuk et al. (2010) argued, create connections based on their expectations of one another. As a result, to better understand crisis situations, it is necessary to study the stakeholder expectations in the relationship.

Although previous research studies exist on testing expectancy and cultural violation on interpersonal level, few studies have focused on cultural and expectancy violation from an international organizations' angle. Additionally, very limited studies focused on international stakeholders' perception of cultural and expectancy violation in crisis context from stakeholders and stakeholders' perspective. Following this reasoning, this thesis suggests the following research question:

RQ1: To what extent do organizations' stakeholders and stakeholders' perceive cultural violations in an international crisis?

RQ2: To what extent do organizations' stakeholders and stakeholders' perceive expectancy violations in an international crisis?

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

This research follows an interpretive research paradigm. Interpretive studies aim to produce an understanding of the context of the information system, and the process whereby the information system influences and is influenced by the context (Walsham, 2006). This is an exploratory, theoretical case study analysis that analyzes the interpretations of international organizations. The understanding of culture requires a focus on meanings and contexts; culture can be seen as a system of meaning differently available to groups of individuals (Falkheimer & Heide, 2006). Thus, interpretive research is relevant due to its potential to provide in-depth insights (Walsham, 2006).

The study objective, the relative dearth of prior research on publics' perception of cultural and expectancy violation influences on international crises, and the proposed research questions align to propose that a case study method is appropriate to enable in-depth contextual analysis and theory elaboration. Yin (2009) defined a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Case studies have been widely used to examine various topics in multinational corporations in general (e.g., Adaba et al., 2022) and crises specifically (e.g., Atwal et al., 2020; Ban & Lovari, 2021; “China Crisis,” 2021; Maslikhan, 2019). In addition, case study research design is appropriate for theory elaboration (e.g., Richards JR et al., 2017; Vlachos, 2021; Xu & Li, 2013).

Case Background

The empirical basis of this paper is a case study of the Italian-based luxury fashion powerhouse Dolce & Gabbana (D&G). The study was chosen through a purposive sample to ensure that it has important attributes to the research (Yin, 2009). Sampling an organization that works internationally with variations of cultures helps to better demonstrate and outline the parameters within which the findings may be valuable for public relations scholars and practitioners. D&G met the standards of this study because it is an international organization that operates internationally and deals with a variety of different cultures and regions, such as the Middle East and East Asia regions. As Wakefield (2000) stated, an organization is considered international when the organization and its stakeholders are in different countries. Additionally, D&G has faced some complications with its international publics during the last decade. Some of these complications were described in Alese's (2018) blog about D&G such as, (in 2012, "Blackamoor" Earrings and Prints), (in 2013, "Afro-Disco" Halloween), (in 2015, Offensive remarks on IVF and Gay Families), (in 2015: Ads simulating gang rape), and (in 2015 The Chinese Tourist).

D&G is an Italian luxury fashion house established in 1985 in Legnano, Italy, by two Italian designers, Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana. The brand is also known by its initials. D&G specializes in luxury handbags, cosmetics and ready-to-wear fashion. It started operations in China in 2016 to provide services and goods to its customer base across the country (Ban & Lovari, 2021).

The largest growing consumer in the luxury market globally is China (Ban & Lovari, 2021). According to Bu et al. (2017), "by 2025, Chinese consumers will account

for a majority of this growth and will account for 44% of the total global market" (p. 3). Furthermore, the Chinese market is a critical part of D&G's global market. Williams (2022) stated that D&G had 58 boutiques in China (e.g., Hong Kong, and Macau). Additionally, three out of the group's six foreign subsidiaries are located in the Greater China Region (in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong), which indicates the importance of the Chinese market to D&G (Ban & Lovari, 2021).

Case Description

In 2018, the luxury fashion brand D&G faced a major crisis in China, one of its largest and most important markets (Atwal et al., 2020). The controversy started with D&G releasing promotional videos on social media platforms intended to promote the brand's upcoming fashion show, "the great show" in Shanghai, scheduled for November 21. It featured a Chinese model attempting to eat Italian foods with chopsticks, accompanied by stereotypical and insensitive captions (Ban & Lovari, 2021). D&G used the corporation's official social media accounts, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, in addition to major Chinese platforms (Ban & Lovari, 2021) such as WeChat, Sina Weibo and Douyin (*China*, 2022) to promote the great show.

The video was heavily criticized for being a culturally offensive stereotype, racist and cultural appropriation (e.g., Atwal et al., 2020; Ban & Lovari, 2021; Haghirian, 2022; Maslikhan, 2019; Pan, 2018; Puppini, 2018; Shih, 2018; Wiener-Bronner, 2018; Yu & Hu, 2020). Yu and Hu (2020) stated that the D&G campaign was "disrespectful and racist." They explained that Chinese consumers criticized it as disrespectful and called for a boycott. Yu and Hu's study suggested that cross-cultural marketing should focus on

more than involving local faces, "but also includes how cross-cultural elements are arranged and presented" (p. 10). Puppini (2018) described this incident as "not funny, real scandal, and offensive".

In a CNN Business article, Thomai Serdari, a strategist in luxury marketing and branding, called this campaign "a very old-fashioned image of China". Maslikhan (2019) pointed out that this campaign caused negative publicity, damaged the brand image, and affected purchase intention, leading to a specific causal life cycle of brand hate from initial controversy to long-term anti-consumption. Similarly, Atwal et al. (2020) found that criticism of the D&G campaign led to a specific causal life cycle of brand hate from initial controversy to long-term anti-consumption.

Publics have discussed the "Boycott Dolce" in both Chinese and English nearly 20,000 times, even though D&G deleted the videos within 24 hours (Pan, 2018). Many Chinese celebrities, such as Zhang Ziyi, Li Bingbing, and Chen Kun, and social media influencers called for a boycott of the brand (Atwal et al., 2020; Ban & Lovari, 2021). As a result, D&G was forced to cancel "the great show" (Atwal et al., 2020; Ban & Lovari, 2021; Maslikhan, 2019). Moreover, retail partners in China and Chinese e-commerce sites removed the brand's products from their stores (Shih, 2018). This crisis resulted in significant damage to D&G's reputation, revenue, and capital due to the controversy (Atwal et al., 2020).

Data Collection

Data is collected from multiple sources (Yin, 2009). Primary data is the original data source, which was collected and observed first-hand by the researcher for this

specific research. Data collection included: (1) weblogs, which is valuable and reliable source of data for analysis (Jones & Alony, 2008); (2) Twitter; where the platform enables the examination of networked interactivity in different forms such as tweets, retweets, and mentions, including a variety of digital publics in dialogues (Ban & Lovari, 2021); and (3) *The New York Times* articles; this newspaper has been recognized as elite news journals and is a large-circulation newspaper. Also, this newspaper is often used for content analysis research (e.g., An & Gower, 2009).

The data collection process was limited to the English language, which is the world's most spoken language (Which Languages Are Most Widely Spoken?, 2015). For this case study, choosing multiple digital networks gives a good representation of internet users in speech forums where they interact on an international level, especially those who are interested in this particular case. Even Though Twitter is blocked in China, it represents an alternate public sphere for Chinese publics (Xu & Feng, 2015).

All data was collected manually through an electronic database search using keywords of the crisis. Using manual data collection was used since this study is an exploratory theoretical case study. #DolceGabbana was used as the initial search term, and search was limited to original tweets, news focused on the case, and personal blogs. This study limits the time period to two months from when the crisis occurred 11/18/2018, when D&G first posted the campaign's video, to 01/18/2019 (Ban & Lovari, 2021). According to An and Gower (2009), crises are most newsworthy within two months of the crisis beginning (p.109). Several other terms related to the crisis emerged during the process including boycott Dolce, the great show, and D&G in China until

reaching theoretical saturation, which means in qualitative research the point at which additional data collection and analysis are no longer expected to generate new knowledge (Ban & Lovari, 2021).

Data Analysis

In analyzing the international stakeholder and stakeholders' perception of cultural and expectancy violations in the D&G crisis, this study examined the international publics' online response. Choosing publics' online response was strategic. This choice allowed contextualizing publics' perceptions of the campaign by capturing large number of responses to demonstrate the dynamic characteristics of stakeholders and stakeholders' perceptions. Methodologically, this means one step analysis of the international publics' online response, which led to a better understanding of to what extent publics perceived cultural and expectancy violations in the crisis.

This analysis aimed to capture publics' perception of D&G's crisis in China. Therefore, this analysis focused on the responses of publics on platforms that allow for contextual analysis involving in conversations a plurality of digital publics, likewise citizens, journalists, and organizations. The final corpus included 800 tweets, 4 New York Times articles, and 4 web blogs.

This present study involved one level or unit of analysis: the text level, which included in-depth text analysis focusing on sentences as the unit of analysis. At the text analysis, the themes were coded: (1) cultural violation and (2) expectancy violation. The thematic variables described below were each assessed, with 1 for cultural violation and 2 for expectancy violation.

Cultural Violation

Using the definition addressed above in this study, any verbal or nonverbal violation of culture in the communication process between an organization and its stakeholders and stakeholders especially if the organization and its stakeholders are located in different nations with different cultures (e.g., disrespecting other cultures by mimicking them or sarcasm and/or generalizing stereotypes on other cultures). Cultural violation was assessed by the following indicators: 1) texts are shown the severity or blame of the D&G campaign associated with culture (e.g., food, way of eating, clothing, cultural racism, etc.). 2) text shows D&G's campaign as harmful and transgression as unattractive, unpleasant, or deviant resulting in punishment relationships. An example of text that expresses how harmful and transgression the action was and affects the relationship growth.

Expectancy Violation

Using a definition set by Burgoon and Walther (1990) "cognitions about the anticipated communicative behavior of specific others, as embedded within and shaped by the social norms for the contemporaneous roles, relationships, and context" (p. 236). More specifically S. Kim's (2014) definition of prescriptive expectancies as expectations based on social norms related to corporations' appropriate behaviors. Expectancy toward an organization was assessed by two indicators 1) the text expresses publics' opinions of the crisis as a disrespectful attitude conducted by D&G. An example of that will be a direct ask for respect or apologies. and or 2) the text highlights the situation with irony and criticism toward the organization.

The process started with close reading of the entire corpus, marked out snippets, paragraphs, headlines and articulations that are relevant and/or interesting. After the initial analysis, 300 tweets were eliminated because it was in languages other than English and/or the content was irrelevant. The final data was 500 tweets, 4 New York Times articles, and 4 web blogs. A code book was established to help analyze the data. After the initial coding, the text was categorized according to themes and subthemes using axial and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Two coders were trained to code 10% of the data each. Their coding results were compared to determine intercoder agreement. The degree of agreement between the coders was calculated using Scott's Pi. The analysis results revealed that Scott's Pi coefficient was 0.96, which is a high level of agreement and indicates that the coders were consistent in their coding (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Analysis continued until delineated an overall structure of the textual data in the form of a set of internally coherent themes and their components (subthemes). Themes that reflect and provide thematic understanding were used to generate insights of publics' perceived cultural and expectancy violation of the D&G crisis.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study addressed the following research questions. RQ1: To what extent do organizations' stakeholders and stakeholders' perceive cultural violations in an international crisis? RQ2: To what extent do organizations' stakeholders and stakeholders' perceive expectancy violations in an international crisis? While the dominant public voice is negative/unfavorable toward D&G's crisis, this case study analysis identified two major themes or ways that stakeholders and stakeholders perceived the crisis: cultural violation theme and expectancy violation theme.

"Cultural violation" — publics' perceived the crisis as a negative violation of culture.

The first theme, cultural violation, centers around the idea that international corporations should be more aware and respectful of the cultural factor in the communication process. In interpreting the appropriateness of the campaign videos to culture, the online stakeholders and stakeholders compete with D&G in the perception of the crisis: *Chopsticks*-- *Blissful taste of Chinese culture! respond to the stupid drama of D&G in China today. If want to play culture thing, at least understand and show respect* someone tweeted. Another blogger stated that:

Apparently, Dolce and Gabbana like to offend people. We all remember when Stefano Gabbana got caught cheating with his blackface wearing friend, Dell'Acqua at that Disco Africa Halloween party only a few short years ago. Recently, D&G have offended another group, namely The Chinese. Over the past several days, the Italian fashion luxury brand has been trying to clean up a crisis

caused by a tasteless and tacky ad campaign that critics called "disrespectful and racist."

The cultural violation theme has two components, including: (1) perceived responsibility and harshness of the violation and (2) damage done by the company's transgression.

Responsibility of the Violation. The first component focuses on the perceived responsibility and harshness of the violation. By defining the incident as a case of cultural violation and cultural racism. Online stakeholders and stakeholders had very strong responses to the crisis. For instance, an article from the New York Times described the D&G crisis as *most corporations are not looking deep enough to understand historical and cultural contexts of their design and marketing choices to assess what might be offensive, inappropriate or simply without permission.*

One online tweet argued that *racism to asians are so bad but then they'll realise how powerful we are. Anyways, China could ban your *** for being racist!! The biggest boycott Dolce & Gabbana 🇨🇳*. Some point out that this campaign is offensive while expressing negative emotions: *"Hey, you know, this could be perceived as offensive."*

A NYT's article described the case as offensive and stereotyped:

In November, Dolce & Gabbana offended an entire country with a marketing campaign that perpetrated passé stereotypes before a show in China. The company had to cancel the show, and some people started burning its products.

*“In all fairness, this happens a lot less than it used to, but come on run your ads by your Chinese team first and take some simple cross-cultural awareness courses for **** sake. #fashion #advertising #cultural #DolceGabbana #china #Retail”* One tweeted.

One blogger wrote: *“Actually this was not the first time D&G had a cultural misstep in China. There was part of an advertisement done by Dolce & Gabbana in 2017 showing well-dressed models on Beijing streets and tourists sites next to poorly dressed ordinary Chinese.”* *“While more and more companies are repositioning themselves as a value-driven business, most are not looking deep enough to understand historical and cultural contexts of their design and marketing choices to assess what might be offensive, inappropriate or simply without permission.”* This incident was shocking to stakeholders and stakeholders especially that they have been treating D&G with goodwill (Ban & Lovari, 2021).

Damage done by the company’s transgression. Another component of the theme, focusing on the damage done by the company’s transgression, argues that negative cultural violation is perceived as unattractive, unpleasant, or deviant resulting in punishment relationships between stakeholders and stakeholders and corporations. Respect for culture should be the foundation of any business's behavior; otherwise, any culturally offensive behavior would be viewed as a violation (Ban & Lovari, 2021). For example, an online blogger stated *“naturally, it will make people uncomfortable if you try to stand out by bragging about your own culture over theirs — especially exposing their dark or weak sides.”* *“this video is neither lovable not humorous, but it is intolerable*

insult to Chinese culture and Chinese people.” “The way the narrator talks and the model in the ad performs make Chinese people really uncomfortable.

Many of the tweets, blogs and NYT articles focused on the punishment aspect of D&G misconduct. One tweet said, *"The Italian luxury brand Dolce & Gabbana apologized Friday for racist-tinged insults that touched off a growing boycott in China and left the company struggling to return its products to store shelves and e-commerce sites."* Another tweeted *"***** D&G done messed up that's alot of money they gonna have to eat with chopsticks" 📺✍️.* One of the most repeated tweets called for Boycott as punishment, *"Dugabanna! The Chinese can either praise you to heaven or let you fall down! Boycott Dolce and Gabbana, start with me!." "Chinese made their decision to boycott @dolcegabbana's 'The Great Show' in Shanghai today, the show has been officially canceled."*

Moreover, many believe that this violation should not have happened as a start, and they see it as disrespect of the culture. Therefore, stakeholders and stakeseekers are questioning the growth of the relationship between them and D&G. For example, someone tweeted *"Y'all "apologizing" cuz you realized how many LOYAL customers you've just lost. Do you know how much they love D&G in China!?!.... not anymoreeeee."* Similarly, another tweeted *"Thank you for your noticing but sorry for your lost China market will never open for you #dolcegabbana ***** #notcool."* *"The reality is this is probably going to kill growth for them #DolceGabbana"* *"Uh oh bye bye D&G in China. You're digging your own grave 😬"* *"Some people say you've wasted a lot of money. I'm willing to waste this money for the nation's dignity."*

"Expectancy violation — prescriptive expectancy" publics' perceived D&G crisis as a violation of their expectations.

While the first theme demonstrates international stakeholders and stakeholders perception of the cultural aspect of the D&G violation, the second theme involves crisis violations of stakeholder and stakeholders expectancy toward an organization. The expectancy violation—prescriptive expectancy theme highlights how D&G's crisis indicates the corporation's behavior is discrepant from unexpected behavior, which stimulates stakeholders and stakeholders' cognitive responses. It is assumed by stakeholders and stakeholders that the corporation will have adequate responsibility to meet the publics' expectations by respecting social norms.

The Expectancy violation theme has two components, including: (1) frequent use of verbal tactics and (2) highlighting the situation with criticism and irony.

Frequent use of verbal tactics. The expectancy violation theme has been understood as publics' perception of the crisis as a disrespectful attitude conducted by D&G characterized by using verbal tactics frequently such as direct request of respect and criticism of D&G's disrespect. For example, one tweeted "*The consumer is more selfish right now in feeling that China has a rich history and culture and is now a world power — that we know we are your most important customer base and you need to respect them.*" Online blogger stated that "*Chinese consumers, like water, once made D&G float high, but if D&G cannot respect and treat the Chinese culture with care and delicacy, the boat of this big fashion brand could be flipped over any time*". "*foreign companies must show "some respect to Chinese people"*" someone stated. Another tweet

argued that *“We are all gods children and we should all be treating EVERYONE, EVERY CULTURE with respect. I will be back to China soon — love you all so much.” “Classic racial insensitivity #D&G”* An online blogger argued *“if on one side you claim that you love their culture but on the other side, you talk down to or make fun of the consumers’ culture, your pride and arrogance will pay in the end!”* referring to D&G's arrogance and disrespect towards Chinese culture.

Another blogger described D&G as gross and greedy, *“I feel terrible that this gross and greedy brand lurched their racist leerings on the people of China.” “Do you know Chinese invented noodles?” The Italian food tastes like s**t.”*

A blogger reported: *Goods of the fashion house have disappeared from Chinese e-commerce sites one day after the incident. E-commerce giants like JD.com and Alibaba's Tmall all removed D&G goods and said they do not welcome those who have no respect for China.*

“The Dolce & Gabbana brand leaders say and do what they want, and I say hooray for your honesty. China also seems to appreciate it, and the brand is now drowning in one of the world's largest luxury markets. #KellyeMedia #socialmedia #marketing ” “First Russia, now China... #DolceGabbana--> everyone is looking to hate or be angry. Be positive. Note: Learn about culture before you market your products in...”

Highlighting the situation with criticism and irony. A large proportion of the online responses seemed to be interested primarily in expressing criticism by using call up verbal attacks. For example, in response to the D&G videos, publics described D&G and people who wear it as ugly. *“Boycott Dolce & Gabbana! Dolce & Gabbana are ugly*

and people who wear Dolce & Gabbana are ugly!" someone tweeted. "D&G's fashion is equally offensive as it is ugly." "Do you think Chinese people are three-year-olds?" "Homophobic and racist @dolcegabbana has a history of this." Others called for actions against D&G, such as encouraging others to boycott D&G. For example, one person tweeted "We don't need your apology. Please take your clothes and your brand and leave China." "Boycott dolce and gabbana" "People in China are dumping their Dolce & Gabbana in the TRASH over their new 'racist' ad #dolcegabbana #China #racism #bk."

Some, however, shared their opinion about the situation with irony *"I can't stop looking at the tire fire that is the situation with D&G in China 🚒."* A blogger stated *"He**! Stefano maybe should have taken a chill pill before his racist campaign was captured! But maybe this is just what a brand that really doesn't give ** like D&G deserves."* One person tweeted *"D&G seems to have trouble professing its love for china without causing backlash from some Chinese."* Another person tweeted *"How could Dolce & Gabbana has so many designs but so less brains??? Is there any worse case than they did for reputation? #DolceGabbana @dolcegabbana" "Backlash over #DolceGabbana "Eating with Chopsticks" ads were amplified by the co-founders racist outburst. 😏" "Why would anyone in their right mind want to offend the world's largest luxury market? #China But it's not Gabbana's first time." "Ironically, if they had used a regular sized cannolo, chopsticks are actually much better tools than bare hands, as Italian cafes would serve them without utensils..."* Ample examples of obscene language were also found in this theme.

Discussion

Even though culture and expectations play an important role in the communication process, especially for international organizations (Perry, 2012; Shuter, 1981; Kagitçibaşı & Berry, 1989; Miller, 2002; Chang et al., 2011; Sriramesh et al., 1999; Sriramesh & White, 1992), these international organizations often fail to fulfill public expectations. Recognizing that there is a lack of research on cultural violations and expectancy violations in the field of public relations (Cho et al., 2021; Fediuk et al., 2010; S. Kim, 2014; Zhu et al., 2017), the current study demonstrated the perceptions of international stakeholders and stakeholders towards international crisis as cultural and expectancy violations.

In particular, acknowledging the important role of culture to both corporations and publics, this study explored to what extent stakeholders and stakeholders' perceive cultural violations and expectancy violations in an international crisis. Discussion elements include responsibility assigned to the organization, negative reactions towards the organization, history of interaction, justice restoration actions by stakeholders and stakeholders, and critical responses.

The study results indicated that the dominant public voice was negative/unfavorable towards D&G's violation. This might be because of the sensitivity of the issue, which people perceived as a negative violation. D&G's violations have been seen as particularly sensitive or controversial (Ban & Lovari, 2021), and considered cultural violation. These results build on existing evidence of EVT. Burgoon and

Hubbard (2005) explained that "negative violations are predicted to yield more unfavorable consequences than conforming to expectations (p. 159)."

First, the cultural violation theme indicated that stakeholders and stakeholders perceived the crisis as a negative violation of culture. This theme had two components, including perceived responsibility and harshness of the violation and damage done by the company's transgression. In line with EVT (Burgoon & Jones, 1976), the study showed that stakeholders and stakeholders' perceptions were affected significantly by the organizations' violation of culture and expectations. In explanation of the crisis effect because of the severity of the incident, stakeholders and stakeholders may have perceived the company's conduct as particularly heinous or insulting, resulting in a poor view of the brand (Atwal et al., 2020).

Stakeholders and stakeholders responded strongly to the crisis, emphasizing D&G's disrespect towards Chinese culture. The emotional reaction triggered by the violation may have affected how stakeholders and stakeholders reacted to the incident, with individuals feeling dissatisfied or let down by the brand's actions. The results associated with EVT suggest that when expectations are not met, it can cause an emotional reaction in the individual affected, which can influence how they respond to the situation, including their perception of the cause of the violation and their judgment of the person responsible for it (Raymond Rui and Stefanone, 2018). Additionally, when negative violations occur, they can elicit several adverse effects, such as feelings of embarrassment, nervousness, and anxiety (Raymond Rui and Stefanone, 2018).

The results suggest that cultural violations focus on the perceived responsibility and harshness of the violation; in addition to the damage done by the company's transgression. The relevance of cultural and social norms in society may explain the emphasis on perceived responsibility and severity of the violation in cultural transgressions. People may believe that it is the obligation of businesses to respect and honor cultural norms, which may lead to a greater emphasis on perceived responsibility and the severity of the violation. Similarly, based on Fediuk's et al. (2010) model, a more plausible explanation suggests that on one hand, the more stakeholders and stakeholders perceive that a corporation has control over a crisis and its intentional actions, the more responsibility they will assign to the company. On the other hand, if stakeholders and stakeholders believe that if external factors are to blame for an event, they will assign less responsibility to the company.

Findings also suggest stakeholders and stakeholders expressed criticism of the campaign as offensive and stereotyped. This perception resulted in negative emotions and calls for boycott as punishment, which could harm the relationship between D&G and its customers. The unfavorable feelings voiced by stakeholders and stakeholders might be attributed to D&G's perceived insensitivity. People may believe that the company has failed to understand and respect their culture, resulting in a negative reaction and boycott calls. In line with the findings, Chen's (2015) experiment found that violations triggered negative affect in participants, which in turn affected their retaliatory responses. Stakeholders and stakeholders were very uncomfortable toward any negative violation done by organizations, (especially if it is related to culture), which may be disappointing.

These results build on existing evidence that negative violations increase uncertainty that raises ambiguities and discomfort in relationships; hence, unfavorable relational attributions between the two parties (S. Kim, 2014; White, 1989).

The results fit with EVT explanation that stakeholders and stakeholders' discomfort generates more negative responses to the organization. Fediuk et al. (2010) stated that when the violation valence is negative, individuals tend to react negatively toward the violator. In other words, when there are instances where stakeholders and stakeholders' expectations are violated negatively, stakeholders and stakeholders who have interests may feel disappointed and as a result, express more negative reactions towards the organization (Cho et al., 2021).

In this case, the publics were aware of the organizations' history of cultural disrespect. Prior negative relationships might damage trust between the business and its stakeholders and affect the organization's reputation (Lee, 2009). This might be because of prior incidents that have affected the relationship between D&G and its stakeholders (Alese, 2018). This implies that an organization faces an added challenge when negative prior expectations exist, as the public evaluates their responses based on their past interactions with the organization. This idea is consistent with EVT. Burgoon and Jones (1976) suggested that people evaluate others through interaction, whether based on first impression or their history of interaction. When people interact with others, they tend to categorize them as a positive or negative value. S. Kim's (2014) findings also confirm the importance of the history of interaction between stakeholders and the organization.

The present study further explored the expectancy violation theme. This theme had two components: frequent use of verbal tactics and highlighting the situation with criticism and irony. The study found that publics perceived D&G's crisis as a violation of their expectations. Publics' responses primarily focused on expressing criticism by using call up verbal attacks and encouraging others to boycott D&G. Publics have shown a pattern of anticipated verbal interaction. According to Fediuk et al. (2010), stakeholders and stakeholders are driven to participate in justice restoration actions such as vengeance behavior in order to restore justice. In other words, In the context of crisis, stakeholders and stakeholders' perception of betrayal due to the violation of contracted expectations can trigger a sense of inequity. The organization's behavior was discrepant from expected behavior, which stimulated cognitive responses from stakeholders and stakeholders. This, in turn, encourages the stakeholder and stakeholders to feel a need to rectify the perceived inequity. The focus of the finding is social norms since this crisis alerts stakeholder and stakeholders cognitive responses. Fediuk et al. (2010) propose that “crisis incidents that are appraised as personally relevant will lead to more active cognitive processing of crisis episodes” (p. 642).

As EVT suggests, expectancy frequently serves as a cultural standard to assist individuals to determine the acceptability of others' behaviors, which shapes interaction patterns as well as their behavior. It is formed of a person's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components (Cho et al., 2021; Siegel & Burgoon, 2002). As a result, when publics perceived the organization's activities as a violation of societal norms of typical

and appropriate behaviors grounded in society, stakeholders and stakeholders responses were critical and asked the organization to correct the situation (S. Kim, 2014).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study provides several theoretical and practical implications. In regard to theoretical implications, by adopting the EVT, which is an interpersonal theory (Burgoon, 1995) to international stakeholders and stakeholders relationships and corporate crisis settings, the study contributes to the body of knowledge in public relations scholarship and crisis communication. Exploring this broader understanding of crisis communication could give fresh insights into stakeholders and stakeholders perceptions of cultural and expectancy violations internationally. For instance, stakeholders and stakeholders negative perceptions of an organization can lead stakeholders stakeholders to discomfort and unfavorable relationship, thereby causing reputational damage.

Additionally, this study provides a new focal point to the expectancy violation theory, which draws the emphasis on the cultural aspect of international crisis from stakeholders and stakeholders perceptions. As such, this study provides a clear distinction between prescriptive expectancy, which focuses on social norms and cultural violation with main emphasis on culture. Although some public relations scholars applied EVT to the field of public relations, their studies were focused on sustainability communication, relational satisfaction role of prior crisis, and CSR and non-profits (e.g., Cho et al., 2021; Park et al., 2021; Rim et al., 2020; S Kim, 2014).

Filling this research gap, the current study examined international stakeholders and stakeholders perception of expectancy violation and cultural violation in a real-world

case. In doing so, this research provides a new point of view of EVT in crisis communication context. More importantly, by illustrating how the public perceives an international crisis, this study resonates with the (Alaimo, 2020; Botan, 1992; Fediuk et al., 2010; Wakefield, 2000) reflective paradigm of public relations, which suggests the importance of understanding differences between international frameworks and various cultures more effectively to communicate and build relationships.

This research also provides public relations professionals with practical guidance. This study offered a new perception of cultural and expectancy violations that seeks to enrich the understanding of the international crisis, hence, improving the effectiveness of crisis communication. Considering the significance of aligning individuals' expectations with an organization's operations, international corporations should proactively understand and satisfy public expectations. Given the importance of matching individuals' expectations with an organization's activities, international corporations should proactively identify and meet public expectations. By doing so, the organization may avoid any unwanted negative perceptions and interactions.

This study reveals that cultural and expectation violations are more likely to occur in an international situation, particularly for international corporate communication managers. As a result, international corporate communication managers must make extra efforts to devote long-term commitment to strengthening international crisis communication, which might decrease the crisis's escalation and negative perceptions.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

International corporations operate globally and deal with various cultures and expectations, which increases economic, social, and political interdependencies among global stakeholders and stakeholders. Public relations as a discipline is more often charged with managing communication and relationships among organizations and their stakeholders on an international level. Companies, for instance, encounter particular difficulties when interacting with their publics due to several cultural and societal influences, such as cultural and expectancy violation.

The purpose of this research was to explore to what extent stakeholders and stakeholders perceived different violations in an international crisis context. This research found that understanding publics' perspective of cultural and expectations violations on international crises was not searched sufficiently. Thus, through conducting a case study, this thesis provided useful insight for crisis communication scholars to help better understand publics' perspective of cultural and expectancy violations on international crises, as well as public relations practitioners who practice public relations internationally. Public relations practitioners could utilize the findings in this thesis to pay close attention to the publics' culture and expectations when designing an international public relations campaign.

While this research contributes to the literature and practice of international crisis communication and public relations, several limitations should be noted. First, this study was employed using data written in the English language only. Given that this specific crisis happened in China, and the researcher has no access to Chinese social media or

written data in Mandarin; it is necessary to replicate the findings with a different language, such as Mandarin. Second, further research should utilize Chinese social media platforms, such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin platforms, which is the most used social network in China. Another drawback of this study was related to the research method. Although it offers strong evidence of publics' perception of the international crisis, examining social media, news, and blogs of a one-time event might not fully capture the antecedent variables of cultural and expectancy violation. Thus, the findings should be interpreted with caution.

For future research, it is recommended to utilize different research methods, including focus groups and interviews, to better indicate stakeholders and stakeholders perceptions of the crisis to portray the effects of cultural and expectancy violation. Further research also can focus on culture as a significant factor in the crisis and introduce the idea of a cultural crisis caused by cultural violation. Future research also can utilize Fediuk's et al. (2010) stakeholder's cognitive model for information processing during and after organizational crises to test the transgression-based crises and apply it in an international crisis communication context.

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APPENDIX

Appendix I. Coding Book Guidelines

While You Analyze the Text, Please Code it As Follows:

Code the text by choosing between two themes: (1) cultural violation and (2) expectancy violation. The thematic will be described below.

Cultural violation theme (1)

Using the definition addressed above in this study, any verbal or nonverbal violation of culture in the communication process between an organization and its stakeholders and stakeholders especially if the organization and its stakeholders are in different nations with different cultures (e.g., disrespecting other cultures by mimicking them or sarcasm and/or generalizing stereotypes on other cultures). Cultural violation was assessed by the following indicators: 1) texts are shown the severity or blame of the D&G campaign associated with culture (e.g., food, way of eating, clothing, cultural racism, etc.). 2) text shows D&G's campaign as harmful and transgression as unattractive, unpleasant, or deviant resulting in punishment relationships. An example of text that expresses how harmful and transgression the action was and affects the relationship growth.

Expectancy violation theme (2)

Using a definition set by Burgoon and Walther (1990) "cognitions about the anticipated communicative behavior of specific others, as embedded within and shaped by the social norms for the contemporaneous roles, relationships, and context" (p. 236). More specifically S. Kim's (2014) definition of prescriptive expectancies as expectations based on social norms related to corporations' appropriate behaviors. Expectancy toward

an organization was assessed by two indicators 1) the text expresses publics' opinions of the crisis as a disrespectful attitude conducted by D&G. An example of that will be a direct ask for respect or apologies. and or 2) the text highlights the situation with irony and criticism toward the organization.

VITA

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