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# The Effect of Biased Expectation of News Media on Persuasion in a Government Crisis : An Application of Expectancy Violation Theory

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The purpose of this study is to investigate how publics perceive news coverage of a government crisis based on their biased perception of news media. More specifically, this study applied Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) and conducted an experimental study of 321 Korean participants through a 2 (message type: expectation- confirmed vs. expectation-disconfirmed message) X 2 (news media type: anti-government vs. pro-government) between-subject design. The results showed that participants were more likely to perceive an expectation-disconfirmed message as more impartial than an expectation-confirmed message when they perceived news media as favorable to the government. On the contrary, respondents were more apt to evaluate an expectation- confirmed message as fairer than an expectation-disconfirmed message when they perceived news media as unfavorable to the government. Theoretical and practical implications are further discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

The management of a government crisis often requires a correct and clear picture of how publics perceive a crisis (Horsley & Barker, 2002; Lee, 2007, 2009; Liu, Horsley, & Levenshus, 2010). It is because a government crisis not only endangers publics' lives but also incites political conflicts which involve many stakeholders (Lang & Lang, 1983). When it comes to a government crisis, publics tend to pay attention to information related to such an unexpected event in order to alleviate its uncertainty. At this point, news media play a crucial role in shaping publics' perception of crisis when a government crisis occurs (Chen, 2009; Bloch-Elkon, 2007; Flink, 1986; Zhang, & Benoit, 2009; Yi, & Chang, 2012; Chen, 2009; Gallagher, Fontenot, & Boyle, 2007; Lee, 2007; 2009).

News media have been traditionally regarded as the primary source of crisis information (Lee, 2007; 2009; Liu, Horsley, & Levenshus, 2010). Previous studies on crisis management have suggested strategic guidelines about how to cope with news media in order to reduce detrimental consequences during government crises as well as in the aftermath of crises (Meng & Berger, 2008; Vincent & Covello, 2003; Horsley & Barker, 2002; Lee, 2007; Lee, 2009; Gallagher, Fontenot, & Boyle, 2007; Hoggan, 1991). Effective crisis-response strategies in media coverage have been also explored by numerous scholars and practitioners (Benoit & Henson, 2009; Chen, 2009; Meng & Berger, 2008; Vincent & Covello, 2003; Horsley & Barker, 2002; Veil, Sellnow, & Heald, 2011). Many of studies regarding the role of news media in a crisis assumed news media, as uncontrollable media, have a greater power to affect publics' perception than controllable media which organizations possess. People tend to believe in independence and autonomy of news media (Bond & Kirshenbaum, 1998; Dean, 2004; Gephart, 2007; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000; Althaus, 2002; Coombs, 2007).

Even though previous studies have contributed to understanding of the impact of news media on publics' perception of a crisis, there has been little attention on publics' biased perception of news media in terms of a government crisis. Recently, some studies have empirically shown that publics tend to evaluate the information of news media based on their perception of news media's political interests (Bennet & Iyengar, 2008; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). These studies shed light on the critical importance of publics' expected bias about news media in a government crisis. As a government crisis can be easily related to political context in nature (Buus & Olsson, 2006; Rosenthal & Kouszmin, 1997; Lee, 2007; 2009), publics' biased expectation toward news media based on their political stances would influence their evaluation of news content in news media. However, such biased expectation about news media has been often ignored in a government

crisis management.

Therefore, this study explored how publics evaluate the fairness of news media based on their biased perception. That is, we focused more on publics who receive crisis-related information from news media than on media itself. Indeed, identifying tendency of publics' viewing news media can play a crucial role in planning effective crisis strategies. We thus applied Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) since the theory explains why publics' message evaluation is determined by their biased expectation about message source (Kohn & Snook, 1976; Jussim, Coleman & Lerch, 1987; Pfau, 1992; Prister & Perry, 1995; Afifi, W. A., & Metts, S., 1998; Petty et al., 2001). An experiment was conducted to examine the main and interaction effects of message types (expectation-confirmed vs. expectation-disconfirmed) and media types (pro-government vs. anti-government) on perceived fairness in news coverage about a government crisis.

## The Role of News Media in a Government Crisis from Publics' Perspective

A government crisis needs extra attention from both scholars and practitioners because of its complexity in the causes and consequences (Buus &Olsson, 2006; Helm, Hiebert, Naver, & Rabin, 1981; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997; Viteritti, 1997; Lee, 2007, 2009).

Crisis managers, therefore, should take into account a broader political, economic and social context around a crisis since a government crisis is easily connected to various issues including politics, economics, and so on (Lee, 2007; Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997). Otherwise, negative information about ill-managed government crisis communication is engraved in the public's memory, and thus is bound to have a negative influence on the next government crisis (Lee, 2007; Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997).

Meanwhile, publics become hostile toward the government when a crisis occurs because they judge a national crisis as a severe threat to the public good, attributed to ineffective and irresponsible government. Official government accounts for crises tend to be ignored or perceived as incorrect and even purposefully twisted information dominates public perception (Gephart, 2007; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). This is the reason why many scholars have put an emphasis on the role of news media during a government crisis (Alison, 2004; Althaus, 2002; Coombs, 2007; Kesten & Sidky, 2005; Liu & Horsley, 2007). Over the past decades, news media has been regarded more trustworthy than government official announcement (Bond & Kirshenbaum, 1998; Dean, 2004; Gephart, 2007; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000; Althaus, 2002; Coombs, 2007).

Although previous studies have suggested useful guidelines about news media strategies for effective crisis communication (Ulmer & Sellnow,

2000, 2002; DuHamel, 2009; Alison, 2004; Gephart, 2007), understanding publics in a government crisis has been often neglected. From publics' perspective, publics acquire, select, and interpret the message of news media by their own expectation or point of view. In this regard, many studies stressed the importance of a positive relationship between an organization and the media (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Huxman, 1996; Sellnow, Ulmer, Seeger, & Veil, 2008); however, the positive relations with news media do not always make a positive impression on publics. Especially, we speculate that publics would expect that news media close to the government tend to release more positive or supportive information about the governmental crisis than news media hostile to the government do.

Besides, negative public opinion and publics tend to seek coverage that is critical and even hostile toward the government to confirm their belief that the government is the cause of the crisis, or that propagandistic authorities aim to conceal the real causes and mitigate the government's responsibility (Bond & Kirshenbaum, 1998; Dean, 2004; Gephart, 2007). At this point, we assumed that publics tend to have a biased expectation about information on news media based upon their perception of the relationship between government and news media and examined the EVT to understand publics' tendency to judge information on news media.

## Expectancy Violation Theory in a Government Crisis

**Expectancy of media bias.** According to EVT, people tend to put others into a certain division, or in- or out- group category based on personal experience and behavior (Biernat, Vescio, & Billings, 1999; Marques, 1990; Marques, Robalo & Rocha, 1992; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988; Marques, Yzerbyt & Leyens, 1988). Group judgment occurs based on a variety of social identities encompassing gender, nationality, university major, school, and sports team groups (Branscombe, Wann, Noel & Coleman, 1993; Jackson & Hymes, 1985; Marques, 1990; Marques, Robalo & Rocha, 1992; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988; Marques et al.,1988).

This phenomenon is also applicable to a government crisis situation based on the two following assumptions; one is that the public generally share the hostile sentiments toward the government under a crisis; and the other is that the tone of media crisis coverage, more often than not, represent and connected to its political ideology and alignment with the government. It is reasoned that, for example, American news media channels have more overt partisanship than in the past, which is evident in the personally mediated information technology and biased news as la for the viewership (Coe et al., 2008; Groeling, 2008; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Pew Research Center for the People and Press, 2004).

Also, audience selectivity in news consumption found in empirical studies attests that the public aptly recognize the news channel political orientation in lieu of government political agendas and/or one's own stance on the issue (Coe et al., 2008; Groeling, 2008; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; An, & Cho, 2008). And the results indicate the public's tendency to judge the media as either pro-government media thus in- or out-group based on one's own political status.

As such, in national crisis communication, we presumed that people are likely to perceive the media bias and its group identification in relation to the government. Built upon EVT, in crisis, people are likely to expect a tendency for media coverage to be consistent with the news media's political stance about the government. For example, in the U.S. media landscape, Fox News is regarded as a hostile media channel to the Obama Administration, and thus, if a national crisis happens, people are bound to expect hostile views from Fox News on the government's account. NPR or MSNBC, on the other hand, is perceived as having a relatively supportive or neutral relationship with the Obama Administration and expectations of supportive views on the government is likely to rise in opposition to the Fox News coverage of the crisis. Yet, it should be noted that expectation of media bias toward or against a government is a different concept than hostile media effect framework in the tradition of political communication (Vallone, Ross, &

Lepper, 1985; Reid, 2012).

Although these two theoretical frameworks commonly place an emphasis on audiences' perception of media bias, the hostile media framework ascribes the cause of bias perception to the audience's political bias, presuming that news media reporting, in general, is neutral and impartial. By contrast, expectancy of media bias in crisis means more of inferential cognition regarding conventional media bias based on personal experience with, and social judgment of, a certain media channel.

**Disconfirmed expectancy and persuasive effectiveness.** Previous studies on EVT have found that the expectancy violation as a result of the interplay between source and message has a significant effect on persuasion (Kohn & Snook, 1976; Jussim et al., 1987). The expectancy violation occurs because people may be apt to perceive ulterior motives of communicator depending on the context (Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978; Priester & Petty, 1995; Walster, Aronson, & Abrahams, 1966; Petty, Priester, & Freinstein, 2001). Self-interestedness or propagandistic motives are the most common type of bias expectancy in communication. Indeed, if a person speaks against her or his self-interest in the message, the situation is considered an expectation violation and thus increases the believability of the communicator. Because people tend to believe a person should overcome the desire to pursue his or her own

self-interests, a violation of self-interestedness is perceived as more trustworthy and accurate than otherwise (Petty et al., 2001).

Recent studies have shown that EVT offered useful frameworks that are explicable to increasing persuasive effectiveness in various fields such as marketing and political communication. For example, Daun (2001) found that EVT is employed in "open architecture" offering which allows sales person to not only sell their own in-house investment products (such as mutual funds) to clients, but also those of other companies. The study found that providing a wide range of options is deem as clients-oriented advice based on client's attributional thinking on sales person's self-interestedness in such a behavior.

Also, expectation violation of style and format of a genre might be able to enhance communicative effectiveness as it feels as novel, fresh approach, and thus more attentive and persuasive (Pfau, 1992). That is, attack spots in political campaigns can be more persuasive by melding new flavors such as subtle, humor and self-effacing element unlike previous repulsive style of attack commercials. Another empirical study in political communication claimed that unexpected information from a political party can influence the public's support for the relevant policy (Bergen, 2012). Specifically, the study found that "republican labels attached to a typically Democratic policy increase support for the policy; likewise, Democratic labels attached to a policy associated with the Republican Party

increase support for the policy" (p.9).

To apply the EVT into the domain of media relations in government crisis, if a news media channel reports against their widely known political bias, it would be deemed as a violation of expected self-interestedness with less propagandistic motives in the news coverage. Therefore, we assume that if a pro-government news channel reports a pro-government message, or an anti-government news channel reveals anti-government view in crisis coverage, people might perceive it as a merely conventional propaganda. On the other hand, if the news channel reports in opposition to its usual bias, people tend to perceive low propagandistic motives in the message. Through the manipulation of media bias in crisis coverage (i.e., whether a news channel's message is in consistence to its political alignment with government or not), the study investigates how perceived confirmation or disconfirmation of message expectancy is related to communicative effectiveness. In this regards, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1. People would be more likely to perceive fairness when their expectation in crisis coverage is violated than when their expectation is confirmed.

**Hostile publics and valence of disconfirmed expectancy.** Previous finding based on EVT framework (Petty et al., 2001) showed that the outcome of expectancy violation is dependent on

whether a violator is considered in-group or out-group. In other words, whether the violated behaviors are favorable or unfavorable is suggested as a determinant in the attitude formation after the violation. Specifically, if a communicator speaks in an expected pattern, it is unclear whether he or she espouses the message because of trustworthy and accuracy or in pursuit of self-interest or propagandistic motives (Afifi, W. A., & Metts, S., 1998; Petty et al., 2001). As the motives of the communicator and the validity of the message are in doubt, evaluation of message validity mainly hinges on people's initial attitudes toward the communicator or the topic of the message and/or on how people identify the communicator's group category in relevance to the communicational context (Branscombe, Wann, Noel & Coleman, 1993; Jackson & Hymes, 1985; Marques, 1990; Marques, Robalo & Rocha, 1992; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988; Marques et al.,1988).

To note, EVT further proposes that the outcome of violated expectations are either positive or negative based on the characteristics of violated expectations and relationship with the violator (e.g., Black Sheep effect: Biernat, Vescio, & Billings, 1999; Marques, 1990; Marques, Robalo & Rocha, 1992; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988; Marques, Yzerbyt & Leyens, 1988). That is, if a person expects an in-group communicator to support himself or herself well yet ends up feeling betrayed, then the outcome of violation is negative and he or she thus might judge the in-group

communicator more adversely than a comparable out-group communicator. In another light, if an out-group member unexpectedly supports one's in-group member—for example, in an election—then the situation is perceived as positive expectancy violation as the in-group can be benefited by the sudden external endorsement. Thus, the same communication behavior is perceived differently based on "who did it" and the situation determines the valence of expectancy violation. One EVT study analyzes this phenomenon as "straightforward manifestation of esteem- enhancing in-group bias" (Biernat et al, p. 524).

In the context of crisis communication, the in-group polarization can be equivalent to self-enhancing motives in consumption of crisis coverage. To illustrate, if a person has an antagonistic view against the government, then he or she tends to identify the government and supportive media outlets as "out-group" category. Thus in this study, we are able to determine in- and out-group media based on public's sentiment toward the government under a crisis. To be specific, if a person's political ideology is consistent with the incumbent government (i.e., conservative person and conservative party government), pro-government media (i.e., conservative news channel) would be deemed as in-group media, while liberal media channel might look as out-group media.

In order to explore the EVT effect on the persuasion, we should examine general sentiment of publics toward a government under a crisis.

Previous studies revealed that it is natural to see publics under government crises hostile to the government as they consider government is the cause of the crisis per se (Gephart, 2007; Horsley & Barker, 2002; Lee, 2007; Lee, 2009 ). Therefore, it can be assumed that under crises hostile publics tend to perceive anti-government media as in-group, which is expected to show a greater level of suspicion and antagonism toward government accounts for a crisis, and pro-government media as out-group which might supposedly admit government accounts as official and legitimate.

Then, if anti-government media channel changes its tone as it argues for the government account for the crisis, the hostile public might perceive it to be a negative violation. The violation would disrupt the person's initial favorable impression toward the media channel as well as his or her own critical perspectives on the government crisis. Along the same lines, if the same person is exposed to anti-government crisis coverage by the media channel that has been considered pro-government, he or she might think it more valid and fairer, noticing that even the opposite political side supports the belief that he or she already held. Hence, when the same anti-government message is delivered through media crisis coverage, the pro-government media might be perceived even more persuasive by overcoming its political interest than anti-government media to the hostile publics.

Supposing that expectancy violation of out-group media is regarded as positive and increases the persuasive effect, while on the other hand, the expectancy violation of in-group media is regarded as negative and harms the believability of content, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H2a. When their expectations on crisis coverage are disconfirmed, publics will be more likely to perceive fairness when news channel is pro-government than when news media is anti-government.

H2b. When their expectations on crisis coverage are confirmed, publics will be more likely to perceive fairness when news channel is anti-government than when news media channel is pro-government.

## METHOD

### Participants and Crisis Cases

The participants comprised 231 undergraduate students enrolled in communication courses at a university in Korea. Males accounted for 41.1% (N=95) of the participants, and females, 58.9% (N=136). The age of participants are early twenties (Male: 23. 24; Female: 21.66). We selected two national crises which had taken place in Korea: The Mad Cow Disease (MCD) issue[1] and the sinking

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1) National case 1: The Mad Cow Disease issue. The 2008 U.S. beef protest in South Korea was not only about an importation issue between Korea and the U.S., but it also revealed severe

of the Cheonan warship[2]. As the two crises have been considered to be the most severe national crises, and a considerable time had passed since the outbreaks of the crises at the time of experiment (2 years since MCD crisis, 3 months since Cheonan crisis), the selection of those cases seemed a valid operationalization of post-national crisis situations. Also, as both crises happened under the MB administration rooted in conservative Grand National party, we believe that public's expectation about the way media cover the crisis based on political standing and relation to the incumbent government would be the same across two cases.

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social conflicts rooted in mutual distrust prevailing in the domestic political landscape. Right after a few anti-government news media reported implications that importation of American beef would put public health at a great risk of Mad Cow Disease (MCD), protests against reopening markets to U.S beef grew in scale and intensity. While pro-government news media criticized the demonstrations and claimed that protesters were misled by invalid and propagandistic "mad cow horror stories" on the internet, anti-government news media and demonstrators expanded the anti-government campaign into further attack other aspects of the political agenda such as education and health care issue (Ko, Lee & Choi, 2009).

2) National case 2: The sinking of the Cheonan warship. The Cheonan warship sinking in 2010 is also one of the cases that showed polarized public opinion and the credibility crisis surrounding traditional news sources. The Cheonan, a South Korean warship, exploded, broke in half and sank near a disputed sea border with North Korea on March 26, 2010, killing 46 of the 104 sailors aboard (*The New York Times*, 2010). South Korea presented forensic evidence gathered by a team of international experts from South Korea, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Sweden, concluding that the warship had been sunk by a North Korean torpedo fired by a midget submarine. However, anti-government news media and parties raised questions about the validity of the evidence. Gallup surveys in September, 2010, showed that only 32.5% of respondents trusted the official government report while the rest of the respondents showed considerable doubts.

## Experiment Design

To test the hypotheses, we employed a 2 (message type: confirmation of expected bias vs. disconfirmation of expected bias) X 2 (news media type: anti-government vs. pro-government) between-subject design. In order to arouse expectation-violation or expectation-confirmation in a message, it was necessary to consider two factors: public's perceptions about the traditional attitudes that news channels have toward the government and their awareness of whether the argument advocates or blames the government regarding the given crises.

People would have expectation-violation experience both when the news media channels, that have been supportive of the government, criticize the government and when the news media channels, which have been opposed to the government, support the government. In contrast, people would have expectation-confirmation experiences when the news media channels, that have been supportive of the government, further support the government as well as when those that have been antagonistic to the government continued to attack the government. In this regard, news media needed to be selected among Korean news dailies based on how obvious the political alignment or hostility of the news channel toward government has been in its journalistic routines.

Two Korean news dailies were selected; *The Chosunilbo Daily* and *The Kyunghyang Shinmun*,

which have been commonly perceived as having an overt political orientation: *The Chosunilbo Daily* is considered the pro-government news daily while *The Kyunghyang Shinmun* is considered the anti-government news daily.

For manipulating the expectation-violation conditions, we used the hostile news content toward the government with title of the pro-government media (*The Chosunilbo Daily)* and supportive news content with the title of the anti-government media (*The Kyunghyang Shinmun).*[3]

All the stimulus and questionnaires were written in Korean. Each respondent was randomly assigned to one of the four conditions, two message types and two media types (2: message types X 2: media types). In each experiment condition, participants were asked to answer the extent to which they thought the given argument was fairly written.

## Measurement and manipulation checks

We used one item ("I do believe that this commentary viewed the crisis fairly") to measure message fairness as a dependent variable. Prior to examining our hypotheses, we checked the effectiveness of manipulation. Two *T*-tests for the message types (confirmed expectation vs. disconfirmed expectation) and for media types (pro-government vs. anti-government) were conducted. As for the message types, we provided the participants with two items designed to assess the degree to which they think the argument was confirmed or disconfirmed expectancy of media bias: "I think the arguments in the newspaper is strongly disconfirmed what I expected about this newspaper" (1: strongly disagree to 7: strongly agree). The higher the score for the item, the more likely the participant is to perceive violated expectation in the news content, whereas the lower the score for such item, the more likely the participant is to perceive confirmed expectation. As expected, the mean for the manipulation check variable was higher in the expectation-violation condition ($M$=4.74, $SD$=1.61) than in the expectation-confirmation condition ($M$=2.85, $SD$= 1.23), and there were significant differences in the means ($t$=10.03, $df$=229, $p$<.001).

To indicate the media types as either pro-or anti-government media, the participant's perception of the relationship between the government

3) Two alternative versions of news coverage for each topic were prepared to measure the confirmed/disconfirmed bias of message effect: one was the pro-government message and the other was the anti-government message. In truth, the pro-government message was written by the pro-government paper, *The Chosunilbo Daily*. The other version of the message is the anti-government message and is actually written by the anti-government newspaper, *The Kyunghyang Shinmun*. Each article assigned the blame to either the government or the liberal protesters for the national crisis in government according to their widely known political bias. And each article used factual information to support their accusations— such as expert institution reports or expert quotes. And both articles are equally based on the same amount of factual information, with almost the same number of words used.

organization and news media was measured by asking participants the degree to which they think the given media has a good relationship with the government using the following scale: strongly hostile (1) to strongly favorable (7). The higher scores reflected a greater degree of perceived positive relationship between news media and government while lower scores indicated a greater degree of perceived hostile relationship between two parties. We found that participants regarded *The Chosunilbo Daily* ($M$=3.90, $SD$=1.24) as *pro-government* media and *The Kyunghyang Shinmun* as *anti-government* media ($M$=2.60, $SD$=1.36). There was a significant difference in the mean score between the two conditions ($t$= 10.031, $df$=229, $p$<.001).

## RESULTS

### Test of Hypotheses

A two-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine the main effect of message type and the interaction effect of message type and media type.

First, we examined the main effect of message type on participants' perceived fairness. The results showed that the message type has a significant direct effect ($F$=4.397, $df$=1, $p$<.001) while the direct effect of the media type was not significant ($F$=0.962, $df$= 1, $p$>.001). The result indicated that the participants in the disconfirmed expectation condition were more likely to highly evaluate the fairness of the given message ($F$=14.323, $df$=1, $p$<.001) than those in the confirmed expectation condition. Thus, H1 was supported (See also Table 1).

Second, we examined the interaction effect of message type and media type on the perceived fairness. The interaction effect of two independent variables was significant ($F$=12.698, $df$=1, $p$<.001) as expected (See also Figure 1). More specifically, the results indicated that the participants who were exposed to the message that violated bias expectation were more likely to perceive fairness in the message when the media was perceived hostile to a government than when the media was perceived favorable to a government.

Table 1. The Main Effects of Message and Media on Perceived Fairness

| Main Effect | Types | Means | Standard Deviation | Sum of Square | df | MS | F | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Message | Expectation–Confirmed | 3.190 | 1.278 | 6.840 | 1 | 6.840 | 4.397 | 0.037 |
| | Expectation–Violated | 3.530 | 1.280 | | | | | |
| Newspaper | Hostile | 3.284 | 1.324 | 1.496 | 1 | 1.496 | 0.962 | 0.328 |
| | Favorable | 3.435 | 1.250 | | | | | |

This result supported H2a (See also Table 2). On the other hand, the participants exposed to the message that confirmed bias expectation were more likely to perceive fairness in the message when the media was regarded as having a favorable relationship with a government than when the media is perceived as having a hostile relationship with a government. Therefore, we confirmed that H2b was also accepted (See also Table 2).

## Discussion

This study explores the communicative effectiveness of crisis coverage after an outbreak of a national crisis in relation to the interplay between media and message type. The findings indicated that the public tends to perceive more fairness of crisis coverage when a news channel argues against its pre-established relationship with the government.

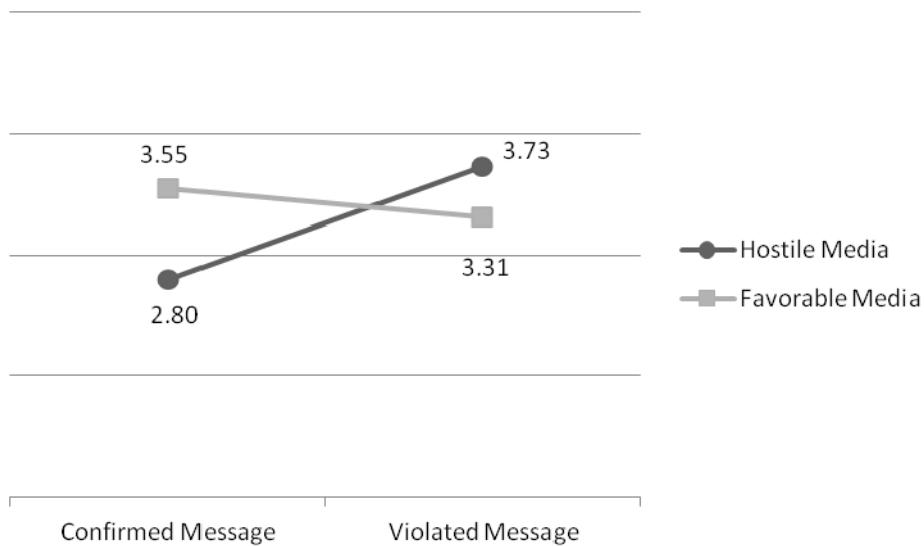Figure 1. The Means of Message and Media on Perceived Fairness



Table 2. The Interaction Effect of Message and Media on Perceived Fairness

| Interaction Effect | Message | Media | Means | Standard Deviation | Sum of Square | df | MS | F | p–value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Message* Newspaper | Expectation–Confirmed | Hostile | 2.804 | 1.285 | 19.755 | 1 | 19.755 | 12.698 | 0.000 |
| | | Favorable | 3.550 | 1.171 | | | | | |
| | Expectation–Violated | Hostile | 3.733 | 1.205 | | | | | |
| | | Favorable | 3.309 | 1.332 | | | | | |

The most notable contribution of this study might be the confirmation of the applicability of EVT to crisis communication. Previous EVT studies indicated that people tend to believe the message based on selective perceptions of a communicator and the message. According to this assumption, this study conjectures that people have a certain bias toward organizational and national crisis management and media crisis coverage. And the findings indicate that EVT might help to implement more effective communication strategies by improving the level of the message fairness in consideration of the public's perceptions about bias in media coverage. Considering that EVT has traditionally been rooted in and focused on interpersonal or group communication, this study might possibly open the door for future applications of EVT to more diverse contexts in mass communication.

Not only that, we note that this framework possibly extends the realm of crisis communication as previous studies have focused on the organizational response strategy to crisis (e.g., apology, denial, scapegoat... Coombs, 1995, 2007a, 2008, 2010), the public's attribution of crisis type based on perception of situations or reaction to a crisis response strategy (Coombs, 2007a, 2007b). That is, perspectives have been limited to the examination of the causal attribution of crisis events and the messages organizations send to deal with them. And yet, the exploration of the role of media and its relationship to stakeholders is to be explored.

We hope this study fills the void thus widens the understanding about the variant believability of crisis messages in relation to the public's traits and social identification.

The study is also expected to help provide practical guidelines for crisis managers and PR practitioners. First, the results suggested that PR practitioners should take the public's previously held attitudes toward government and media and their selective perceptions into account for designing a media strategy. Thus, situational analysis in crisis communication should consider the way the public perceptions of fairness in media message may have an impact beyond the public's attitudes toward organizations' responsibility or response strategy.

Secondly, the study implied more multi-dimensional aspects in media relations in contrast to the monolithic approach of assuming the favorable media relationship is bound to supportive publicity in crisis communication. Fairness perception is dependent on the context of "who says what." The findings showed that the same positive publicity has a different effectiveness in communication based on which channel reports it. That is, a pro-government message received more believability when it was covered by an anti-government news channel than pro-government media news channel.

Along the same lines, crisis managers and PR practitioners should keep in mind that hostile media might bring about more believability when they support organizational accounts. Thus, crisis

managers for government and other organizations might need to keep trying sophisticated strategies with the media, which has been perceived as having a hostile relationship with governments. Also, practitioners should consider the flip side of supportive relationships with news media, noticing the results that anti-government publicity can be seen as fairer when a pro-government news channel reports it versus an anti-government news channel.

Thus, this study's findings might be able to contribute to our understanding about the importance of media-government relationships and why and how those relationships should be considered in an effective crisis communication strategy.

## Limitation and Future Studies

The study demands further investigations into the application of EVT in crisis communication settings in consideration of several methodological and theoretical concerns. First, college student samples may not be a proper representation of general expectations held by audiences in a crisis communication. Considering that the Korean college population is thought to be politically liberal and the incumbent government and government-friendly media are rooted in conservative party, this study has limitations in its ability to reflect variant expectation toward media coverage or bias toward government and

media held by other demographics. Since national crisis perception and crisis coverage harbors different types and degrees of expectations based on demographical differences and the political nature of the public, further studies should examine the applicability of EVT to other population sets.

Also, the study used only two cases of Korean government crises and thus the result might not be generalizable to other kinds of national crises. Thus, noticing diverse types of crises and variant degrees of both salient perceived in a national crisis and sensationalism in media coverage, additional theorizing about the nature and type of national crisis is needed to further explore the applicability of EVT in crisis communication strategies. Finally, this study selected the two news media in South Korea. Therefore, the future study needs to examine the causal relations between the variables with other Korean news media such as Hankyoreh, Joongang Ilbo, and so on for more generalizable results of our study.

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# 정부 위기 상황에서 뉴스 미디어에 대한 기대 편향이 설득에 미치는 영향에 관한 연구 : 기대 위반 이론의 적용을 중심으로

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본 연구의 목적은 정부 위기 상황에서 공중이 뉴스 미디어에 대한 편향된 태도에 따라 위기 관련 뉴스 보도를 어떻게 인식하는지 살펴보는 것이었다. 이와 같은 목적을 달성하기 위하여 기대위반이론에 의거하여 2(메시지 유형: 기대 일치 메시지 대 기대 불일치 메시지)*2(뉴스 미디어 유형: 정부 친화 미디어 대 정부 적대 미디어)의 집단 간 실험 설계를 하였으며, 한국인들을 321명을 대상으로 실험연구를 진행하였다. 연구 결과, 본 연구에 참여한 응답자들은 뉴스미디어가 정부와 친밀하다고 느끼는 경우, 해당 미디어를 통해 나온 위기 관련 보도는 공중이 기존에 했던 뉴스미디어에 대한 기대와 일치하는 내용보다 불일치한 내용이 더욱 공정하다고 인식하는 경향이 있었다. 또한, 뉴스미디어가 정부와 적대적이라고 인식하는 경우에는 기존의 기대와 일치하는 내용이 그렇지 않은 내용보다 덜 편파적이라고 인식하는 것으로 나타났다. 결론 부분에 본 연구가 가지는 이론적·실무적 함의를 논의하였다.