CEOs' political tweets and perceived authenticity: Can expectancy violation be a pleasant surprise?

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1. Introduction

Many corporate executives embrace social purposes and connect them to a higher-order rationale for something larger than just the success of their company (Ferguson, 2018, April. 30). And in the Age of Twitter, social media makes it relatively easy for high-profile CEOs to not only position themselves as tech-savvy and approachable, but also to take a stand on controversial issues such as climate change, same-sex marriage, immigration, discrimination and gun control (Men & Tsai, 2012, 2016; Brandfog, 2013; Chatterji & Toffel, 2018). CEOs are not only stewards of their companies but also social actors, and it is no longer controversial to suggest that their communication efforts in the political arena may sway public opinion just like those of prominent politicians (Chatterji & Toffel, 2018). Of course the primary objective of such social activism is to inspire public support around a contentious issue or to address a particular social problem (Salmon, 1989; Deegan, 2001; Derville, 2005; Vegh, 2013), but it seems worth considering whether these CEO political tweets are an effective form of activism, providing new information or raising awareness in a new way.

While the outspokenness of CEOs has certainly proven effective as far as grabbing headlines is concerned (Chatterji & Toffel, 2016; Gelles, 2018), a number of researchers have scrutinized the extent to which CEO tweets can be said to be politically or financially effective (Reidenbach & Pitts, 1986; Chatterji & Toffel, 2016; Gaines-Ross, 2000, 2017; Park & Berger, 2004; Gelles, 2018). What has not been tested, however, is the perceived authenticity of CEO tweets. Bearing in mind that the instantaneous, reactive nature of tweets may give a more candid, uncensored understanding of a CEO's thoughts, this study aims to experimentally test perceptions of authenticity around CEO tweets, using expectancy violation (EV) theory as a guide (Burgoon, 2015).

Expectations can be constructed from a mix of factors including CEO characteristics, the history of the relationship between an organization and its publics, and the communications context (Burgoon, 2015; Burgoon, Dunbar, & Segrin, 2002). Traditionally, all violations of expectancy are considered to be negative, since expectancy is thought of as what is socially appropriate and predictable (Burgoon, White, & Greene, 1997; Floyd & Burgoon, 1999). Many EV studies have therefore focused on crisis communications, and suggested that a higher degree of expectancy, once breached, triggers a deeper degree of disappointment, which in turn incurs severer penalties in the form of negative public perceptions and uncertainty about a company's future performance (Kim, 2014; Sohn & Lariscy, 2015).

This study departs from conventional applications of EV theory, in which all violations are considered negative, and builds upon Burgoon (2015)'s assertion that violations form a valence continuum from negative to positive. The scholarly evidence suggests that when celebrities or media figures share their life experiences, communicating about them directly via social media (SM), other SM users tend to feel that the celebrity is socially present in their life and to entertain a more positive image of them (Kim & Song, 2016). Similarly, when male politicians tweet out personal information it tends to create a positive expectancy violation, enhancing their popularity and people's subsequent voting intentions (Lee, Oh, Lee, & Kim, 2018). Similarly, this study posits that a CEO's political coming-out may be seen as a deviation from stakeholders' expectations about corporate America's capitalist leaders, with the violation offering a surprising token of authenticity. If this is the case, the study further discusses what might best foster such perceived authenticity.

To address these objectives we first ask what constitutes expectedness in the context of SM messages, analyzing the latter into a)

message appropriateness - what is considered desirable for a CEO to do; and b) message consistency - the extent to which a given message is consistent with prior statements by the CEO. Secondly, we test experimentally the degree to which CEOs' political tweets might create an expectancy violation effect upon perceived authenticity. Thirdly, we consider the way a CEO's reward value and Twitter users' gratification needs may influence such perceived authenticity. Lastly, we discuss the significance the findings might have for an organization's public relations.

2. Literature review

2.1. Prescriptive and predictive expectancies

The notion of expectancy in EV theory has two domains: prescriptive and predictive expectations. According to Afifi and Burgoon (2000), prescriptive expectancy refers to what is desirable and appropriate within a bandwidth of individual tolerance. On the other hand, predictive expectancy refers to which messages recipients envisage a specific communicator might send in the future (Burgoon, White, & Greene, 1997; Floyd & Burgoon, 1999). Our study adjusts the definition of prescriptive expectancy to include social expectations about CEO message appropriateness and the behavior of business leaders; and of predictive expectancy to include message consistency - that is, how far a specific CEO's communication is in accord with his or her prior communications behaviors.

Building on Malhotra and Malhotra (2016)'s investigation of the Twitter usage patterns of 25 CEOs of publicly traded companies in America, we suggest that CEO Twitter users fall into one of two types: business maven and expressionist. The business maven type corresponds with most people's expectations of what CEO should tweet about; they use Twitter as a brand-building platform for their companies, dealing with professional updates, organizational accomplishments, and self-promotion, plus the advertising of events, services, and resources (Malhotra & Malhotra, 2016). Expressionist Twitter use, on the other hand, can be considered as deviating from prescriptive norms of business leader SM behavior; these CEOs often post non-business content, share the mundane details of their lives with their followers, and freely express their opinions on social or political issues (Malhotra & Malhotra, 2016). As Johnson (2012) and Burgoon (2015) suggest, both types of CEO messaging can be analyzed in terms of consistency so as to measure the extent to which they cohere with prior messaging by that CEO.

2.2. Expectancy violation

When their expectations are breached, people's arousal response is intensified (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Burgoon et al., 2002). As Heider (1979) puts it, people tend to move toward a "balanced state" owing to a desire "to have our cognitive food prepared so that it is easy to swallow and to assimilate" (p. 16). The way an expectancy violation is interpreted depends upon a cognitive schema comprising a mix of factors, for example the violator's perceived personal characteristics and relative cultural appropriateness (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, & Levy, 2015). Specifically, when violations seem to be ambiguous or suggest multiple meanings, their interpretation is affected by the violator's reward value (Burgoon, 2015).

As Festinger, Johnson, and others have pointed out, individuals tend to encode new information in ways that support their existing expectations, and to reorganize stored information in ways that support habitual affective or behavioral states (Burgoon, 2015; Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones et al., 2015; Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008; Lee et al., 2018). Considering this, it is worth asking how expectancy violation effects are influenced by CEO reward values.

2.3. CEO reward value

Like corporate reputation, a CEO's reward value is built upon stakeholders' collective judgments over time, based on information from the media, from personal experience, and from the company itself in the form of financial, marketing and strategy communications (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Fombrun, Van Riel, & Van Riel, 2004). From the point of view of stakeholders, the CEO not only manifests the company but embodies it. In a sense the CEO *is* the organization, and in the case of celebrity CEOs like Jack Welch, Warren Buffet, or Bill Gates, personal reputation can often be taken as synonymous with company reputation (Pincus et al., 1991, cited in Park & Berger, 2004, p.93). Moreover, communicators with high status, reputed expertise, purchasing power, physical attractiveness and perceived similarities to their communication recipients, have been appraised as delivering more favorable messages simply because of those characteristics (Burgoon, 2015). Unsurprisingly, public engagement by such corporate CEOs via their SM pages have a positive influence on organization-public relationships (Men & Tsai, 2016).

In this study, the term *CEO reward value* is used to refer to stakeholders' relative satisfaction with a CEO's activities and messaging. A high reward value would likely indicate perceptions of outstanding leadership, managerial excellence, effective communication, and ethical behaviors which contribute to corporate social responsibility and enhance corporate reputation (Fombrun et al., 2004; Lee & Shin, 2014).

The scholarly evidence suggests that positively-valenced encounters in social media are predictive of positive relational outcomes, such as reinforcement of social presence, para-social interactions and effective public engagement (Burgoon, Kelley, Newton, & Keeley-Dyreson, 1989; Kang, 2014; Le Poire & Burgoon, 1996; Lee & Jang, 2013; Lee & Shin, 2014; Lee et al., 2018). Likewise, the question presents itself as to whether a CEO's reward value tends to increase perceptions of CEO authenticity.

2.4. Perceived authenticity

The construct of *authenticity* is usually glossed as "frankness, candor, honesty, moral courage, saying no in the face of opposition, and not being afraid to stand alone with one's moral convictions" (Kant, 1930; Kidder, 2006, cited in Bowen, 2016, p. 567). At the core of the idea of authenticity - in leadership as elsewhere - there is a notion of being "true to oneself" and "being the same on the inside as one appears to be on the outside" (Molleda, 2010, cited in Bowen, 2010, p. 579). Taking it as read that the sense of authenticity in a leader is built upon consistent behavior over a period of time, this study focuses on how Twitter users think about CEO tweets, and whether they see them as instances of authentic dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Authenticity is a social construct (Grazian, 2003) in which no utterance can be context-independent or unconcerned with a specific audience (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Accordingly, drawing on the concept of the Arthur W. Page Society (2007) and Shen and Kim (2012)'s notions of perceived authenticity and the authentic enterprise, this study defines the perceived authenticity of a CEO's tweet stream in terms of other Twitter users' evaluation of its contents as truthful, transparent, and consistent.

According to the Arthur W. Page Society's core principles, to qualify as an authentic enterprise, an organization is required to "tell the truth [about] what's happening and provide an accurate picture of the company's character, ideals and practices"; "to prove that it means what it says through its actions"; and to "listen to its stakeholders [in order to] understand what the public wants and needs" (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007, pp.17˜18). In a similar vein, Avolio, Gardner and others point out that the essence of CEO authenticity is to remain true to one's self and to act in accordance with it (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Shen & Kim, 2012). If an executive leader's social media presence is perceived as fake, would-be-followers become mistrustful and tend to view all future posts as attempts to manipulate (Huy & Shipilov, 2012). If an organization's leaders wish to be perceived as genuine and transparent, their messages and actions in the virtual world should be in alignment with their messages and actions in the physical world; when such alignment is absent, authenticity is quickly destroyed. Transparency is manifest in behaviors such as openly sharing information or expressing one's true thoughts and feelings during interpersonal interaction (Peus, Wesche, Streicher, Braun, & Frey, 2012).

It seems evident that an individual is more likely to act consistently if they have a clear and objective assessment of themselves; and in turn, a high degree of self-consistency on the part of a leader encourages followers to perceive him or her as authentic (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008; Peus et al., 2012). It follows that a public figure who fails to live up to the values, beliefs, and principles they advocate will likely be subject to tight public scrutiny; conversely, a perceived alignment between a leader's values and their behaviors will engender increased credibility in the eyes of their followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005).

To summarize, perceived authenticity refers to a public evaluation of the degree to which a CEO's messages and actions are truthful, transparent and consistent. Bearing this in mind, we now explore the correlations between violation effects in CEO tweets, perceived authenticity, and the mediating effect of CEO reward value on the other two variables. We offer the following hypotheses:

H1. The expectancy violation effect may differ according to the perceived appropriateness and consistency of CEO messages.

H2.1. Perceptions of message appropriateness and consistency may correlate interactively with violation effects.

H2-2. Business maven CEO tweets may make people feel a higher violation effect when confronted by a political tweet than when encountering a professional tweet.

H2-3. Expressionist CEO tweets may make people feel a higher violation effect when confronted with a professional tweet than when encountering a political tweet.

H3. A higher violation effect may enhance perceptions of authenticity.

H4. A CEO's reward value is likely to mediate the impact of violation effects upon perceptions of authenticity.

Once an expectancy violation is experienced, individuals try to reduce feelings of dissonance and move toward a more balanced state (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones et al., 2015). Botan and Taylor (2004) argue for a co-creational perspective that "sees publics as co-creators of meaning, and communication as what makes it possible to agree to shared meanings, interpretations, and goals" (p. 93). Notwithstanding the brevity and seeming incompleteness of many Twitter messages, they can trigger complex communication exchanges. SM users "intentionally seek and share information and attempt to find satisfying information from richer forms before settling on the response(s) to the information" (Liu, Fraustino, & Jin, 2016, p. 629). This study posits that Twitter users' own needs and desires may cause changes in their cognitive evaluation behavior, which in turn influence perceptions of authenticity.

2.5. Twitter users' gratification needs

Twitter users are active and goal-oriented in their selection of media-use behaviors (Baran & Davis, 2006). Acting on their expectations and purposes, they seek various types of gratification and consciously select messages that fulfill their personal needs (Johnson & Yang, 2009; Meyrowitz, 2002; Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009). A single user may have multiple intentions or even play different roles while seeking gratification in the form of remuneration, entertainment, information, social integration, personal identity, or empowerment (Boyd, 2008; Men & Tsai, 2012; Tsai & Men, 2013). Exploring public motives for choosing to engage with CEOs' personal SM pages, Men and Tsai (2016) suggest that key motivations include "thought leadership, task attraction, information seeking, role modeling, job-related interests, and social networking - i.e., building connections with like-minded others" (p.938).

The current study follows this same line of thinking in suggesting that Twitter users' gratification requirements might influence

their perceptions of the authenticity of CEO tweets. Building on Men and Tsai (2016)'s classification of Twitter users' motivations and Han (2012)'s typology of Twitter users' responses to CEO tweets, the study proposes two distinct types of user each pursuing distinct gratification requirements: (1) logical social participants, and (2) happy life-oriented emotionalists. In this typology, the logical social participant group prioritize factual, clearly-sauced informational content, and have a strong tendency to support social justice and social improvement. Conversely, the happy life-oriented emotionalist group tend to prefer people-focused expressions of value or disclosures about CEOs' personal lives and are much less interested in posts about elite power or culture.

This study argues that perceived authenticity is influenced by SM users' gratification needs; that SM users who are more knowledgeable about and/or engaged in political and social issues are more likely to accept as authentic SM posts in which a CEO takes a stance on political and social issues as that such stances can be seen as positive expectancy violations. We consequently offer hypothesis 5:

H5. The perception of authenticity is likely to be more pronounced among *logical social participants* than it is among *happy life-oriented emotionalists*.

To summarize, then, our study posits that CEOs' political tweeting tends to trigger positive expectancy violations which enhance perceived authenticity, with the magnitude of the violation effect varying with the appropriateness and consistency of the messages. Twitter users' gratification needs, and the reward value attached to CEO tweets, also impact upon perceptions of authenticity.

3. Method

The study adopted a two-step survey process: a pre-test screening of message stimuli, followed by a survey using experimental design. The survey was designed to test the extent to which political or business-related tweets create positive or negative violation effects and to correlate these effects with a) the appropriateness of CEO messaging and b) the consistency of the messaging compared with prior statements by the same CEO. The design also addressed the question of whether CEO reward value and Twitter users' gratification needs might influence perceptions of the authenticity of CEO tweets.

3.1. Stimuli construction and manipulation

For the pre-test, we selected some actual tweets of the 20 most influential CEO tweeters (Dubois, 2016), grouping messages in order to test respondents' reaction to different types of tweet: business-promotion tweets, public stand-taking tweets, and personal tweets. A total of 116 respondents (48% men; 60% aged between 20 and 50) were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Although concerns have been expressed about the reliability of data derived from MTurk, due to its non-probability online sampling system, recent studies have found it to be as reliable as data acquired using other methods (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012). This survey was built using the online survey system Qualtrics, and participants were given a link to the survey. Participants were told they were taking part in a study on Twitter usage and shown mock-ups of Twitter pages. They were then asked to consider 25 personal, professional or political CEO Twitter posts, with the selection including 5 personal posts (all $ts > 2.57$, $ps < .001$), 5 political posts (all $ts > 2.51$, $ps < .001$) and 5 professional posts (all $ts > 2.54$, $ps < .001$). The personal messages concerned interactions with the CEOs' friends and family, personal likes and dislikes, and everyday life. The professional posts featured CEOs' business activities. And the political messages included CEO tweets on social or controversial issues. Table 1 shows the CEO tweets used as message stimuli.

Table 1
CEO Twitter Posts.

CEO Twitter Posts	
Professional posts	"@StartUp's USD2,000 Bootcamp of our company could help push your business in the right direction"
	"If you're into video game development, consider applying to our company"
	"We are thrilled to open a Piazza Liberty store in this city rich with art and creativity. Ciao Milano!"
	"Today is #EqualPayDay & there is still a #paygap, albeit lower in our company. All for one, that's everyone's problem! Take action with @AUW now"
	"We increased maternity leave from 12 weeks to 18, and in turn halved the rate at which new mothers quit #Maternityleave"
Political posts	"I am grateful to the transgender members of the military for their service. # LetThemServe."
	"You don't just imagine a better future. You create it. This #PrideMonth"
	"Dreamers are our neighbors, our friends and our co-workers. This is their home. Congress needs to act now to #DefendDACA. #WithDreamers"
	"Given that Gen Z will finally be the ones to solve gun control, we must collectively agree to tighten up the gun control issue to prevent Gen Z to take seriously its critical commentary and jokes."
	"Climate change is real. Leaving Paris is not good for America or the world #climate change"
Personal posts	"Why I jumped out of a traffic jam and ran 15 blocks through sweltering Manhattan"
	"Love the movie, Handmaiden. The movie director also made original Korean Oldboy"
	"Saying a sad goodbye to our beloved dog Zumo, but celebrating her wonderful life."
	"How my bottle saved me from a serious slip on the rocks hiking across Corsica"
	"The tea — actually the diet root beer—was great. But the conversation and your insights were even better!!

3.2. Data analysis procedure

A total of 268 U.S. adults were recruited via MTurk to join a 2 × 2 factorial design survey. To ensure familiarity with the medium only current Twitter users were allowed to participate. Participants received an online link and were randomly assigned to one of four conditions with the between-subject factors: either business maven (BM) CEOs or expressionist (EX) CEOs; and either professional or political tweets. A fictional IT company and its CEO - with a gender-neutral name - was described in a news article to reduce the potential impact of prior bias or pre-existing sentiments about specific companies. Bearing in mind Lee and Jang (2013)'s finding that even where there is no preexisting attitude toward the target a direct SM conversation induces more favorable impressions and intentions, the condition of CEO reward value was manipulated in the fictitious article that featured 'Taylor Williams' as a highly reputable CEO who was driving record sales and excellent consumer satisfaction and described the company as having high levels of corporate social responsibility and ethical decision-making.

Of the respondents 50% were in their 20 s or 30 s, 32.91% in their 30 s or 40 s, 11.11% in their 40 s or 50 s, 3.85%, in their 50 s or 60 s, and 2.14% in their 60 s or above. 44.1% of respondents were male and 54.7% female. 43.59% of respondents had a university (4-year) bachelor's degree, 13.68% a master's degree, and 10.68% a (2-year) associate degree. 39.32% of respondents used Twitter multiple times per day, with 26.92% using the platform once a day. 82.48% of respondents were found to be following social media influencers, and participants themselves had an average number of 477 followers.

3.3. Measurement

After reading Twitter messages from Taylor Williams, participants were asked to answer several questions designed to determine if participants had read them carefully, e.g. "What is Taylor William's job?" and "Where were the messages featured?". Responses from 38 participants who were unable to correctly answer some manipulation check questions were eliminated from the data set. ANCOVA analysis showed that individuals perceived CEO tweets updating business status to be more appropriate ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .69$) than mundane or personal tweets ($M = 3.36$, $SD = .78$), $F(1, 228) = 20.568$, $p < .001$, Partial $\eta 2 = .083$. An additional analysis was conducted to measure participants' perceptions of message consistency. When a #paygap tweet ($M = 4.16$, $SD = .77$) was suggested, respondents found this to be more consistent with prior CEO messages than when a #LGBTQ tweet ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .94$) was suggested ($F(1, 225) = 8.574$, $p = .004$, Partial $\eta 2 = .037$). All stimuli achieved the level of manipulation necessary to manifest a difference between groups.

3.3.1. Expectancy violation and its effect

Drawing on Johnson (2012)'s operationalization of expectancy violation, the survey asked respondents to respond to the questions: "to what extent did the message meet your expectations about social behavior?", "Were you surprised by the posting?" and "To what extent did the message meet your expectations about language use?" The Cronbach's α for the scale was .782 ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.80$).

3.3.2. Perceived authenticity

This term refers to stakeholder perceptions of a CEO's true self, based on the congruence or discrepancy between the messages they utter and their actions (Molleda, 2010; Shen & Kim, 2012). Participants were asked to indicate how well a given tweet showed the CEO to be authentic, by scoring the statements "The CEO's tweet is transparent"; "The CEO's tweet is congruent with their previous tweets"; "I believe this CEO's tweet is genuine"; and "I believe the CEO's tweet is trustworthy" - using a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's α for this scale was .835 ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.08$).

3.3.3. CEO reward value

To investigate this variable, participants were asked to respond to a 'news' story featuring a CEO's successful career and outstanding entrepreneurship; their leadership, communication, and ethical behaviors; managerial excellence; and their CSR or corporate philanthropy (Carroll, 1979; Choi & Wang, 2007; Fombrun et al., 2004). Participants gave their impressions by responding to 7 questions and their answers were evaluated. The Cronbach's α for this scale was .904, with a mean score of 4.52 ($SD = 1.43$).

3.3.4. Twitter user gratification type

Twitter user gratification types were investigated by asking participants how well various statements described their Twitter usage profile on a scale of 1–5, with the statements mapped onto Han (2012)'s scale of (a) logical social participants and (b) happy life-oriented emotionalists. Statements for logical social participants included: "I once posted a call to action for social justice"; "I have clicked a "like" button under political posts by those I follow"; "I have retweeted political posts by those I follow"; and "I once signed an online petition for social justice". Cronbach's α for the scale was .89, with a mean score of 2.88 ($SD = 1.18$). Statements for the life-oriented emotionalists included: "I like talking about my daily routine"; "I love to comment on or reply to friends' posts"; "I report or share the latest news"; and "I keep myself up-to-date on new lifestyle trends". Cronbach's α for this scale was .84, with a mean score of 3.18 ($SD = .91$). To validate whether participants apparently explain the two homogeneous groups, k-means clustering analysis was employed (Schaffer & Green, 1998). Considering Kathiresan and Sumathi (2012)'s suggestion that z-score ranking tends to give better clustering results than does random initialization based on selection of initial centroids, this study used the former method to successfully divide the ranked cases of participants into two groups, (a) logical social participants ($N = 116$) or (b) happy life-oriented emotionalists ($N = 114$).

4. Results

All hypotheses and research questions were designed, firstly, to shed light on the conditional effect of different message types and their perceived appropriateness or consistency on perceptions of CEO authenticity; and secondly to explore whether Twitter users' reward values and gratification needs influence the impact of CEO tweets on perceived authenticity. To this end, we conducted a series of analysis of variance (ANOVA), analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) tests and univariate linear regression and bootstrapping analyses (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) in order to evaluate the mediating effect of CEO reward value between violation effects and perceived authenticity.

H1-1 predicted that the expectancy violation effect might vary with the perceived appropriateness of the message to leadership of a business. The ANOVA test showed that different levels of message appropriateness produced a difference in violation effect ($F(1,$ $228) = 4.047, p = .045$) between expressionist CEO tweets ($M = 4.12, SD = .74$) and business maven CEO tweets ($M = 3.92,$ $SD = .74$). H1-1 is therefore supported. H1-2 predicted that the expectancy violation effect might vary with message consistency in the suggested professional and political tweets (#paygap and #LGBTQ). The ANOVA test result indicated that different levels of message consistency produced a difference in violation effect ($F(1, 228) = 12.013, p = .001$) between the #paygap tweet ($M = 3.83,$ $SD = .78$) and the #LGBTQ tweet ($M = 4.17, SD = .69$). H1-2 is therefore supported.

H2 predicted that message appropriateness and consistency correlate interactively with the violation effect. The ANCOVA test evaluated each variable at an alpha level of .05, and suggested message appropriateness and consistency have an interaction effect on the violation ($F(1, 223) = 6.11, p = .014$, Partial $\eta 2 = .027$). Those exposed to business maven-type CEO messages (e.g. business updates) evinced a higher violation effect when confronted with a professional tweet (#paygap tweet: $M = 4.30, SD = .66$) than did those confronted with the political tweet (#LGBTQ tweet: $M = 4.24, SD = .64$). On the other hand, those exposed to expressionist-type CEO messages (e.g., lifestyle update) evinced a higher violation effect when confronted with a political tweet (#LGBTQ tweet: $M = 4.12, SD = .69$) than did those confronted with a professional tweet (#paygap tweet: $M = 3.65, SD = .76$). These results tend to confirm that CEO message types are indeed a predictor of positive violation effects, and that the overall effect is more pronounced among those exposed to business maven CEO tweets. Therefore, H2-1's hypothesis of an interaction effect was supported. However, H2-2 and H2-3 were not supported, since participants exposed to business maven-type tweets showed a higher violation effect when reacting to the #paygap tweet than when reacting to the #LGBTQ tweet, while those exposed to expressionist tweets indicated a higher violation effect when reacting to the #LGBTQ tweet than when reacting to the #paygap tweet.

H3 predicted a positive correlation between violation effect and perceived authenticity. This was tested using the univariate linear regression model test, with the two conditioning factors of message appropriateness and consistency as variables. The covariate violation effect along with perceived authenticity, and the two categorical factors message appropriateness and consistency, were included in the model to measure the effect of the two factors on perceived authenticity. The result suggested that the violation effect shows a positive correlation with perceived authenticity ($B = .442, p < .001, \eta 2 = .300$). H3 was therefore supported. Overall, the H2 and H3 test results indicate that CEO message types are indeed predictors of both positive violation effects and of perceived authenticity.

H4 suggested that CEO reward value would mediate the impact of violation effects upon the perceived authenticity of tweets. Bootstrapping analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) was used to investigate this potential relationship between the two variables. Results indicated that violation effect was a significant predictor of reward value ($b = 0.423, SE = .057 p = .001$), and that reward value was a significant predictor of perceived authenticity ($b = .417, SE = .061, p = .001$). After controlling for the mediating effect of reward value ($b = 0.434, SE = .060, p = .001$), violation effect was also seen to be a predictor of perceived authenticity, suggesting partial mediation only. Approximately 51.6% of the variance in perceived authenticity was accounted for by the two predictors violation effect and reward value ($R^2 = 0.516$). The indirect effect was tested using a bootstrapping estimation approach with 2000 samples, and the results indicated a significant indirect coefficient ($b = 0.177, SE = .031, p = .001$; 95% CI [.106, .208]). Violation effects as mediated by reward value were associated with a rise in perceived authenticity scores of approximately 0.143 points. In other words, reward value is a significant factor in helping to explain why those experiencing positive violation effects tend to perceive CEO tweets as more authentic. H4 is therefore supported.

H5 predicted that Twitter users' gratification needs would influence their perceptions of authenticity, and that this effect would likely be more pronounced among logical participant respondents than it was among life-oriented emotionalist respondents. An ANOVA test of responses from the two groups indicated, firstly, that perceived authenticity is indeed influenced by Twitter users' gratification needs ($F(1, 228) = 17.353 p = .001$), and secondly that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups, with perceptions of the authenticity of CEO tweets significantly higher among logical social participants ($M = 4.20,$ $SE = .071$) than they were among happy life-oriented emotionalists ($M = 3.76, SE = .114$). H5 is consequently supported.

5. Conclusion and discussion

The current study set out to experimentally assess the effect of CEO political tweets on public perceptions of authenticity and achieved some valuable insights. First, the findings suggest that CEOs' political tweets trigger a positive violation effect and enhance perceptions of authenticity - countering the traditional view that all or most expectancy violations are negative, and supporting the prediction of EV theory that positive violations can generate a positive communication outcome while enhancing perceptions of authenticity. The latter effect is significantly influenced by the violator's reward value, based on stakeholders accumulated collective judgments about CEO behavior. This finding is consistent with Burgoon (2015)'s suppositions that a high reward value improves the chances of a communicator's actions being favorably evaluated and that expectancy violations can have a greater impact than

expectancy confirmation if the violation is a positive one.

Second, this study confirms the hypothesis that the magnitude of positive expectancy violation effects varies according to SM users' differing gratification requirements. When a CEO tweets out political messages, the logical social participant group were found to be more likely to view the messages as authentic than were the happy life-oriented emotionalist group. The findings are in line with the assertion that individuals bring different expectations about the communicator, which guide their reactions to identical messages, with differing consequences (Lee et al., 2018). Similarly, when organizations take a stance on socio-political issues, SM users' attitudes and intentions toward the companies were found to be more supportive when those stances were congruent with users' gratification needs than when they were incongruent (Dodd & Supa, 2014).

While the current author believes these findings have real value, the study nevertheless has limitations which should be noted when considering future research. First, while our message stimuli came from real CEOs, the fact that we used a fictitious CEO for the CEO reward value stimulus might cast some doubt on whether the findings would apply to real CEOs, about whom people may hold settled opinions or have specific expectations which would color interpretations of their SM behavior. This limitation may have either suppressed or amplified the effects observed in the current study.

A second limitation comes from the fact that although expectancy itself is cross-cultural, its evaluative content consists of subjective and culturally specific norms, with every society having its own set of expectancies for a given type of encounter (FitzGerald, 2003; Gudykunst, 1997, 1998; Burgoon & Hubbard, 2005). It is therefore very difficult to identify expectancies with cross-culture applicability, and the types of CEO expectancy violation discussed in this study cannot be simply generalized across different cultural settings. For instance, individuals from a culture where uncertainty avoidance is strongly normative are less likely to tolerate deviant behavior, and more likely to see it as a negative expectancy violation, than are individuals from a culture where people are more comfortable with uncertainty and a wide range of different behaviors are tolerated (Hofestede,1980; Burgoon, 2015). Therefore, we recommend that any future research in this field should include some analysis of cultural differences so as to refine our understanding of the nuances of expectancy violation effects arising from CEO SM posts, and of their impact on public perceptions.

A conclusion to take away from this study is that CEOs are stewards of their companies, and are therefore seen by company stakeholders as squarely in the center of the picture, not on the periphery. As Kent and Taylor (2002) have pointed out, an organization that engages in authentic communication with its publics can build a high-quality relationship with them, and a CEO's tweeted opinion about a social issue can play a crucial part in such authentic communication. In today's digital societies and economies, multiple publics have unprecedented levels of impact and influence, and it is more essential than ever for companies to develop organizational authenticity, built upon trust, transparency and consistency. The traditional tight-lipped, hidebound style of management communications may well prevent companies from achieving such authenticity. A CEO's spontaneous, 140-character tweets may sometimes upset some stakeholders or cause misunderstanding; but if they improve the overall quality of an organization's communication with its public then that is a risk that's well worth taking. Most companies will want to carefully consider the potential benefits and costs of their CEO taking a political stand: it may alienate customers who disagree, while others may consider ideology, values and morality inappropriate ground for a CEO to step onto. However the rewards of being authentic, engaged and transparent are likely to outweigh the risks.

Extending on Dodd & Supa (2014)'s assertion, this author views such CEO public activism is also a welcome counterbalance to the largely hidden ways in which corporate leaders have traditionally influenced governments and shaped public policy in favor of their company or themselves. It may also help stakeholders develop their understanding of where the company is positioned in the wider society, and who it should be doing business with. But accelerating from zero to public activism is hard. The cause should be selected carefully, should feel plausible to stakeholders, and should be embedded right across the company, informing hiring policy, supply chain management and company interactions with employees and stakeholders (Edelman, 2018). In today's social media-dominated world, where multiple online voices help to shape the process of organizational legitimacy (Bakhtin, 1981,1986), CEOs arguably have little choice but to enter the public conversation, explaining what they stand for and why they deserve a hearing (Weber Shandwick, 2015). But the positions they take need to reflect their beliefs and their leadership style if they want to be seen as authentic. Those CEOs who not only adopt positions but actually live up to the values, beliefs, and principles they advocate will likely garner increased reward value and greater credibility in the eyes of stakeholders (Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Gardner et al., 2005; Grazian, 2003; Marwick & Boyd, 2011). More importantly, such CEOs can be change agents, not just in their industry but in society at large.

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