



Collective Memory in the Age of SNS Big Data: Cultural Sensitivity, Moral Outrage, and Reputation Repair in Global Marketing

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual article advances a theory of collective memory violation in global marketing. It contends that certain brand crises cannot be fully understood as routine cases of value-related misconduct, creative failure, or general cultural insensitivity. Rather, these crises arise when a brand's messaging, symbolism, timing, or product positioning intersects with socially protected memories of historical suffering, democratic movements, or shared trauma. Building on literature in collective memory, cultural trauma, moral outrage, brand crises, and crisis communication, the article introduces a five-stage process model that explains how symbolic conflict evolves into reputational delegitimation through public moral interpretation and the amplification of outrage. It further proposes a typology of memory-related brand crises and outlines memory-sensitive recovery strategies that go beyond conventional apology-based responses. The Starbucks Korea "5.18 Tank Day" controversy is used as the central illustrative case, demonstrating how a global brand can provoke moral outrage by inadvertently activating nationally institutionalized remembrance through seemingly commercial communication. The article contributes to international marketing by framing historical memory as a legitimacy system relevant to markets, to crisis communication by identifying conditions under which standard response strategies fall short, and to managerial practice by providing a checklist for anticipatory screening, symbolic withdrawal, and culturally grounded repair in sensitive contexts.

Keywords: Social Network Service, Brand Crisis, Big Data, Crisis Communication, Reputation Repair, Global Marketing

JEL Classifications: M31; M14; M16; M37

1. INTRODUCTION

Global brands increasingly operate in markets where the past functions not merely as background context but as an active source of identity, legitimacy, and political meaning. Research on collective memory suggests that societies do not simply preserve historical events as neutral facts; instead, they institutionalize selective recollections through narratives, commemorations, symbols, and practices that shape collective identity (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995; Olick and Robbins, 1998). Within cultural trauma theory, certain historical events gain particular significance

because they leave lasting imprints on group consciousness and transform how communities interpret harm, accountability, and remembrance (Alexander, 2004; Hirschberger, 2018). From a marketing standpoint, this implies that historical memory is embedded within the marketplace itself, influencing what is perceived as appropriate symbolism, legitimate creativity, suitable timing, and respectful brand conduct in specific local contexts. Recent research on cultural adaptation in international markets similarly emphasizes that firms must account for cultural values, social norms, language features, and consumer perceptions when operating across national contexts (Prokopenko et al., 2026).

The Starbucks Korea “5.18 Tank Day” incident demonstrates this dynamic with particular clarity. On May 18, 2026, as South Korea commemorated the anniversary of the May 18 Democratization Movement, Starbucks Korea launched a “Tank Day” tumbler promotion that drew criticism for being linked to memories of the democratic movement and the military violence associated with the Gwangju uprising (Yonhap News Agency, 2026). Reports also noted concern over promotional language that some audiences interpreted as echoing authoritarian-era violence and its concealment. Starbucks Korea discontinued the campaign and issued an apology after public criticism intensified (Yonhap News Agency, 2026). Subsequent coverage pointed to leadership accountability, additional public apologies, an internal investigation, and measurable commercial repercussions (Associated Press, 2026). The incident was thus not regarded merely as a copywriting mistake; rather, it was interpreted as a symbolic breach of collective memory.

The historical context is significant. The May 18 Democratization Movement is officially commemorated in South Korea as a democratic struggle linked to sacrifice, human rights, and resistance to authoritarian violence. The records of the uprising have also been internationally recognized through UNESCO’s Memory of the World Programme as the Human Rights Documentary Heritage 1980 Archives for the May 18th Democratic Uprising against Military Regime, in Gwangju, Republic of Korea (UNESCO, n.d.). The Starbucks case did not intersect with a private or peripheral memory; it intersected with an institutionalized public memory sustained through commemorative practices, archival preservation, civic identity, and public education.

This article raises a broader question: What occurs when brands violate collective memory, and how should such crises be conceptualized and addressed? Existing research on brand crises has established important distinctions between performance-related and values-related crises, while crisis communication scholarship provides well-developed guidance on reputation management, image repair, and response strategies (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007; Hansen et al., 2018). However, these bodies of work have not sufficiently identified the distinct type of crisis in which market communication is interpreted through public remembrance of trauma, repression, or democratic sacrifice. At the same time, marketing research has explored how brands draw on the past through heritage, nostalgia, retro, and vintage, but this literature largely emphasizes value creation from the past rather than legitimacy erosion resulting from offense to it (Dam et al., 2024; Pecot et al., 2023).

The article advances three contributions. First, it conceptualizes collective-memory violation as a distinct form of legitimacy-threatening brand crisis in which commercial meaning conflicts with socially protected historical meaning. Second, rather than formulating formal propositions, it develops a process model explaining how memory-related crises unfold through symbolic collision, public moral interpretation, outrage amplification, reputational delegitimation, and memory-sensitive repair. Third, it presents a typology of memory-related brand crises along with a practical repair checklist for global marketing managers. The

argument is conceptual rather than empirical, with the Starbucks Korea controversy serving as the primary illustrative case rather than as statistical evidence.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Collective Memory and Cultural Trauma

Collective memory scholarship clarifies why certain historical references carry exceptional symbolic significance. Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) differentiate forms of memory that stabilize identity through cultural expression, while Olick and Robbins (1998) demonstrate that social memory is not a singular psychological repository but a field of mnemonic practices through which societies construct and negotiate the past. In trauma-oriented perspectives, a disruptive historical event becomes culturally formative when a collectivity comes to understand itself as shaped by that event and obligated to remember it publicly (Alexander, 2004; Hirschberger, 2018). These insights are particularly relevant for markets, as brands communicate through signs, rituals, temporal cues, and narratives—the same elements through which collective memory is activated and protected.

Collective memory is not solely retrospective; it is also normative. It informs communities about what should be honored, what must not be trivialized, and which symbols demand caution. Commemorative dates, memorial sites, survivor testimonies, archives, school curricula, and public ceremonies all contribute to shaping a society’s memory infrastructure. Brand communication becomes risky when it unintentionally enters this infrastructure and reconfigures protected meanings for commercial purposes. This risk intensifies when the remembered event involves state violence, democratization, colonial harm, genocide, racial terror, or political martyrdom.

2.2. Moral Outrage and Digital Amplification

Research on moral outrage helps clarify why symbolic harms can generate strong market reactions. Stakeholders become angry not only in response to direct material harm but also when they judge an organization as irresponsible, disrespectful, hypocritical, or morally negligent (Antonetti and Maklan, 2016). In studies of corporate social irresponsibility, moral emotions play a central role in punitive responses such as negative word of mouth, boycott intentions, and reputational sanctions (Antonetti, 2020; Valor et al., 2022). A collective-memory violation intensifies these dynamics because the perceived victim is not just an individual consumer but a remembered community that includes victims, survivors, descendants, and citizens who regard the memory as part of civic identity.

Digital media reshapes both the speed and form of mnemonic outrage. Social platforms enable screenshots, hashtags, memes, historical explanations, and calls for accountability to spread rapidly. Recent research similarly links social media engagement, cancel culture attitudes, and brand attitudes, suggesting that digitally networked consumer environments can intensify reputational risks for brands (Banda and Haarhoff, 2026). Recent

research on collective memory and social media further suggests that digital platforms are not merely communication channels but also spaces in which collective memories are produced, circulated, contested, and amplified (Adriaansen and Smit, 2025).

Brand crisis research indicates that social media firestorms can influence consumer judgments both in the short term and over time (Hansen et al., 2018). In memory-related crises, such reactions may be particularly persistent because they connect the brand to a morally charged historical narrative rather than to a temporary service failure. Online publics can preserve the offending message, reinterpret it through historical frames, and repeatedly link the brand to the violated memory. As a result, digital amplification does not simply increase the visibility of criticism; it can deepen the moral meaning of the crisis by embedding the brand's action within a broader collective memory.

2.3. Brand Crisis, Cultural Sensitivity, and Reputation Repair

Crisis communication theory offers useful but incomplete tools for understanding memory-related brand crises. Situational crisis communication theory highlights the alignment between perceived crisis responsibility and response strategy (Coombs, 2007). Image repair theory outlines rhetorical options such as denial, evasion of responsibility, corrective action, and mortification (Benoit, 1997). Similarly, brand crisis research distinguishes between performance-related and values-related failures, showing that the latter can be particularly damaging when consumers have strong self-brand connections (Baghi and Gabrielli, 2021). Recent research on activist brands further shows that consumers respond negatively when brands commit moral transgressions that contradict their stated values or social positioning (Mahmud and Guzman, 2025).

However, collective-memory violation is not equivalent to general values-related misconduct. A values-related crisis may involve labor exploitation, discrimination, corruption, or hypocrisy, whereas a memory-related crisis concerns a brand's relationship to the symbolic and moral order of public remembrance. It is often triggered not by intentional wrongdoing but by poor timing, ambiguous language, visual resemblance, or a failure to recognize commemorative contexts. The severity arises because audiences interpret the brand's action as a statement about the value of victims, survivors, democratic struggle, or historical suffering. Consequently, standard crisis responses such as "we regret any inconvenience" or "we did not intend offense" may be inadequate, as the public demands historical acknowledgment and moral accountability rather than simple clarification.

3. CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION: COLLECTIVE-MEMORY VIOLATION

This article defines collective-memory violation as a type of brand crisis that occurs when market communication, product symbolism, timing, or promotional framing is publicly interpreted as disrespecting, trivializing, commodifying, or inadvertently echoing a socially protected historical memory. The definition

includes four elements. First, the trigger is a brand action, such as an advertisement, product name, promotion, image, social media post, event, or customer communication. Second, the action intersects with public memory, including a remembered event, symbol, date, person, place, slogan, or trauma. Third, this intersection is judged as morally inappropriate by relevant stakeholders. Fourth, this interpretation threatens brand legitimacy by signaling historical incompetence, cultural negligence, or disrespect toward the community.

The central issue is not whether the brand intended to offend. Many memory-related crises involve ambiguous or absent intent. What matters is whether stakeholders determine that the brand has crossed a boundary surrounding collectively meaningful remembrance. This distinction is critical in global marketing, where managerial intent is often less visible than public interpretation. A campaign may be designed internally as a routine sales initiative, but if it is introduced on a commemorative date and employs language or imagery associated with trauma, it may be externally interpreted as mockery or desecration.

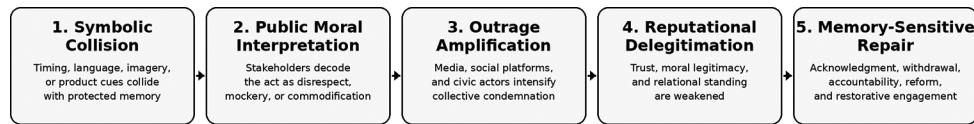
Collective-memory violation differs from general cultural insensitivity in four respects. First, it is linked to sacred temporality, where dates, anniversaries, memorial periods, and commemorative rituals intensify moral evaluation. Second, it involves condensed symbolism, in which a brief phrase, object, color scheme, product name, or visual design can trigger historically dense meanings. Third, it is grounded in public legitimacy systems, including archives, education systems, memorials, government ceremonies, activist groups, and media narratives. Fourth, it often generates intergenerational resonance, such that individuals who did not directly experience the original trauma may still feel a responsibility to protect the memory.

4. A PROCESS MODEL OF COLLECTIVE-MEMORY VIOLATION

Rather than presenting formal propositions, this article develops a process model. This approach is suitable because collective-memory violations unfold as interpretive and reputational sequences rather than as straightforward linear relationships. As illustrated in Figure 1, the model comprises five stages: symbolic collision, public moral interpretation, outrage amplification, reputational delegitimation, and memory-sensitive repair. The Starbucks Korea case demonstrates this sequence, while comparable cases involving Holocaust-related imagery, tragedy-associated language, or memorial-site symbolism indicate that the underlying logic extends across different markets.

4.1. Stage 1: Symbolic Collision

The first stage arises when a brand action intersects with symbols that are publicly associated with a traumatic event or civic struggle. This collision may involve timing, language, imagery, product design, promotional framing, or a combination of these elements. In the Starbucks Korea case, the risk did not stem from the word "tank" alone or from the date alone; rather, it emerged from the conjunction of militarized language, the May 18 commemoration,

Figure 1: A process model of collective-memory violation in global marketing

and the historical memory of military repression in Gwangju. Symbolic collision is therefore context-dependent: the same phrase may be innocuous in one market or temporal setting but highly charged in another.

For global brands, symbolic collision highlights the limits of standard localization practices. Accurate translation does not ensure sensitivity to collective memory. A slogan may be linguistically correct yet historically inappropriate, and a product name may be locally understandable yet unsuitable in a commemorative context. The managerial challenge lies in identifying high-risk intersections before launch, rather than after public interpretation has already solidified.

4.2. Stage 2: Public Moral Interpretation

The second stage involves the public interpretation of the act as morally meaningful. Collective memory theory indicates that meaning is socially mediated rather than determined by the sender. In a memory-related crisis, audiences tend to ask not whether the firm explicitly intended offense but what kind of relationship to history the act conveys. Does the brand appear to trivialize suffering? Does it convert a symbol of violence into a commercial cue? Does it neglect the community's obligation to remember? Once the act is interpreted as disrespectful, managerial explanations that focus solely on intent may be perceived as evasive.

Public moral interpretation is influenced by who speaks first and who is regarded as legitimate. Survivors, civic groups, historians, journalists, public officials, and culturally informed consumers can all shape the meaning of the act. When these actors frame the campaign as a violation of collective memory, the brand loses control over interpretation. The crisis shifts from a disagreement about advertising to a contest over moral legitimacy.

4.3. Stage 3: Outrage Amplification

The third stage is amplification. Social media platforms convert individual offense into collective outrage through speed, repetition, and visibility. Screenshots preserve the original content even after it is removed. Hashtags condense and circulate criticism. News coverage translates online reactions into broader public controversy. Civic actors link the brand's action to historical education, survivor memory, or political accountability. At this stage, outrage becomes networked rather than merely individual.

Memory-related outrage can spread rapidly because it provides a clear moral narrative: a powerful commercial actor has failed to respect a vulnerable or sacred past. This narrative is easily shared and difficult for the brand to counter. The more the incident appears to align with a broader pattern of foreign insensitivity, corporate negligence, or superficial localization, the more quickly outrage can extend beyond the brand's existing consumer base.

4.4. Stage 4: Reputational Delegitimation

The fourth stage arises when outrage undermines the brand's legitimacy rather than merely its popularity. At this point, the brand is no longer viewed simply as having made an error; it is perceived as culturally incompetent, morally unserious, or unworthy of local trust. Consumers may reinterpret prior corporate social responsibility initiatives, community engagement, or localization efforts as superficial. This reaction is consistent with research showing that a firm's bad reputation and crisis occurrence can shape perceptions of hypocrisy, especially when corporate social responsibility claims appear inconsistent with public behavior (Shim et al., 2021). This is the stage at which a communication failure escalates into a legitimacy crisis.

Reputational delegitimation is particularly likely when the brand is positioned around community, warmth, belonging, inclusion, or social responsibility. Such positioning generates expectations of cultural sensitivity (Alden et al., 1999). When the brand then violates a protected memory, stakeholders may perceive not only negligence but also hypocrisy. In the Starbucks Korea case, the brand's prominent role in everyday urban life and its community-oriented identity heightened the symbolic cost of appearing historically insensitive.

4.5. Stage 5: Memory-Sensitive Repair

The fifth stage concerns repair. Conventional crisis responses emphasize speed, consistency, responsibility, and corrective action. While these remain important, they are insufficient in collective-memory crises. The brand must demonstrate an understanding of the historical significance of the offense. Effective repair therefore requires symbolic withdrawal, explicit acknowledgment of the harmed memory, an apology without defensive qualification, accountability at the appropriate organizational level, and visible changes to approval processes.

Memory-sensitive repair may also involve restorative engagement. Depending on the severity of the incident, firms may need to consult historians, civic organizations, memorial institutions, survivor groups, or local cultural experts. The aim is not to turn trauma into another branding opportunity, but to demonstrate humility, learn from the community, and institutionalize safeguards to prevent recurrence. Repair is successful when publics recognize that the brand has internalized a historical lesson rather than merely a public relations response.

5. TYPOLOGY OF MEMORY-RELATED BRAND CRISES

The process model explains how collective-memory violations develop, while a typology clarifies their variation. Four types are particularly relevant for global marketing: anniversary collision

crises, traumatic-symbol commodification crises, memorial-site or survivorship trivialization crises, and mnemonic hypocrisy crises. These categories are not mutually exclusive; a single incident may encompass more than one type, and such overlap can intensify reputational damage. Table 1 summarizes these four crisis types, including their trigger logic, the reasons outrage intensifies, illustrative examples, and the corresponding priority responses.

The first type, anniversary collision crisis, arises when an otherwise routine marketing action is introduced during a protected commemorative period. The temporal context reshapes the meaning of the campaign. In the Starbucks Korea case, May 18 was not a neutral date on the calendar but a day of public remembrance, so the brand action was interpreted through sacred temporality rather than ordinary promotion.

The second type, traumatic-symbol commodification crisis, involves product or message elements that resemble symbols of violence, repression, or atrocity. In this case, the offense stems from the perceived transformation of suffering into style, humor, novelty, or commercial appeal. The risk is particularly high in fashion, retail, entertainment, and social media marketing, where visual resemblance alone can activate public memory even when designers assert benign intent.

The third type, memorial-site or survivorship trivialization crisis, occurs when brand language related to a tragedy, memorial event, or survivor community adopts an inappropriate emotional tone. A celebratory expression may be acceptable in one setting but deeply offensive in another if it appears to trivialize survival, death, mourning, or remembrance. The central issue here is not only symbolism but also tone.

The fourth type, mnemonic hypocrisy crisis, emerges when a brand's established identity intensifies the violation. Brands that emphasize local warmth, civic belonging, social purpose, or community care may face stronger backlash when they appear unaware of the community's protected memory. The violation contradicts the brand's own identity claims, generating reputational damage through perceived hypocrisy as well as historical insensitivity.

6. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS: A MEMORY-SENSITIVE REPAIR CHECKLIST

The main managerial implication is that brands operating across markets require a memory-sensitivity capability rather than relying solely on general cultural sensitivity policies. Conventional localization typically screens for linguistic accuracy, legal compliance, or consumer preferences, but this is insufficient in contexts where sacred dates, traumatic language, memorial symbols, and political histories remain publicly salient. A memory-sensitive firm therefore treats commemorative calendars and mnemonic symbols as strategic risk factors. Table 2 presents a memory-sensitive repair checklist covering preventive screening, crisis response, organizational accountability, structural reform, restorative engagement, and recovery monitoring.

A memory-sensitive firm must focus on both prevention and repair. Prevention requires developing a market-specific memory map that includes commemorative dates, high-risk historical language, sensitive symbols, memorial sites, relevant civic actors, and prior controversies. This map should not be treated as fixed, as memory politics evolve, the significance of anniversaries can shift, and new events may reactivate older meanings. Firms therefore need a review process that is both locally grounded and continuously updated.

During crisis response, the initial apology should avoid vague language that downplays the symbolic nature of the offense. Phrases such as “we regret the inconvenience” or “we did not intend to offend” may appear evasive if they fail to acknowledge the historical meaning of the harm. More credible responses explicitly recognize the commemorative context, accept responsibility for inadequate review, withdraw the triggering content, and announce concrete preventive measures. The key signal is that the brand acknowledges the moral legitimacy of the community's memory.

After the crisis, recovery should be assessed beyond short-term sales outcomes. Management should track trust, legitimacy, media

Table 1: Typology of memory-related brand crises

Type	Trigger logic	Why outrage intensifies	Illustrative examples	Priority response
Anniversary collision crisis	Campaign launches on a protected memorial date or civic anniversary.	Sacred temporality makes routine commercial messages appear disrespectful.	Starbucks Korea “5.18 Tank Day” on May 18, 2026.	Immediate withdrawal, recognition of commemorative significance, executive-level apology.
Traumatic-symbol commodification crisis	A product, slogan, or design resembles symbols linked to violence, repression, or atrocity.	Audiences see commercialization of suffering rather than creative expression.	Holocaust-reminiscent designs or authoritarian symbols used in fashion, advertising, or retail.	Remove the product, acknowledge symbolic meaning, install historical-symbol screening.
Memorial-site or survivorship trivialization crisis	Language around a tragedy-linked event appears flippant or celebratory in the wrong register.	Survivors and communities perceive emotional invalidation.	Tragedy-linked event communications that unintentionally echo suffering.	Rapid apology, event-specific review, memorial-awareness protocol.
Mnemonic hypocrisy crisis	A brand positioned as local, caring, or socially engaged violates memory norms that sustain local legitimacy.	The gap between proclaimed values and symbolic conduct deepens perceived hypocrisy.	Community-oriented global brands that violate democratic or traumatic memory.	Apology plus governance reform, accountability, and third-party or local oversight.

Table 2: Memory-sensitive repair checklist

Repair domain	Diagnostic question	Recommended action	Desired signal
Calendar risk	Does the launch date overlap with a memorial date, anniversary, mourning period, or state ceremony?	Maintain a market-specific commemorative calendar and require escalation for overlap.	Temporal awareness
Symbol risk	Could a term, object, color, slogan, or visual resemble traumatic or authoritarian symbolism?	Conduct local semiotic screening with native experts, not only translators.	Historical literacy
Context testing	Has the campaign been reviewed by people who understand the local mnemonic context?	Use a local review panel for high-risk launches.	Local competence
Escalation rule	Can frontline marketers stop a campaign before release if symbolic concerns emerge?	Create formal stop-launch authority and risk thresholds.	Governance seriousness
First response	Has the brand named the historical meaning of the offense?	Issue a direct apology that recognizes the memory violated.	Moral acknowledgment
Symbolic withdrawal	Has the triggering content been removed everywhere it circulated?	Remove the message, halt promotion, freeze related assets, and correct reposts.	Respectful retreat
Accountability	Is responsibility personalized and organizationally legible?	Assign accountability at the level matching public expectations.	Credibility
Structural reform	What changes prevent recurrence?	Revise approval processes, training, vendor rules, and market review architecture.	Reform
Restorative engagement	Has the firm re-entered the community through listening rather than branding?	Meet relevant civic groups, historians, memorial stakeholders, or bereaved associations where appropriate.	Relational humility
Recovery monitoring	Is recovery assessed only financially?	Track trust, legitimacy, local media tone, boycott persistence, and commemorative sensitivity over time.	Long-run learning

tone, local stakeholder sentiment, employee confidence, and whether the brand remains associated with the incident in search results or public discourse. A memory-related crisis can become embedded in the brand's own reputational memory. As a result, repair is not complete when negative coverage subsides, but only when stakeholders perceive clear evidence of institutional learning.

7. DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH AGENDA

This article positions collective memory as an underexamined source of market legitimacy. In international marketing, cultural adaptation is typically discussed in terms of language, consumption practices, consumer values, or local identity; the framework developed here introduces historical competence. Global brands must understand not only what consumers prefer but also what communities remember, mourn, protect, and resist commercializing. This reframes the managerial question from “Is this locally appealing?” to “Is this historically appropriate?”

The framework also extends crisis communication theory. Situational crisis communication theory and image repair theory remain important, but memory-related crises require an additional dimension: mnemonic recognition. A response may be rapid, legally cautious, and procedurally sound yet still fail if it does not address the violated memory. Future research should therefore compare apology-only responses with those combining apology and reform, apology and restorative engagement, and apology and symbolic restitution. It should also examine whether early acknowledgment of historical meaning improves recovery compared with explanations that emphasize lack of intent.

Future research should further explore boundary conditions. Not all uses of the past are problematic; brands often generate value through heritage, nostalgia, retro aesthetics, and historical storytelling. The theoretical challenge is to identify the threshold at which engaging the past becomes commodifying, trivializing,

or desecrating it. Relevant moderating factors may include the degree of institutional recognition, the presence of surviving victims or descendants, political contestation surrounding the memory, perceived foreignness of the brand, and the brand's prior moral positioning.

Another direction concerns audience heterogeneity. Consumers vary in mnemonic attachment, political identity, generational position, regional affiliation, and self-brand connection, all of which may influence whether a campaign is interpreted as careless, offensive, unforgivable, or repairable. Cross-cultural research is particularly important, as different societies organize memory through distinct institutions and moral frameworks. More broadly, recent studies on global reputation and evaluation systems suggest that international visibility and legitimacy are shaped by regional and institutional inequalities rather than by neutral global standards alone (Kim and Kim, 2025a, 2025b). This insight is relevant for global marketing because brand legitimacy is also judged within uneven local contexts, where cultural memory, institutional recognition, and public sensitivity may differ across markets.

Finally, future work should examine global-local governance. The Starbucks Korea case raises a broader question for multinational and licensed brands: Who bears moral responsibility when local operators violate locally protected memory while the global brand absorbs the reputational impact? Comparative research across wholly owned subsidiaries, joint ventures, licensees, franchise systems, and local partners could clarify how governance structures shape both the emergence of crises and the credibility of subsequent repair.

8. CONCLUSION

Brands do not communicate within a cultural vacuum; they operate within memory landscapes shaped by trauma, ritual, archives, anniversaries, and moral expectations. The Starbucks Korea

“5.18 Tank Day” controversy shows that when brand symbolism intersects with a protected democratic memory, the outcome is not merely offense but a loss of legitimacy. The conceptual framework presented here reframes such incidents as collective-memory violations—crises in which market actions are evaluated through the civic meaning of the past.

For international marketing scholarship, the article conceptualizes collective memory as a public legitimacy system that can be disrupted by brand activity. For crisis communication, it clarifies why standard apology strategies may be inadequate when a campaign appears to profane historical suffering or democratic sacrifice. For managers, it underscores that localization extends beyond consumer preferences or language adaptation to include historical competence. In markets shaped by active memories of authoritarian violence, genocide, racial trauma, colonial rule, or civic martyrdom, symbolic boundaries surrounding the past carry clear commercial implications. Brands that fail to recognize these boundaries risk transforming a campaign into a broader judgment of their moral legitimacy.

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