Consumers' engagement with corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication in social media: Evidence from China and the United States☆

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates cross-cultural differences between Chinese and American consumers in the relationships of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) intentions and consumers' engagement with CSR communication through social media with three antecedents: (1) attitude toward CSR in social media, (2) peer communication about CSR activities, and (3) opinion leadership characteristics. An online survey was conducted with samples of social media users in China and the U.S. Results from the multiple-group analysis show that the degree of impact of the three antecedents varies significantly between consumers in China and the U.S. Specifically, the influence of attitudes toward CSR in social media on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media is stronger for the Chinese participants than for the U.S. participants. In addition, peer communication and opinion leadership characteristics have significantly stronger effects on consumers' engagement with CSR communication via social media for the Chinese participants than for the U.S. participants.

1. Introduction

Given that social media allows for greater global reach and facilitates two-way conversations, marketers are increasingly taking advantage of consumers' adoption and usage of social media sites to develop their promotional mix (Jin & Phua, 2014). In particular, the role of social media in developing successful corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives has received increasing attention in recent years (Kesavan, Bernacchi, & Mascarenhas, 2013; Sutton, 2016). Today, social media represents a tremendous opportunity for CSR communication as the interactive and social characteristics of these sites have helped push companies to new levels of openness and transparency (Sutton, 2016).

Marketers have begun to explore the potential of using social media for CSR communication. For example, H&M, a leading fast fashion brand, created an online music video ad featuring musician M.I.A. to encourage customers to recycle unwanted clothes at their stores and participate in H&M's World Recycle Week sustainability initiative (Sutton, 2016). In another example, TOMS Shoes utilized social media to communicate their "One for One" shoe donation program to help children in need (TOMS.com 2018). This program involves donating one pair of shoes to needy children in developing countries for every

pair sold in the U.S. TOMS also used Instagram to promote their "One Day Without Shoes" campaign, encouraging Instagram users to post photos of their bare feet with the hashtag #withoutshoes; for every photo posted, TOMS gave a new pair of shoes to a child in need. These users were also asked to tag their friends and challenge them to do the same with the idea that "the more you share, the more you give" (TOMS.com 2018). Another instance is Disney's collaboration with the Make-A-Wish Foundation to develop the #ShareYourEars hashtag campaign on social media. Disney encouraged its fans to post their pictures with Mickey Mouse ears and the hashtag #ShareYourEars, then donated $5 to the Make-A-Wish Foundation for every photo (businesswire.com 2018). These examples demonstrate the power of social media and its ability to foster electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Chen, Fay, & Wang, 2011).

A few studies have focused on the use of social media for CSR communication (Kent & Taylor, 2016; Lyon & Montgomery, 2013; Rim & Song, 2013). Lyon and Montgomery (2013) argue that the advent of social media has changed the way companies communicate about their environmental performance and improved the quality of CSR communication as well as reduced greenwashing. Lee, Dolen, and Kolk (2013) suggest that social media help generate awareness of CSR communication, and Internet users can freely give their views about an issue

without companies' consent. In addition, Du and Vieira (2012) suggest the use of social media for CSR communication because these platforms help reduce the public's skepticism toward CSR. These studies indicate that social media can be effective in CSR communication as consumers can write and share their opinions about companies' CSR initiatives, offering opportunities for companies to engage in two-way dialogue with stakeholders. However, there has been limited research on what factors influence consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

To understand this topic, it is crucial to examine how consumers perceive and respond to CSR in these platforms. Social media gives consumers a channel to learn about CSR and share their views on it (Cho, Furey, & Mohr, 2017). Consumers' attitude toward CSR promoted by a company in social media may relate to their decision to engage with the CSR communication. Communication with their peers about CSR activities may facilitate the eWOM process because information provided by their peers is perceived to be more trustworthy and credible (Moschis & Churchill 1978). Peers also have the ability to increase the dissemination of ideas and information (Men & Muralidharan, 2017). Thus, peer communication may have an impact on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media. In terms of individual personality traits, being an opinion leader or opinion seeker may contribute to consumers' CSR-related eWOM intention and behavior in social media (Christodoulides, Michaelidou, & Argyriou, 2012). Social media users who actively share information may be more likely to engage in CSR-related eWOM, while those who are opinion seekers are also likely to generate eWOM communication by asking questions. This study examines how attitude toward CSR in social media, peer communication, and opinion leadership characteristics relate to consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

Specifically, this study proposes that attitude toward CSR in social media, peer communication, and opinion leadership serve as antecedents of eWOM behaviors. This study further posits that eWOM intention is a mediator in the relationships of the three antecedents and consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media. In addition, prior research has emphasized the importance of taking cross-cultural factors into account when studying CSR, especially in today's globalized economy (Becker-Olsen, Taylor, Hill, & Yalcinkaya, 2011; Lim, Sung, & Lee, 2018). Understanding cross-cultural differences in consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media is important as it will provide valuable implications for multinational companies as they develop global CSR programs. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to understand the effects of the three antecedents on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in China and the U.S. In particular, cross-cultural differences in the degree of impact of the three antecedents between consumers in China and the U.S. are explored. According to Statista, (2019), China represents the world's largest social media population, with India and the U.S. ranked second and third. Most of the research on CSR has been conducted in the U.S. context, so little is known about how social media users in emerging markets such as China perceive and react to CSR communication. By testing the model in two culturally different markets, the findings of this study will have better external validity (Men & Muralidharan, 2017).

This study will make three important contributions to the literature on CSR and social media. First, it examines the cultural distinctions of CSR-related eWOM by exploring differences among countries in antecedents leading to consumers' behaviors to spread a brand's CSR activities. Second, this study identifies antecedents of eWOM behavior in the CSR context, namely consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media. Third, this study provides practical insights for CSR communication by shedding light on how to engage consumers in social media across different cultures. In sum, the findings of this study will contribute to the literature on CSR and social media from a cross-cultural perspective.

2. Literature review

2.1. Consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media

The Interactive Advertising Bureau (2015, p. 6) defines social media as "created, shared or exchanged information, ideas, content and opinions in virtual communities and online networks, including conversations about or with a brand." Social media has created a collaborative, ubiquitous, and user-centered environment and empowered consumers to engage with corporate information (Fernando, Suganthi, & Sivakumaran, 2014; Men & Muralidharan, 2017), which in turn fosters eWOM behavior. The concept of eWOM is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004, p. 39). The explosive growth of social media has provided new ways for consumers to access content and share information and opinions about a product or experience, leading to eWOM (Hayes, Shan, & King, 2018; Kim, Park, Lee, & Park, 2018). The current study particularly focuses on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media as a form of eWOM behavior by which social media users receive, create, or share information about a brand's CSR activities. Such eWOM behaviors may include liking, following, or hashtagging a brand's causes, commenting or sharing thoughts about a brand's CSR programs, and inviting friends to join groups in social media dedicated to socially responsible initiatives.

eWOM is a new form of word-of-mouth (WOM), which refers to information exchange among consumers (Engel, Blackwell, & Kegerreis, 1969; Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger, & Yale, 1998). WOM is an important but understudied construct in the CSR literature. A few studies have considered WOM as behavioral outcomes of CSR (Rim & Song, 2013; Su, Swanson, & Chen, 2015; Walsh & Bartikowski, 2013). For example, Walsh and Bartikowski (2013) confirmed that customer satisfaction mediates relationships between CSR and WOM, suggesting that greater satisfaction drives improved WOM behavior. However, little is known about consumers' engagement in CSR-focused eWOM in emerging social media contexts. Engagement has been operationalized as customers' behavioral responses toward a brand such as WOM activities, posting comments, and writing reviews (van Doorn et al., 2010). Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014, p. 149) define engagement in social media as "a consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions." This study focuses on consumers' positive eWOM behaviors in relation to CSR.

The surge in social media usage and the ongoing digitization of media life (Deuze, 2016) around the world highlight a need for academic research on the role of social media in global CSR campaigns. This study takes a cross-cultural perspective to examine the influence of culture on Chinese and American consumers' intention to engage in CSR communication in social media.

2.2. CSR in China and the U.S.

In recent years, CSR has received unprecedented attention in the advertising, marketing, and management literature (e.g., Brammer, He, & Mellahi, 2015; He, Zhu, Gouran, & Kolo, 2016; Rim & Song, 2016). CSR refers to "the social responsibility of business that encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" (Carroll, 1979, p. 500). CSR communication refers to "a process of anticipating stakeholders' expectations, articulation of CSR policy and managing of different organization communication tools designed to provide true and transparent information about a company's or a brand's integration of its business operations, social and environmental concerns, and interactions with stakeholders" (Podnar, 2008, p. 75). It is important to note that CSR

communication is a firm-generated perspective, while the concept of consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media comes from a consumer-generated perspective.

As the originator of CSR, the U.S. businesses have taken a leading role in its development. In contrast, as a follower of the global trend, Chinese firms have transformed from a passive endorser to an active learner in the past decade, but the development of CSR is still at a very preliminary stage (Li & Gong, 2009). However, the nature of CSR in a country is also shaped by its overarching cultural values, political and economic system, and development stage (Matten & Moon, 2008; Ramasamy & Hung, 2005). Due to the apparent differences between the U.S. and China in these aspects, corporations' CSR practice and communication as well as consumers' perceptions and response toward CSR exhibit varying features in these two societies.

First and foremost is that practices and perceptions of CSR should be considered in the cultural settings of a country. U.S. companies have for a long time explicitly attached themselves to CSR, which to some degree relates to the American ethic of stewardship emphasizing the moral worth of capitalism (Matten & Moon, 2008). Furthermore, as a country that is high on the individualism index, the U.S. tends to have a high degree of consumer activism, leading to a greater level of consumers' perception and expectation of CSR (Katz, Swanson, & Nelson, 2001). Although it originated in the Western world, the core principles of CSR fit with the traditional Chinese cultural values of Confucianism, Taoism, and collectivism, which emphasize interpersonal harmony and harmony between humans and nature (Wang & Juslin, 2009). These virtues or cultural values have been embodied in CSR programs and practices in China that focus on balancing corporate gains with societal contribution (Wang & Juslin, 2009). However, due to their collectivist cultural values, Chinese corporations' CSR activities lack interactions with consumers, and Chinese consumers possess relatively lower CSR awareness and expectations (Katz et al., 2001; Tian, Wang, & Yang, 2011).

3. Hypothesis development and conceptual framework

3.1. Attitude toward CSR in social media

Attitudes are generally defined as an overall evaluation of attitude objects, including positive or negative assessments (Katz, 1960). Attitude toward CSR in social media is defined as a consumer's perceptions and responses toward both marketer-generated and consumer-generated content in a brand's CSR communication in social media. Social media provides marketers with a cost-effective way to reach, connect, and interact with their target segments. Minton, Lee, Orth, Kim, and Kahle (2012) argue that social media could be an appropriate venue for CSR campaigns (e.g., green advertising) via eWOM, which is considered more credible than commercial advertising.

According to the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), behavioral intention is the main determinant of that behavior and this behavioral intention is influenced by attitude toward that behavior. The TRA has been widely used in advertising and consumer behavior research. For example, Dabholkar and Bagozzi (2002) and Schlosser and Shavitt (2002) found that attitudes have a positive effect on intentions, which leads to actual behaviors. Past research has examined the impact of a company's CSR efforts on purchases (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Yan, Ogle, & Hyllegard, 2010). These studies generally found that advertisements with explicit CSR messages increased consumer intent to purchase from a brand, and this intent is predicted by attitudes toward the brand. Furthermore, Kang and Hustvedt (2014) found that a brand's transparency and social responsibility directly predicted consumers' trust as well as attitudes toward the brand and indirectly affected their intentions to engage in positive WOM and to make a purchase.

Previous research indicates that consumers demonstrate favorable attitudes toward companies that promote social causes, and that

attitude positively translates into purchase intention (Rim & Song, 2013). At the same time, consumers generally maintain cynicism about CSR communication (Cho et al., 2017). Thus, it is crucial to examine consumers' attitudes toward CSR advertising in social media and how their attitudes affect eWOM. Based on the TRA, it is hypothesized that a positive attitude toward CSR in social media will increase consumers' likelihood to spread positive views about the brand, and eWOM intention will mediate this relationship. To examine the relationships among attitudes toward CSR in social media, eWOM intention, and consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media, H1A and H1B are presented as follows:

H1A: Attitudes toward CSR in social media will have a positive, direct impact on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

H1B: eWOM intention will mediate the effect of attitude toward CSR in social media on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

From a cultural perspective, this study posits that culture plays an important role in explaining the impact of the three antecedents (attitudes toward CSR, peer communication, and opinion leadership characteristics) on CSR eWOM behavior in social media. Culture is defined as "the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one group from another" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 9). This definition suggests that members of a particular culture or country share similar values, characteristics, and behaviors. However, only scant research has examined the antecedents and culture-related factors that prompt eWOM participation (Mishra, Maheswarappa, Maity, & Samu, 2018). Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) suggested that both attitudes toward the behavior and subject norm (the perceived social norms an individual has about others' expectations for behavior) can contribute to an individual's intention to perform the behavior. Shen, Dickson, Lennon, Montalto, and Zhang (2003) examined the role of culture in Chinese consumer behavior by testing the validity of the Fishbein model in the context of the Chinese market. Results of their study show that attitudes toward culturally symbolic products or objects are influenced by both attitude and subjective norm. This study considers that CSR communication in social media is culturally relevant as CSR focuses on the well-being of the larger society. Because of the collectivistic cultural orientation of Chinese society (Hofstede, 1980), Chinese consumers tend to place more emphasis on others' expectations and perceptions. Their attitude toward CSR in social media may play a more important role in their eWOM behaviors compared to their American counterparts as it is vital to show others that they care about CSR or have favorable attitudes toward it. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1C: Culture will moderate the relationship between attitudes toward CSR in social media and consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media. Specifically, the influence of attitudes toward CSR in social media on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media is stronger for Chinese consumers than for American consumers.

3.2. Peer communication about CSR Activities: Strong vs. Weak ties

Defined as overt peer interactions related to consumption (Moschis & Churchill, 1978), peer communication in social media has received increasing attention (Men & Muralidharan, 2017; Wang, Yu, and Wei 2012). For example, Chu and Sung (2015) found that microblogging sites like Twitter represent an emerging form of socialization agent that expedites the eWOM process because peers can connect and share information quickly and easily.

The influence of peer communication is also affected by the social tie, which is defined as the strength of the bond between members of a network (Mittal, Huppertz, & Khare, 2008). Granovetter (1973) distinguishes between two types of social ties: strong and weak. Strong ties refer to closer relationships that are formed within an individual's

personal network, while weak ties are associated with less personal social relationships (Pigg & Crank, 2004). Strong ties such as family and close friends are often able to provide emotional support. On the other hand, weak ties comprise acquaintances and colleagues with diverse interests and have the ability to accelerate the dissemination of novel ideas and information on a variety of topics (Goldenberg, Libai, & Muller, 2001; Pigg & Crank, 2004).

In light of the increasing interplay between CSR and social media, this study proposes that peers act as socialization agents through social media, and consumers' CSR eWOM behaviors in social media are influenced by peers (e.g., strong and weak ties) through communication. In the online social media environment, peers can communicate their experiences, expectations, and opinions of a company's CSR initiatives through comments, posts, and likes, facilitating the flow of eWOM communication. This study argues that both strong and weak ties exert impacts on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media. Thus, H2A and H3A propose:

H2A: Peer communication with strong ties about CSR will have a positive, direct impact on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

H3A: Peer communication with weak ties about CSR will have a positive, direct impact on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

In addition, this study investigates the potential mediating role of eWOM intention in the relationships between peer communication about CSR and a behavioral outcome (i.e., eWOM behavior) in a social media context. From a theoretical perspective, this study integrates and modifies the traditional attitude behavioral intention model (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) by suggesting that eWOM intention will mediate the effect of peer communication with strong and weak ties about CSR on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media. That is, when social media users interact with peers about CSR, their engagement with CSR communication in social media will become higher through enhanced eWOM intention. H2B and H3B are therefore outlined as follows:

H2B: eWOM intention will mediate the effect of peer communication with strong ties about CSR on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

H3B: eWOM intention will mediate the effect of peer communication with weak ties about CSR on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

Differences in eWOM behavior may be related to dominant cultural orientations such as individualism-versus-collectivism (I-C) (Han & Shavitt, 1994; Lee, Choi, & Kim, 2018). Members of an individualistic culture such as the U.S. place a great emphasis on themselves and focus on independence, self-reliance, and internal attributes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In contrast, members of a collectivistic culture such as China tend to focus on interdependence, social norms, and in-group membership (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For example, on Twitter, American consumers from a typical individualist culture talk more about what is different and how to display their uniqueness than about general trends. By contrast, Chinese consumers on Weibo, a popular microblog site in China, show great interest in common practices, care more about being accepted by peers, and value opinions of family and in-group members (Ma, 2013).

In addition, American consumers tend to have a large number of remote or loose contacts (weak ties), while Chinese consumers focus more on intimate, cohesive social relationships with close bonds (strong ties) (Chu & Choi, 2011). The tightly knit networks and positive qualities of social relationships that Chinese consumers maintain lead them to engage more in eWOM than their American counterparts. While past research has demonstrated that both strong and weak ties are crucial for information sharing and have an impact on WOM communication (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007), it is expected that strong ties play a more important role than weak ties among Chinese consumers. With the emphasis on tightly knit networks and close social structure in

Chinese society, information about CSR through peer communication with strong ties might exert greater influence on consumers' eWOM behaviors compared to weak ties. Although an increasing number of global brands use social media to communicate their CSR efforts, no empirical study has examined the effect of culture on peer communication in the context of CSR eWOM in social media. To address this research gap, H2C and H3C are proposed as follows:

H2C: Culture will moderate the relationship between peer communication with strong ties about CSR and consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media. Specifically, the influence of peer communication with strong ties about CSR on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media is stronger for Chinese consumers than for American consumers.

H3C: Culture will moderate the relationship between peer communication with weak ties about CSR and consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media. Specifically, the influence of peer communication with weak ties about CSR on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media is stronger for American consumers than for Chinese consumers.

3.3. Opinion leadership characteristics: Opinion leaders and opinion seekers

The actors in opinion leadership and opinion seeking are opinion leaders (OL) and opinion seekers (OS). OL are defined as individuals who exert an unequal amount of influence on the decisions of others (Rogers & Cartano, 1962), while OS are defined as individuals who search out advice from others when making a purchase decision (Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1996). Research on the twin topics of OL and OS originated in Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) work on the two-step flow of communication. This model implies that opinion leaders actively learn and form opinions from mass media and then pass their opinions on to others. These message receivers, who get information and are influenced by opinion leaders, are opinion seekers (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

OL play an important role in marketing communication. They are very likely to communicate with others and to provide informal, consumption-related information or advice to other consumers by virtue of their higher level of product involvement and knowledge (Allen, 2000; Bloch, 1986; Goldsmith, Flynn, & Goldsmith, 2003). More importantly, as OL do not represent any commercial interest, their opinions are considered more credible and influential than those from commercial sources like advertisements (Rogers, 1995). In contrast, OS usually have less product knowledge and thus are worried about a purchase (Flynn et al., 1996). Moreover, OS show a preference for interpersonal sources (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Gilly et al., 1998) and are therefore likely to engage in searching for interpersonal information and advice for the purposes of facilitating their purchase (e.g., saving time) and reducing their risk (Bristor, 1990).

In line with the abovementioned characteristics of OL and OS, this study proposes that consumers' CSR-related eWOM behavior in social media are influenced by their roles (e.g., OL and OS) in interpersonal communication. Specifically, social media users who show OL characteristics should be more responsive to the company's CSR communication (e.g., comments, posts, likes, forwards), as they are active product information seekers as well as information transmitters and personal influence actors. In addition, social media users with OS characteristics are likely to facilitate the flow of eWOM communication through active initiation (e.g., asking for opinion) and response (e.g., likes, comments) to OLs' CSR communication in social media. Thus, H4A and H5A are proposed:

H4A: Opinion leader characteristics will have a positive, direct impact on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

H5A: Opinion seeker characteristics will have a positive, direct impact on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

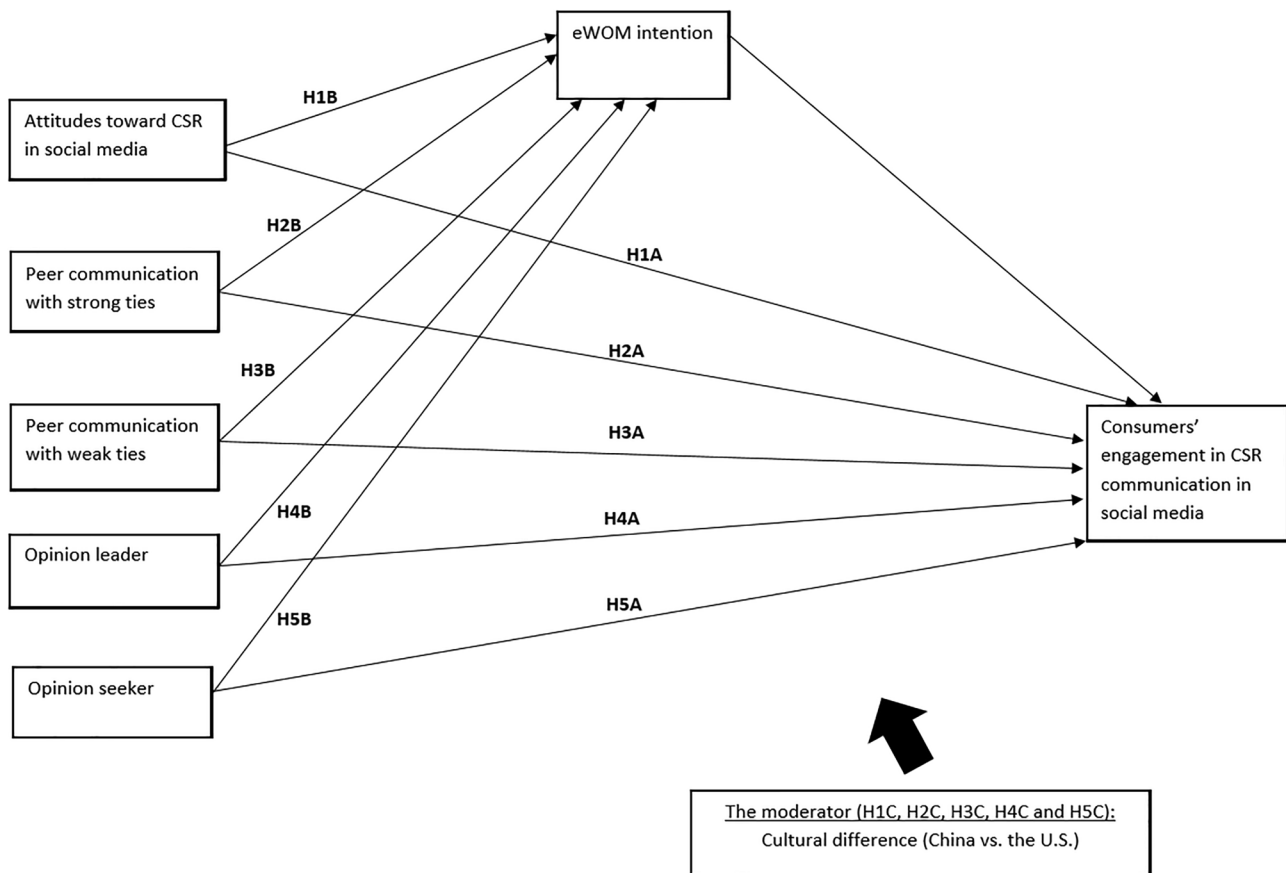This study also tries to explain social media users' eWOM intention

Fig. 1. *The Proposed Model.* Note: The relationships among the independent variables are covaried, and age and gender are included in the model as control variables, but the relationships are not presented in the figure to enhance readability.

and engagement with CSR communication in social media in relation to opinion leader and opinion seeker characteristics. As a form of interpersonal communication, opinion leadership and opinion seeking have been regarded as two of the most important WOM influences on consumer behaviors, like brand choices and product consumption (Bristor, 1990; Weimann, 1994). As social media enable interpersonal communication online, opinion leadership and opinion seeking might boost CSR-related communication through eWOM intention. As the attitude behavioral intention model (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) suggests, eWOM intention may play a mediating role between antecedents and eWOM behavior. Thus, this study also argues that eWOM intention will mediate the effect of opinion leader and seeker characteristics on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media. H4B and H5B are presented:

H4B: eWOM intention will mediate the effect of opinion leader characteristics on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

H5B: eWOM intention will mediate the effect of opinion seeker characteristics on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

A few studies have shown the impacts of culture on opinion leadership characteristics (Christodoulides et al., 2012; Fong & Burton, 2006; Nath, Devlin, & Reid, 2018). For example, Fong and Burton (2006) found that Chinese Internet users exhibited higher levels of engagement in information-seeking behavior in electronic discussion boards, while their American counterparts tended to be involved more in information giving. The concept of face may help explain Chinese consumers' willingness to engage in CSR eWOM in social media. As Goffman (1967) described, face is "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself" (p. 5). Face also relates to the moral character of a person (Hu, 1944). In a collectivistic culture like China,

consumers may actively seek for social approval based on their performances in social interactions. Social media provides Chinese consumers with an ideal channel to develop a favorable self-concept and self-image. Because Chinese consumers place greater emphasis on reference groups and group norms, they may rely on opinion leaders in their evaluations of CSR. In addition, engaging in CSR eWOM in social media can help Chinese consumers build a socially responsible image and enhance their face in social settings.

Hofstede (1980) power distance dimension can also help explain why American consumers tend to engage in higher levels of information-giving behaviors, thus exhibiting more opinion leader characteristics than Chinese consumers, who are more likely to be opinion seekers. The dimension of power distance concerns the extent to which less powerful people accept the unequal distribution of power in a given society (Hofstede, 1980). For example, among people in a high power distance culture (e.g., China), tolerance of hierarchies and autocratic leadership are emphasized (Hofstede, 1980). Because individuals tend to expect clear directions and advice from leaders in a high power distance culture, it is logical to assume that they are more likely to seek information from opinion leaders. On the other hand, in a low power distance culture (e.g., U.S.), individuals are more likely to rely on factual information and reasoning about an action (Hofstede, 1991). In the context of CSR eWOM behaviors in social media, compared to American consumers who live in a low power distance culture, Chinese consumers with a high power distance orientation may be more likely to trust and follow the advice of leaders (i.e., opinion leaders in CSR). Along this line, H4C and H5C propose:

H4C: Culture will moderate the relationship between opinion leader characteristics and consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media. Specifically, the influence of opinion leader characteristics on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social

media is stronger for American consumers than for Chinese consumers.

H5C: Culture will moderate the relationship between opinion seeker characteristics and consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media. Specifically, the influence of opinion seeker characteristics on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media is stronger for Chinese consumers than for American consumers.

In summary, this study proposes that attitude toward CSR in social media, peer communication about CSR activities, and opinion leadership characteristics serve as antecedents of consumers' engagement in CSR eWOM in social media. eWOM intention serves as a mediator between the effects of the proposed antecedents on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media. Specifically, consumers' attitude toward CSR in social media may relate to their decision to engage with the CSR communication. In addition, peer communication may have an impact on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media as peers may facilitate the eWOM process. Opinion leadership characteristics may also contribute to consumers' CSR-related eWOM behavior in social media via eWOM intention. Attitude, peer communication, and opinion leadership characteristics are selected as study variables because of their important role in spreading eWOM in social media. The moderating role of culture in the relationships between the antecedents and eWOM behaviors are also explored. Fig. 1 presents the conceptual framework.

4. Method

4.1. Sample and data collection

Few studies have examined CSR outside of the U.S., particularly testing models across countries, limiting generalization of the results to other cultural settings. This study presents data from two online surveys with the same measurements—one administered in the U.S. and the other in China. Semantic equivalence was ascertained by using a back-translation technique (Schaffer & Riordan, 2003). The original survey in English was translated into simplified Chinese and then back-translated into English by two bilingual native Chinese speakers. Before the Chinese data were collected, the survey was sent to several Chinese students to assess its validity. This process ensured that translation equivalence was established.

Following previous studies in cross-cultural research (e.g., Boonchoo & Thoumrungroje, 2017), this study employed non-probability sampling to ensure sampling equivalence and intercept techniques for data collection in China and the U.S. to obtain a homogeneous composition of the samples. Specifically, the proportions of major demographics including age, sex, and income were controlled.

Social media users in the two countries were invited to participate in online surveys. For the Chinese data, participants were recruited from an online consumer panel via a Chinese research company, Sojump (www.sojump.com). Sojump has more than four billion members in China and is considered the largest consumer database for empirical online research. Four hundred and twenty-one valid responses were obtained in China, among whom approximately 55% were females ($n = 231$) and 45% were males ($n = 190$). Respondents ranged in age from 19 to 65, with an average age of 31 years ($SD = 6.59$). The geographic make-up of the sample comprised a wide range of cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu. For the U.S. data, an online survey was conducted with a sample of social media users from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk: www.mturk.com). The final total of valid responses was 482, of whom 46% were male ($n = 223$) and 54% were female ($n = 259$). Their ages fell between 18 and 71, with a mean age of 36 ($SD = 11.77$). More than half of the respondents were White (67.2%), followed by Asian American (7.6%), African American (6.8%), Hispanic (5.3%), and other (13.1%). The sample characteristics were similar in the two countries. Participants in the two panels were paid 0.70 USD each for their participation.

5. Measurement

At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were provided with a definition of CSR along with examples of CSR communication in social media (see Chu & Lin, 2013). Specifically, participants read:

In recent years, CSR has become an important strategic component to organizations in developing an effective communication program. Many shoe companies actively enhance global performance by engaging in CSR initiatives, such as developing green/ethical products, revolutionizing sustainable materials, and promoting charitable causes, donations, and philanthropic activities. For example, Nike has developed sustainability guidelines with the aim of reducing the environmental footprint associated with their products. TOMS matches each pair of shoes purchased with a pair of shoes for a child in need and uses natural hemp, organic cotton and recycled polyester in designing their shoes. In this study, CSR is defined as any domestic or international shoe companies' promotion of "ethical" or "green" products and/or incorporation of socially responsible messages and charitable causes (e.g., philanthropy and donation) in their strategic communication campaigns.

The online questionnaires used major brand manufacturers in the footwear industry in the two countries (China: New Balance and Li Ning; U.S.: New Balance and TOMS).[1] Based on the pre-tests on brand familiarity, Chinese participants were less familiar with the TOMS brand. Thus, a popular Chinese footwear brand, Li Ning, was used in the Chinese questionnaire. Respondents in the two countries were asked to answer questions about one of the two footwear brands. They were randomly assigned to either New Balance or Li Ning (in China) and New Balance or TOMS (in the U.S.). By using different companies within the same product category, this study design can enhance the external validity of the proposed model, as suggested by Kang and Hustvedt (2014).

Consumers' Engagement with CSR Communication in Social Media. Respondents were asked (on a scale from $1 =$ never to $10 =$ all the time) about their frequency of participating in the following activities on social media: (1) Posting personal experiences related to [Brand]'s CSR activities, (2) Friending, liking or following [Brand]'s CSR activities, (3) Posting or sharing thoughts about [Brand]'s CSR activities, (4) Posting or sharing photos, videos, memes or gifs created by others that relate to [Brand]'s CSR activities, (5) Posting or sharing photos, videos, memes or gifs created by you that relate to [Brand]'s CSR activities, (6) Receiving messages or information from [Brand] regarding its CSR activities, (7) Forwarding someone else's discussion on [Brand]'s CSR activities to other people, (8) Joining groups dedicated to [Brand]'s CSR activities, (9) Creating a group dedicated to [Brand]'s CSR activities, and (10) Attending a gathering regarding [Brand]'s CSR activities that you learned about through social media (China: $\alpha = 0.94$, $M = 7.28$, $SD = 1.61$; U.S.: $\alpha = 0.96$, $M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.92$).

Attitude Toward CSR in Social Media. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree (from $1 =$ strongly disagree to $7 =$ strongly agree) with the following statements based on the information and interaction on social media: (1) [Brand] is committed to using a portion of its profits to help non-profits, (2) [Brand] gives back to the communities in which it does business, (3) Local non-profits benefit from [Brand]'s contributions, (4) [Brand] integrates charitable contributions into its business activities, and (5) [Brand] is interested in corporate giving. These measurements were adopted from Kang and Hustvedt (2014) (China: $\alpha = 0.83$, $M = 5.33$, $SD = 0.75$; U.S.: $\alpha = 0.89$, $M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.18$).

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[1] To avoid variation between brands, we checked if there was a significant difference regarding people's identification with the brands. We found that there was no significant difference between the two brands in each country (China: $t = 1.05$, $p = .30$, $M_{New Balance} = 5.10$, $M_{LiNing} = 4.99$; U.S.: $t = -0.35$, $p = .73$, $M_{New Balance} = 3.57$, $M_{Toms} = 3.61$). For the measures used in this study, the independent sample test also showed that there were no significant differences in each measure between the two brands across both countries.

Peer Communication. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale (1 = never to 7 = very frequently) how often they communicate with the following people about [Brand]'s CSR activities in social media: (1) family, (2) close friends, (3) classmates or college friends, (4) former high school friends, and (5) acquaintances. The items of family and close friends were averaged to form an index of peer communication with strong ties (China: Spearman-brown coefficient = 0.63, $M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.05$; U.S.: Spearman-brown coefficient = 0.90, $M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.77$), while the other three items were averaged to create an index of peer communication with weak ties (China: $\alpha = 0.74$, $M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.04$; US: $\alpha = 0.90$, $M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.67$).

Opinion Leader and Opinion Seeker. Two measurements were adopted from Flynn et al. (1996). For opinion leadership, respondents were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale to what extent they agree with the following statements: (1) People that I know pick shoes based on what I have told them, (2) I often persuade others to buy the shoes that I like, and (3) I often influence people's opinions about shoes. The scores of the three items were averaged to form an index of opinion leader (China: $\alpha = 0.85$, $M = 5.22$, $SD = 1.12$; U.S.: $\alpha = 0.92$, $M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.57$). For opinion seeking, the statements are: (1) I like to get others' opinions before I buy a pair of shoes, (2) I feel more comfortable buying shoes when I have gotten other people's opinions on them, and (3) When I consider buying a pair of shoes, I ask other people for advice. The scores of the three items were averaged to form an index of opinion seeker (China: $\alpha = 0.85$, $M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.34$; U.S.: $\alpha = 0.86$, $M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.53$).

eWOM Intention. Eberle, Berens, and Li (2013) measurement of eWOM intention was adopted in this study. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale to what extent they agree with the following statements: (1) I will invite friends to learn more about [Brand]'s CSR on social media, (2) I will recommend [Brand]'s CSR on social media to my friends, (3) I will talk about [Brand]'s CSR on social media, and (4) I will talk positively about [Brand]'s CSR on social media. The four items were averaged to form an index of eWOM intention (China: $\alpha = 0.81$, $M = 5.53$, $SD = 0.91$; U.S.: $\alpha = 0.90$, $M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.57$).

6. Results

6.1. Scale reliability and construct validity

First, Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess scale reliability for each construct. Most coefficient alphas were above 0.70. The reliability for peer communication with strong ties in the China sample is slightly lower due to the two-item construct. To assess construct reliability, both composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were computed for all the constructs. As shown in Table 1, the overall results indicated adequate reliabilities.

For construct validity, Table 1 also shows that all items loaded significantly ($p < .001$) on their designated constructs in confirmatory factor analyses. The standardized factor loadings are between 0.639 and 0.868 in China and between 0.713 and 0.957 in the U.S. This suggests that all constructs established convergent validity in both samples (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

6.2. Attitude toward CSR in social media

The structural model shows a very good fit to the data ($X^2 = 0.291$ with $p = .59$ and $df = 1$, CFI = 0.1.000, TLI = 1.005, RMSEA = 0.000 and SRMR = 0.002).[2] Table 2 presents the structural

paths.[3] Hypothesis 1A predicts a positive relationship between attitudes toward CSR in social media and consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media, but the hypothesis was not supported. Instead, as shown in Table 3,[4] there was an indirect effect of attitudes toward CSR on consumer's engagement with CSR communication in social media through eWOM intention ($\beta = 0.032$, $p < .001$), supporting H1B. To determine whether the structural paths for the China and U.S. models were invariant, which is the moderating effect of culture in the structural model, a series of multi-group analyses using Mplus 7 with maximum likelihood estimation was conducted that compared the chi-square differences between the base model and the constrained model with the equality constraints imposed (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The increase in chi-square due to the equality constraints was used as a significance test. As shown in Table 4, when we constrained the structural paths to be equivalent (Model 2), a significant increase in chi-square was observed ($\Delta\chi2$ (35) = 246.004, $p < .001$) compared to the base model with all parameters free (Model 1). This indicates that the structural paths are overall different in their degrees across the two groups.

To continue to compare the invariance in each structural path between the two groups, the constrained (Model 2 in Table 4) and unconstrained models (Model 3 to Model 7 in Table 4) were compared. Significant difference in the path between the two groups was reached when the chi-square difference was significant between the constrained and unconstrained models. Table 2 illustrates the chi-square differences and the comparison of path coefficients of the two samples. The chi-square difference in Table 4 between the constrained (Model 2) and the unconstrained model (Model 3) shows that culture moderated the relationships between attitudes toward CSR and consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media ($\Delta\chi2$ (1) = 22.011, $p < .001$). More specifically, the influence of attitudes toward CSR on consumers' engagement with CSR communication is stronger for the Chinese participants than the U.S. samples ($\beta_{China} = 0.174$, $p < .001$; $\beta_{U.S.} = 004$, $p = n.s.$).

6.3. Peer communication about CSR activities with strong and weak ties

The results in Table 2 show that peer communication with both strong ties (H2A) and weak ties (H3A) had a positive influence on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media (H2A: $\beta = 0.162$, $p < .001$; H3A: $\beta = 0.570$, $p < .001$). In addition, peer communication with both strong ties and weak ties can indirectly affect consumers' engagement with CSR communication through eWOM intention (H2B: $\beta = 0.031$, $p < .001$; H3B: $\beta = 0.032$, $p < .001$). The chi-square difference in Table 4 between the constrained (Model 2) and the unconstrained model (Model 4 and Model 5) indicates that culture significantly moderated the effect of peer communication with strong ties on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media ($\Delta\chi2$ (1) = 6.569, $p < .05$), but it did not moderate the effect of peer communication with weak ties ($\Delta\chi2$ (1) = 0.27, $p = n.s.$), supporting only H2C. The influence of peer communication with strong ties on consumers' engagement with CSR communication was stronger for the Chinese than the U.S. participants ($\beta_{China} = 0.269$, $p < .001$; $\beta_{U.S.} = 186$, $p < .001$).

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[2] Both the China and U.S. models also have very good fit to the data when they are analyzed separately. For the China model: $X^2 = 0.007$ with $p = .93$ and $df = 1$, CFI = 0.1.000, TLI = 1.030, RMSEA = 0.000 and SRMR = 0.000; for the U.S. model: $X^2 = 0.343$ with $p = .56$ and $df = 1$, CFI = 0.1.000, TLI = 1.014, RMSEA = 0.000 and SRMR = 0.003.

[3] Results of the direct effects for the China and U.S. samples are presented in Table 2 as well as additional information when China and the U.S. samples were analyzed separately.

[4] Results of the indirect effects for the China and U.S. samples are presented in Table 3 as well as additional information when China and the U.S. samples were analyzed separately.

Table 1
Reliabilities and Confirmatory Factor Analysis Properties.

Construct	China				U.S.			
	factor loadings	α	CR	AVE	factor loadings	α	CR	AVE
Attitude toward CSR in social media		0.85	0.85	0.53		0.89	0.89	62
1. [Brand] is committed to using a portion of its profits to help non-profits	0.740***				0.830***			
2. [Brand] gives back to the communities in which it does business	0.647***				0.713***			
3. Local non-profits benefit from [Brand]'s contributions	0.743***				0.726***			
4. [Brand] integrates charitable contributions into its business activities	0.707***				0.830***			
5. [Brand] is interested in corporate giving	0.805***				0.815***			
Peer communication with strong ties		0.62	0.62	0.45		0.91	0.91	0.83
1. Family	0.657***				0.864***			
2. Close friends	0.686***				0.957***			
Peer communication with weak ties		0.75	0.75	0.51		0.90	0.90	0.74
1. Classmates or college friends	0.726***				0.899***			
2. Former high school friends	0.639***				0.849***			
3. Acquaintances	0.767***				0.837***			
Opinion leader		0.86	0.86	0.68		0.92	0.92	0.80
1. People that I know pick shoes based on what I have told them	0.831***				0.835***			
2. I often persuade others to buy the shoes that I like	0.781***				0.916***			
3. I often influence people's opinions about shoes	0.862**				0.935***			
Opinion seeker		0.85	0.85	0.65		0.87	0.87	0.70
1. When I consider buying a pair of shoes, I ask other people for advice	0.777***				0.751***			
2. I like to get others' opinions before I buy a pair of shoes	0.862***				0.899***			
3. I feel more comfortable buying shoes when I have gotten other people's opinions on them	0.783***				0.851***			
eWOM intention		0.82	0.82	0.53		0.90	0.90	0.68
1. I will invite friends to learn more about [Brand]'s CSR on social media	0.781***				0.889***			
2. I will recommend [Brand]'s CSR on social media to my friends	0.756***				0.809***			
3. I will talk about [Brand]'s CSR on social media	0.726***				0.875***			
4. I will talk positively about [Brand]'s CSR on social media	0.648***				0.727***			
Consumers' Engagement with CSR Communication in Social Media		0.94	0.94	0.63		0.96	0.96	0.72
1. Posting personal experiences related to [Brand]'s CSR activities	0.823***				0.894***			
2. Friending, liking or following [Brand]'s CSR activities	0.699***				0.819***			
3. Posting or sharing thoughts about [Brand]'s CSR activities	0.868***				0.898***			
4. Posting or sharing photos, videos, memes or gifs created by others that relate to [Brand]'s CSR activities	0.802***				0.889***			
5. Posting or sharing photos, videos, memes or gifs created by you that relate to [Brand]'s CSR activities	0.783***				0.875***			
6. Receiving messages or information from [Brand] regarding its CSR activities	0.675***				0.720***			
7. Forwarding someone else's discussion on [Brand]'s CSR activities to other people	0.801***				0.854***			
8. Joining groups dedicated to [Brand]'s CSR activities	0.843***				0.876***			
9. Creating a group dedicated to [Brand]'s CSR activities	0.797**				0.828***			
10. Attending a gathering regarding [Brand]'s CSR activities that you learned about through social media	0.821***				0.829***			

Notes: Standardized coefficients reported. ***$p < .001$. AVE = Average variance extracted; CR = Composite reliability

Table 2
Results of the Structural Paths from the Multi-Group Analysis.

			All parameters free		
			Combine	China	U.S.
Attitudes	→	Engagement (H1A)	0.024	0.174***	0.000
Strong ties	→	Engagement (H2A)	0.162***	0.199***	0.219***
Weak ties	→	Engagement (H3A)	0.570***	0.226***	0.514***
Leader	→	Engagement (H4A)	0.108***	0.207***	0.045
Seeker	→	Engagement (H5A)	-0.015	0.109**	-0.118***
eWOM	→	Engagement	0.128***	0.116*	0.196***
Attitudes	→	eWOM	0.253***	0.509***	0.248***
Strong ties	→	eWOM	0.240***	0.117**	0.227***
Weak ties	→	eWOM	0.248***	0.173***	0.162**
Leader	→	eWOM	0.169***	0.136***	0.150***
Seeker	→	eWOM	0.124***	0.042	0.185***

Notes: Standardized coefficients reported. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. The relationships among the independent variables are covaried, and age and gender are included in the model as control variables.

6.4. Opinion leadership Characteristics: Opinion leaders and opinion seekers

The results document that opinion leader characteristic had a significant effect on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media (H4A: $\beta = 0.108$, $p < .001$; Table 2). Moreover, it had an indirect effect on consumers' engagement with CSR communication by enhancing eWOM intention (H4B: $\beta = 0.022$, $p < .001$; Table 3). Although opinion seeker characteristic did not directly affect consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media (H5A: $\beta = -0.015$, $p = n.s.$; Table 2), it did indirectly influence consumers' engagement with CSR communication by enhancing eWOM intention (H5B: $\beta = 0.016$, $p < .001$; Table 3).

Regarding the difference across the two groups, Table 4 shows that the opinion leader characteristic (model 6) had a significantly stronger effect on consumers' engagement with CSR communication for the Chinese than for the U.S. samples (H4C: $\Delta\chi2 (1) = 24.548$, $p < .001$; $\beta_{China} = 0.217$, $p < .001$; $\beta_{U.S.} = 0.026$, $p = n.s.$). The result is opposite to our hypothesis in which we proposed that effect would be stronger for American consumers than for Chinese consumers. Being an opinion seeker (model 7 in Table 4) had a significantly stronger effect on consumers' engagement with CSR communication for the Chinese than for the U.S. participants ($\Delta\chi2 (1) = 33.579$, $p < .001$; $\beta_{China} = 0.116$, $p < .001$; $\beta_{U.S.} = -0.143$, $p < .001$), supporting H5C. It is interesting to note that the relationship between opinion seeker characteristic and consumers' engagement with CSR communication was positive for China but negative for the U.S.

Table 3

Indirect Effects of Attitudes toward CSR, Peer Communication, and Opinion Leadership Characteristics on Consumer's Engagement with CSR Communication in Social Media through eWOM Intention.

Independent variables		Mediators		Dependent variables	β
China and the U.S. Combined					
Attitudes toward CSR (H1B)				Consumer's engagement in CSR communication in social media	0.032***
Peer communication with strong ties (H2B)					0.031***
Peer communication with weak ties (H3B)	→	eWOM intention	→		0.032***
Opinion leader (H4B)					0.022***
Opinion seeker (H5B)					0.016***
China					
Attitudes toward CSR				Consumer's engagement in CSR communication in social media	0.059*
Peer communication with strong ties					0.014*
Peer communication with weak ties	→	eWOM intention	→		0.020*
Opinion leader					0.016*
Opinion seeker					0.005
U.S.					
Attitudes toward CSR	→			Consumer's engagement in CSR communication in social media	0.048***
Peer communication with strong ties	→				0.044***
Peer communication with weak ties	→	eWOM intention	→		0.032**
Opinion leader	→				0.029**
Opinion seeker	→				0.036**

Notes: Standardized coefficients reported. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. One-tailed.

Table 4

Multi-Group Model and Path Comparison (Moderation Effect).

Model			χ2	df	Comparison to all-free model	
	Path coefficient (β)				Δχ2	Δdf
Model 1: All parameters free			0.291	1		
Model 2: Structural paths constrained			246.295	36	246.004***	35
Unconstrained a single path: (All other paths constrained)	**China**	**U.S.**			**Comparison to all-constrained model**	
Model 3: Attitudes → engagement (H1C)	0.174***	0.004	224.284	35	22.011***	1
Model 4: Strong ties → engagement (H2C)	0.269***	0.186***	239.726	35	6.569*	1
Model 5: Weak ties → engagement (H3C)	0.426***	0.401***	246.025	35	0.27	1
Model 6: Leader → engagement (H4C)	0.217***	0.026	221.747	35	24.548***	1
Model 7: Seeker → engagement (H5C)	0.116***	-0.143***	212.716	35	33.579***	1

Notes: **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. The relationships among the independent variables are covaried, and age and gender are included in the model as control variables.

7. Discussion

This study tested a model to understand consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media as a form of eWOM behavior in a cross-cultural setting. The study proposes that attitudes toward CSR in social media, peer communication about CSR activities, and opinion leadership characteristics serve as the three antecedents of CSR-focused eWOM intention which will lead to consumers' eWOM behavior. The analysis also reveals the mediating role of eWOM intention and its impact on eWOM behavior in social media. The results of multiple-group structural equation modeling with data from China and the U.S. suggest that the relationships are mostly as predicted but differ in degree across cultures (see Table 4). For global marketers, these findings provide useful information on how to use social media more effectively to promote their CSR campaigns.

Several important theoretical contributions and practical implications can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, while attitude toward CSR had no direct effect on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media, both strong ties and weak ties had a positive influence on eWOM behaviors. Moreover, opinion leader characteristic had a significant, direct effect on consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media, while opinion seeker characteristic did not. These findings suggest that consumers' favorable attitudes about CSR in social media do not necessarily make them likely to tell their friends about a company's CSR initiatives or spread positive eWOM about the brand. While attitude toward CSR had no direct effect on eWOM behaviors, an indirect effect was found through eWOM

intention. Similarly, opinion seeker characteristic also indirectly influenced consumers' engagement with CSR communication by enhancing eWOM intention, although a direct effect was not found. Indeed, all of the hypotheses regarding the mediating effect were supported (H1B, H2B, H3B, H4B, H5B) in the current study. This finding contributes to the literature by highlighting the significant mediating role of eWOM intention between the three antecedents and consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media.

Second, this study also illuminates the critical role of peer communication in leading to eWOM behaviors among social media users by confirming the influence of peer communication on eWOM intention and behavior in social media across cultures. In particular, social media peer communication about CSR activities with either strong ties or weak ties positively influences consumers' intention to engage in eWOM and the consequent behavior in both China and the U.S. This specific finding supports recent studies on social media peer communication (Men & Muralidharan, 2017; Muralidharan & Men, 2015; Wang, Yu, and Wei 2012) and reinforces the important role of peer groups as socialization agents in social media platforms. Social media peer communication involves a process in which individuals may imitate or model the behavior of their peers through social interactions (Wang, Yu, and Wei 2012). In both countries, when peers share opinions about a company's CSR communication on social media, their contacts may form similar perceptions and are susceptible to conforming to group norms. Marketers need to understand the importance of strong and weak ties and their instrumental value in positively influencing the eWOM behavior of social media users.

Third, the results from the multiple-group analysis showed that there are significant cross-cultural differences in the two consumer markets. That is, culture moderates the relationships between CSR eWOM behavior and its various antecedents. The degree of impact of the three antecedents varies significantly between consumers in China and the U.S. In particular, the influence of attitudes toward CSR on consumers' engagement with CSR communication is stronger for the Chinese than for the U.S. participants. In addition, the effect of strong-tie communication on consumers' engagement with CSR communication is stronger for China than for the U.S. Contrary to our prediction, the opinion leader characteristic has a significantly stronger effect on eWOM behaviors for the Chinese than for the U.S. samples, while the relationship between opinion seeker characteristic and eWOM behaviors was positive for China but negative for the U.S. Overall, these findings suggest that the relationships between the three antecedents and eWOM behavior in social media are stronger for Chinese consumers than American consumers.

These findings suggest that attitude, peer communication, and opinion leadership play a more powerful role for Chinese consumers than for their American counterparts in leading to eWOM behavior. This may explain why Chinese consumers generally engage in a higher level of eWOM than American consumers. For example, consumers with an interdependent cultural orientation, like Chinese social media users, emphasize harmony within their in-groups (Chu & Choi, 2011; Jiao, Jo, & Sarigöllü, 2017). Thus, Chinese consumers are more likely to use social media to maintain relationships with others. Because of this, their engagement with CSR communication is more likely to be influenced by their attitude, peer communication, and opinion leader characteristics. However, consumers with an independent view of self like American social media users are more likely to use social media to interact with content (Jiao Jo, and Sarigöllü 2017; Minton et al., 2012) and are therefore less likely to engage in eWOM behavior. Global marketers should adopt localized CSR strategies when considering how to boost the influence of attitude, peer communication, and opinion leadership characteristics on eWOM behavior. For example, companies interested in the Chinese market can monitor what CSR communication is being forwarded among users on social media and try to promote those CSR initiatives by leveraging the influence of opinion leaders and seekers.

Finally, cultural differences were observed in terms of the influence of opinion leader and seeker characteristics on consumers' eWOM engagement with CSR communication in social media. Specifically, opinion leader characteristic had a significantly stronger effect on consumers' engagement with CSR communication for the Chinese than for the U.S. samples.

While prior research found that American consumers tend to engage more in information giving and be opinion leaders, this characteristic plays a more important role in China than in the U.S. Interestingly, the relationship between opinion seeker characteristics and consumers' CSR engagement was only positive for China but negative for the U.S. These findings suggest that opinion leadership and opinion seeking are more likely to generate CSR-related communication through eWOM in social media in China than in the U.S. The collectivistic cultural orientation and group norms emphasized in Chinese society may contribute to these findings. When Chinese social media users actively learn and form opinions about CSR and at the same time receive information from others, they are more likely to engage in CSR communication to demonstrate their group membership and identity. Marketers in China should develop CSR programs that boost eWOM intention and create an online community on social media where Chinese consumers can discuss and share information about CSR.

While the direct relationship between opinion seeking and consumers' engagement with CSR communication was negative among participants from the U.S., opinion seeking indirectly influenced American consumers' CSR engagement through eWOM intention. A negative relationship between opinion seeker characteristics and consumers' engagement with CSR communication for American users

indicates that some social media users merely view others' comments and opinions about CSR and are not motivated to share that information with others on social media. These results indicate the importance of eWOM intention as a mediator in enhancing the relationship between opinion seeking and engagement with CSR communication among American social media users. For the U.S. sample, whether social media users will engage in CSR communication is based on their behavioral intentions. In the U.S. market, companies should attempt to inspire opinion seekers' intention to express their opinions about CSR as this will lead to their actual engagement with CSR communication in social media.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study highlight the huge opportunity to use social media to communicate CSR in China and provide valuable implications for multinational companies as they create global campaigns to target socially responsible consumers. It is imperative for Chinese social media marketers to develop strategic plans to identify peers who are able to persuade others among their friend circles. Companies should create CSR campaigns that encourage Chinese social media users to share their personal experiences or stories about companies' CSR programs with their peers. Furthermore, marketers can use artificial intelligence technologies or big data analytics to segment social media peers in order to develop real-time campaigns that optimize user responses.

In addition, consumer norms vary across cultures, and it is vital to develop a mechanism for identifying those norms that are valued in China. Such norms could be used in designing CSR communication strategies that will be more appealing to Chinese consumers and lead them to engage with CSR communication in social media. For example, to target Chinese social media users, it is vital to create CSR campaigns that they will see as likeable and sharable, as the influences of attitudes toward CSR, peer communication, and opinion leadership characteristics on consumers' engagement with CSR communication are strong for Chinese consumers.

8. Limitations and future research

A few limitations provide directions for future research. First, the present study focuses on positive eWOM and examines the antecedents that lead to CSR-related eWOM intention. Future researchers should consider the negative aspect of eWOM, as negative WOM could be used to express dissatisfaction and disapproval regarding irresponsible companies (Grappi, Romani, & Bagozzi, 2013). In addition, factors such as the creative idea, the actual social aspect being addressed, the specific social media platform, and congruence with the brand may have an impact on consumers' attitude toward CSR as well as their engagement with CSR communication in social media. Future researchers could examine these factors to expand the research in this area.

Second, this study focuses on the cultural differences between China and the U.S. It is important to note that the level of economic development also influences the extent of CSR practices and perception (Ramasamy & Hung, 2005). In China, social issues and responsibility only become important when economic security is guaranteed. The origination and spread of CSR in the U.S. also relates to the emergence of a wealthy middle class who care about the social consequences of business activities and can afford to support or punish companies through socially responsible consumption (Auger, Devinney, & Louviere, 2007). In contrast, although China has enjoyed rapid economic growth in recent decades, it is still the biggest developing country in the world. Previous studies showed that Chinese executives' and managers' adoption of CSR is linked to gaining economic benefits (Zu & Song, 2009), and many companies use CSR as a tool of public relations or window dressing rather than to make substantive structural change (Marquis & Qian, 2013). Longitudinal studies could provide insights about the trends and changes in the antecedents of consumers' engagement with CSR communication in social media, as China is moving from a developing country to a developed country.

Third, the power of government in economic regulation also shapes the nature of CSR in different countries (Matten & Moon, 2008). Empirical studies show that Chinese companies' response to CSR is both politically and economically driven, and political interference is an important determinant of CSR in China (Noronha, Si Tou, & Cynthia, and Jenny J. Guan, , 2013). Future researchers could examine the influence of economic systems and political interference on consumers' response to CSR in social media. Constructs such as consumer skepticism and trust could be included in the research model to examine their relationship with eWOM intention and behavior.

Fourth, future researchers may need to be more cautious when providing CSR examples in the study. Including actual CSR examples of a brand may provide more information about that brand than others, which could bias the result when some respondents are assigned that brand while others are assigned to different brands when answering the survey. Future researchers may want to use different brands, with one serving as the example of CSR and the other being asked about in the survey.[5]

Finally, as with all self-reported studies, participants' self-reported responses may be different from how they actually behave. For example, social desirability bias may affect the results. Future researchers could use experiments to investigate participants' actual behaviors related to their engagement with CSR communication in social media.

In sum, this is the first empirical study to examine the influence of culture on eWOM in social media, as it relates to CSR. The findings show that attitude toward CSR in social media serves as a more important predictor of eWOM behavior in China than in the U.S. Similarly, Chinese consumers' eWOM behaviors related to CSR are more likely to be influenced by peer communication and opinion leadership characteristics than those of their American counterparts. Identifying differences among countries in antecedents leading to consumers' action to spread a brand's CSR activities provides theoretical contributions to the literature on CSR and eWOM from a cross-cultural perspective.

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[5] We also conducted the analysis to compare New Balance between China and the U.S. given that they are the same brand and same amount of information was presented in both countries' survey. The significance of the structural paths from the multi-group analysis of New Balance stays the same as the results combined with the other brand for both the China data and U.S. data.

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