

Electronic Word-of-Mouth in Social Networking Sites: A Cross-Cultural Study of the United States and China

Shu-Chuan Chu
Sejung Marina Choi

ABSTRACT. Understanding electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in social networking sites (SNSs) is crucial as consumers have potential to reach global audiences quickly and easily. This article presents the first cross-cultural study on eWOM in SNSs by examining social relationship variables between the United States and China. Specifically, social capital, tie strength, trust, and interpersonal influence were examined as potential predictors of eWOM communication in the emerging online social channels. The results suggest that national culture plays a significant factor that affects consumers' engagement in eWOM in SNSs in the two countries. Theoretical and managerial implications for global Internet marketers were presented and discussed.

KEYWORDS. eWOM, cross-cultural, social networking sites, social relationship, China

INTRODUCTION

The impact of word-of-mouth (WOM) on the Web 2.0 on consumer purchase decisions has been an emerging topic of importance to business and marketing researchers (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009; Riegner, 2007). Among the many new Web 2.0 applications, social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and CyWorld have recently become one of the most popular social communication channels, attracting millions of consumers across the globe (Nielsen Online, 2009). As SNSs have become a global phenomenon and enjoyed mounting popularity worldwide (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008), networking, conversation, and collaboration therein present immense opportunities for consumers to actively engage in peer-to-peer

product recommendations and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM; Chu & Kim, 2011). Accordingly, global marketers increasingly employ product-focused eWOM strategies in order to develop strong relationships and enhance consumer engagement with their brands (Smith, Coyle, Lightfoot, & Scott, 2007).

With its orientation toward social exchange and engagement, SNSs have transformed the ways consumers interact with their peers, obtain product-related information, and make purchase decisions. Consumer activities in SNSs range from socializing with existing friends and making new ones to exchanging information and experiences regarding brands. Because contacts in SNSs are embedded in consumers' personal network, they tend to be perceived as more credible and trustworthy than marketers or unknown sources that often have a vested interest (Chu

Shu-Chuan Chu, PhD, is Assistant Professor in the College of Communication at DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA. Sejung Marina Choi, PhD, is Associate Professor of Advertising in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at Korea University, Seoul, Korea.

Address correspondence to Shu-Chuan Chu, PhD, College of Communication, DePaul University, 1 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60604, USA. E-mail: schu7@depaul.edu

& Kim, 2011). It is no wonder that more and more marketers invest considerable resources in encouraging positive eWOM in the online social venue by setting up their brand profile pages and engaging consumers to *make friends with or become followers* of the brand (Jansen et al., 2009).

Given that social engagement is the primary function of SNSs and social interactions among the users do not occur in a cultural vacuum, a question arises as to whether cultural values affect eWOM in this online social environment. Many suggest that social relationships and communications depend in part on the dominant cultural orientation of a given society (Singelis, 1994). Indeed, a few studies suggested that consumer behavior online is culturally shaped, reflecting the prevailing values of the culture in which individual consumers belong (Fong & Burton, 2006; Pfeil, Zaphiris, & Ang, 2006; Sun & Wang, 2010). Lewis and George (2008), for instance, found cross-cultural differences in deception in SNSs and face-to-face communication. Choi, Kim, Sung, and Sohn (2011) observed that motivations for using SNSs and the nature of relationships formed and maintained via these sites were different between the United States and Korea, reflecting the dominant cultural values in the respective countries. Although these studies provide initial insights into cultural influences in online environments, our theoretical knowledge of consumer behavior in the emerging social media, SNSs, is still limited. Further empirical investigation is timely and necessary to enhance our understanding of how culture influences social activities and eWOM in SNSs, the seemingly universal phenomenon.

Given the global growth and the highly social nature of SNSs, variations in cultural orientations of SNS users might be reflected in their social relationships and eWOM via the medium. The objective of this study was, therefore, to understand the status of eWOM as well as characteristics of social relationships in SNSs and identify the potential predictors of eWOM, with cultural contextuality. China, the world's largest Internet population with huge marketing opportunities, presents an ideal context for this investigation with its fast-growing economic potential and sharp cultural contrast with the

United States. In the emerging Chinese market, online social networking has gained huge popularity and SNSs such as QQ, Renren.com, and Kaixin.com have recently emerged as the most influential online channels (Eaton, 2009).

By applying the horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism (HVIC) typology of culture (Traindis, 1995), differences between China and the United States in four social relationship variables—*social capital*, *tie strength*, *trust*, and *interpersonal influence*—and their influence on eWOM in SNSs were examined. Since SNSs are specifically designed to facilitate social navigability and cultivate social exchange, eWOM within SNSs should be under the influence of social relationships the users hold therein. From a cultural perspective, the nature of and guiding principles for social relationships vary from culture to culture and are still reflected in the mediated environment. In this light, close examination of social relationship-related variables should provide useful insight to eWOM among SNS users across cultures. Findings of this study contribute to the literature on cross-cultural research and global marketing by delving into the cultural influence on social relationships and eWOM in the up-and-coming online social networking environment with a finer theoretical lens. Knowledge of how social relationships development and eWOM varies between the United States and China, culturally diverse two nations of notable importance in the global economy, sheds light on the development and implementation of effective global marketing strategies.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

eWOM in Social Networking Sites

WOM refers to information exchange behavior among consumers and is a powerful force in influencing consumers' attitudes and behaviors (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Gilly, Graham, Wolfenbarger, & Yale, 1998) as well as brand awareness, product knowledge, and perceived value (Wang, Li, & Wei, 2010). As new media technologies continue to evolve, the nature and effect of WOM taking place within

online environments, known as eWOM, have gained rising attention from researchers in recent years (e.g., Dwyer, 2007; Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006). Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004) defined eWOM 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” (p. 39). While WOM is often considered to include spoken, person-to-person interpersonal communication (Arndt, 1967; Rogers, 1995), eWOM is made available to simultaneously reach many other consumers and institutions via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al.). In addition, eWOM can take place through a variety of forms and means like blogs, review sites, and emails and the Internet’s freedom from geographic and time constraints allows eWOM communication to spread globally and quickly (Hennig-Thurau et al.). Unlike traditional WOM, both identified and unidentified sources may coexist when consumers use product-focused eWOM as a source of information online (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). Previous research, for example, has found that eWOM impacts online customer perceptions of product value (Gruen et al.), sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006), and consumer communities (Dwyer, 2007). As a result, eWOM is recognized as an important marketing technique in branding online.

The mounting use of SNSs provides consumers with another social venue to search for unbiased product information and at the same time allows consumers to give their own consumption-related advice by engaging in eWOM. SNSs are defined as an effective, powerful channel for consumers to create a visible personal profile, build a personal network, and display interpersonal commentaries publicly (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Regardless of geographical and temporal constraints, consumers can easily and quickly exchange brand-related information with their personal contacts (Graham & Havlena, 2007) and have potential to reach global audiences who share common interests in a product or brand via a multitude of communication modes readily available in the online environment. Because contacts within SNSs are generally members of focal users’ personal

networks and are perceived as more credible and trustworthy, SNSs may serve as an effective vehicle for eWOM and an important source of product information among consumers.

Traditionally, WOM communication is operated by two parties: opinion leaders and opinion seekers (Gilly et al., 1998). Opinion leaders are the information generators or providers in WOM, whereas opinion seekers are those who desire to obtain advice or opinions from others that help them evaluate products and services for their purchases (Feick, Price, & Higie, 1986). Accordingly, opinion leadership refers to an individual’s ability and motivation to share information, whereas opinion seeking is related to an individual searching out advice and information from others (Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1996; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). In the SNS context, the unique applications of SNSs enable users to forward and pass-along useful information to their personal contacts with ease and celerity. Thus, pass-along behavior is conceptualized as another important component of eWOM in SNSs. Thus, *opinion leadership*, *opinion seeking*, and *pass-along behavior* are three important aspects of information exchange that together constitute eWOM behavior in SNSs.

Social Relationships in Social Networking Sites

Given the unique social character of communications in SNSs, understanding the potential influence of social relationships developed therein on brand communications could advance our knowledge of the underlying process of eWOM. Indeed, a few studies have applied concepts pertaining to social relationships to understand traditional WOM referral behavior in the offline environment (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Gilly et al., 1998; Reingen & Kernan, 1986). For example, Stephen and Lehmann (2008) suggested that social capital plays an important role in the process of WOM transmission by an individual’s use of existing social capital or attempt to build new social capital. Brown and Reingen (1987) examined the effect of social tie strength on the referral flows and found that weak ties displayed a significant bridging function in facilitating WOM referral streams, whereas strong

ties were perceived as influential in consumers' decision making.

Another dimension of social relationships directly relevant to WOM is trust (Chow & Chan, 2008). Trust has been found to facilitate the exchange and use of information due to the increased perceived credibility of information when the partner as an information source is trusted in a social relationship (Robert, Dennis, & Ahuja, 2008). As a result, it is reasonable to believe that trust in personal sources could affect the nature and pattern of eWOM behavior. Similarly important, consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence is another construct that is useful to explain differences in cross-cultural consumer behavior (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989). Individuals with a high level of interpersonal influence susceptibility tend to follow the expectations of significant others (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975) and seek information from others (Bearden et al.), which may lead to increased eWOM. Thus, consumer sensitivity to interpersonal influence is identified as a potential social relationship factor that predicts eWOM.

From a cultural perspective, these social relationship related constructs—*social capital*, *tie strength*, *trust*, and *interpersonal influence*—may differ from culture to culture, reflecting the prevailing norms for an individual's role within a larger social group in a specific cultural context. An examination of cross-cultural similarities and differences in social relationships in SNSs is particularly important and interesting given that social connectivity and relationships are at the core of SNSs (Choi et al., 2011). Accordingly, social relationship dimensions are postulated to serve as major variables determining consumers' eWOM behavior in SNSs and to exert differential influences cross-culturally.

Cultural Orientations

Individualism-versus-collectivism (I-C) is perhaps the most frequently used dimension of cultural variability in cross-cultural consumer research (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Han & Shavitt, 1994). Members of an individualistic culture such as the United States tend to consider themselves as independent from others and focus on self-reliance, internal attributes,

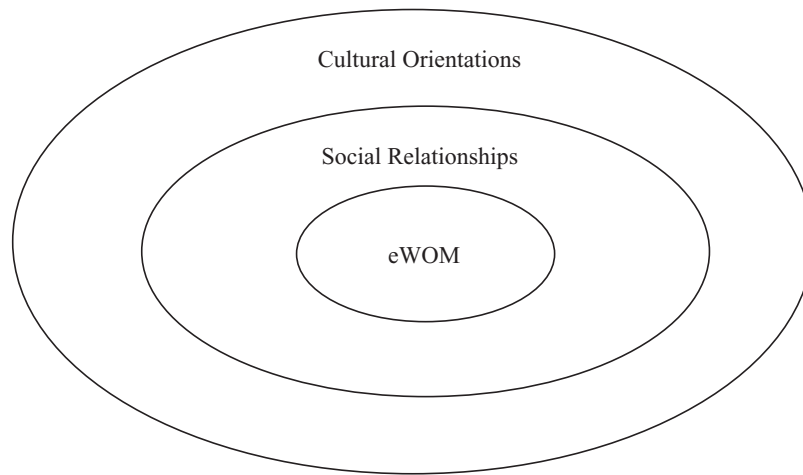
separateness, and distance from in-groups (Singelis, 1994). In contrast, members in a collectivistic culture such as China and Korea emphasize interdependence and value harmony, social norms, connectedness, and in-group memberships (Singelis). From this conceptualization, different cultures can be placed along the continuum with the opposite ends of I-C. However, such a dichotomous view has been criticized for its simplicity and there has been a need for a more sophisticated classification. A new typology expanding the I-C dimension with another aspect of social relationships, horizontal and vertical, has been introduced and validated (Triandis, 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

According to the new four-way typology, HVIC, individualism and collectivism are further divided along the horizontal and vertical dimension (Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, & Torelli, 2006). For horizontal relationships, individuals assume equal status for everyone (Triandis, 1995). In contrast, vertical relationships work following hierarchies; thus individuals accept inequality and acknowledge the importance of social status (Triandis). Hence, Triandis identified four distinctive types of cultures: horizontal individualism (HI), vertical individualism (VI), horizontal collectivism (HC), and vertical collectivism (VC).

Indeed, a few studies have applied the expanded view and suggested that the United States is a VI culture, whereas China is a HC culture (Shavitt et al., 2006; Sivadas, Bruvold, & Nelson, 2008). With VI cultural values, Americans tend to place strong emphasis on "being the best" and strive to achieve personal goals (Nelson & Shavitt, 2002). China, on the other hand, embraces the HC orientation, with a focus on peer bonding, sociability, and equal social relationships (Chen, Meindl, & Hunt, 1997). Given that relationship building marks the essential nature of SNSs, it is speculated that the innate cultural orientations of American and Chinese consumers are extended to online social channels and social engagement in SNSs may reflect the dominant values of the culture from which the consumers are from.

With a VI orientation, Americans may use SNSs to foster their social status and express uniqueness, whereas Chinese users with their

FIGURE 1. Conceptual Framework



HC orientation may see SNSs as a venue wherein they maintain strong and benevolent social relationships. As interdependence, accordance, and status equality are valued in HC cultures, Chinese users may be more likely to conform to peers' opinions and more susceptible to social influence in the form of eWOM than their American counterparts who stress independence and separateness from others.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

As discussed earlier, the prevalent orientations in a culture may shape the members' social relationships as well as their perceptions of self and others. Within VI cultures, social networks are likely to be stretched with loosely connected social relationships. On the other hand, social relationship development in HC cultures tends to be focus on close bonding with great influence on attitudes, norms, and behaviors. As social relationships are articulated in the form of contact lists in SNSs, users in HC cultures with tightly connected social relationships are more likely to rely heavily on information obtained from their contacts via SNSs than are consumers with their VI cultural orientations. Therefore, differences in cultural orientations in the United States and China may influence the types of social relationships formed and sustained in SNSs and thereby lead to distinct eWOM behavior.

Drawing from the literature on culture, social networks, and traditional WOM research, a general framework for cultural orientations, social relationships, and eWOM in SNSs is developed (Figure 1). Specifically, culture is proposed as a broader context which social relationships are embedded within and the corresponding cultural orientations are postulated to serve as governing principles for social relationship development in SNSs. Such culturally determined social relationships among SNS users are influential factors that drive consumers' engagement in eWOM in SNSs. Using the cultural typology, namely HVIC (Triandis, 1995), this study attempts to understand how variations in cultural orientations relate to social relationships, and consequently on eWOM behavior in SNSs in the United States and China.

eWOM in Social Networking Sites

Most research to date has examined WOM in a single country, yet little consideration has been given to cultural influences in WOM communication (Lam, Lee, & Mizerski, 2009). While information exchange behavior may be observed in all cultures, the degree and manner of such behavior may depend on dominant cultural orientations (Dawar, Parker, & Price, 1996; Dwyer, Mesak, & Hsu, 2005; Fong & Burton, 2006; Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005). Money, Gilly, and Graham (1998), for example, found that Japanese firms consulted more referral

sources than did their American counterparts. Money (2004) further noted that national culture impacted buyers' WOM referrals and switching of service providers. More recently, Lam et al. examined the transmission of WOM to in- or out-groups and found that consumers with their prevailing cultural orientation of collectivism (both HC and VC) tended to rely more heavily on in-group sources of information than did consumers with individualistic orientations (HI and VI).

Accordingly, Chinese SNS users with their HC orientation may put a relatively higher value on opinions and information obtained from their personal contacts than their own knowledge and experience. It is anticipated that Chinese SNS users are more likely to interact with their articulated close relationships and engage in eWOM with them via SNSs than American users. The interactive and vivid content of SNSs enables Chinese users to actively give, seek, and pass along information because consumers in a HC culture tend to feel more comfortable with speaking out and expressing their opinions online than in face-to-face communication (Tse, 1999). Tse, for instance, found that Chinese participants engaged in a higher level of participation and interaction in an electronic focus group environment, compared to traditional face-to-face focus group discussion. Thus, the first set of hypotheses is proposed to examine whether the extent of eWOM in SNSs differs between the United States and China.

H1: Chinese SNS users engage in a greater level of (a) information giving, (b) information seeking, and (c) pass-along behavior in SNSs than do their American counterparts.

Social Relationships in Social Networking Sites

Previous research has shown that WOM transmitters use social capital to fulfill various needs (e.g., attention, strengthening existing relationships and building new relationships) (Stephen & Lehmann, 2008, p. 3). In addition, Hung and Li (2007) found that social capital in a virtual community generates credible eWOM. In this regard, social capital may serve as a potential predictor of eWOM in SNSs. Scholars have defined

social capital as the set of resources embedded within social networks accessed and used by actors within a network (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). Putnam (2000) conceptualized two types of social capital, namely bridging and bonding. Bridging social capital builds upon reciprocity exchanges created by heterogeneous groups and requires diverse assets and access to information, whereas bonding social capital is formed through socially homogeneous groups that provide emotional support or reinforce shared social norms (Pigg & Crank, 2004).

Current research has found that both bridging and bonding social capital are observed in SNSs (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). The unique applications of SNSs provide consumers with various opportunities to maintain existing personal networks or to expand them, which simultaneously promote bridging and bonding social capital on these sites. In their recent study, Choi et al. (2011) found that cultural variations between individualistic cultures (e.g., United States) and collectivistic cultures (e.g., Korea) may be reflected in the two types of social capital that are available to consumers through social interactions in SNSs. Formatted by loosely connected networks, bridging social capital is associated with an individualistic orientation that focuses on independence and self-achievements (Choi et al.). In contrast, bonding social capital that emphasizes the importance of emotional support and shared norms obtained through dense networks is related to group-orientated collectivistic cultures (Choi et al.). Thus, it is reasonable to believe that with their VI cultural orientation, American SNS users are more likely to gain bridging social capital, whereas Chinese users who focus on HC values exhibit more bonding capital that leads to stronger engagement in eWOM. In an effort to investigate the relative magnitude of bridging and bonding social capital on SNSs between the two countries, the second set of hypotheses is formulated as follows.

H2: (a) American SNS users gain more bridging social capital in SNSs than do their Chinese counterparts, and (b) Chinese SNS users gain more bonding social capital in SNSs than do their American counterparts.

To further enhance the knowledge of the role of culture in influencing the formation of social relationships in SNSs, exploring how cultural orientations relate to tie strengths is needed. Tie strength is defined as “the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361). Strong ties emphasize the reciprocity nature of social relationships and are closely associated with bonding social capital, whereas the values of weak ties lie in those loosely connected individuals who provide bridging (Pigg & Crank, 2004). Tie strength has been studied extensively in the research of WOM behavior (e.g., Brown & Reingen, 1987; De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Goldenberg, Libai, & Muller, 2001). These studies found that both strong and weak ties are important for information exchange.

In the case of SNSs, eWOM may be initiated by interactions with both “strong ties” (e.g., close friends) and loosely connected “weak ties” (e.g., classmates). Yet the numbers of strong and weak ties may be related to the dominant cultural orientations such as HVIC (Triandis, 1995). Within the cultural orientation of VI, American SNS users may form a greater number of looser relationships and the social interactions among themselves may not be as frequent or strong. On the other hand, with the emphasis of HC in China, strong, cohesive, and intimate social relationships are more likely to be formed among users in SNSs. Thus, strong ties may be dominant in Chinese SNSs, while weak ties are paramount in American SNSs. The following hypotheses are proposed to explore such phenomena.

H3: (a) American SNS users have more weak ties in SNSs than do their Chinese counterparts, and (b) Chinese SNS users have more strong ties in SNSs than do their American counterparts.

Trust in SNS users is conceptualized as another important factor in influencing consumers' eWOM behavior in SNSs. Trust has frequently been described as a crucial part of social capital (Putnam, 1993). Trust can be viewed as an enduring attitude, belief, or expectancy possessed by an individual in interpersonal relations that the

statement or promise of another individual can be relied upon (Rotter, 1967; Schurr & Ozanne, 1985). Several studies have found that the level of trust plays a crucial role in determining an individual's decision to bridge other networks to exchange information or other resources existing in social capital (Leonard & Onyx, 2003; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In the online context, trust has been found to be essential for continuous participation in virtual communities (Jarvenpaa, Knoll, & Leidner, 1998; Lin, 2006).

In SNSs, consumers may evaluate the value of product information based on the perceived interpersonal factors, such as perceived integrity, expertise, honesty, sincerity, congeniality, and timeliness, all of which are important predictors of trust (Moorman, Deshpande, & Zaltman, 1993). Trust may facilitate the flow of information in SNSs and thus increase the likelihood that consumers will consider using eWOM when making a purchase decision. Yet the degree of trust in SNS contacts may be related to the predominant cultural orientations in the United States and China. Americans tend to emphasize social status and self-achievement and only look after themselves (Triandis, 1995). In contrast, Chinese people may look after members in their groups in exchange for loyalty and trust (Willis, 2009). While American users may also use SNSs as a source of product information, for Chinese users, trust should be established with other contacts for strong social relationships to be formed. Thus, the characteristics of cultural and social environments may shape the perceived trust among social relationships in SNSs. The next hypothesis, therefore, is outlined as follows.

H4: Chinese SNS users have a higher level of trust in their contacts in SNSs than do their American counterparts.

Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Bearden et al., 1989) is another construct that could be applicable to explain the social influence in eWOM in SNSs. Because eWOM focuses on online information exchange among consumers through social interactions, social norms and interpersonal influence are key

determinants of eWOM. Interpersonal influence has been viewed as a two-dimensional construct, normative influences and informative influences (Bearden et al.). Normative influences refer to the tendency to follow the expectations of others through purchasing a product (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). Informational influence is related to the tendency to make informed decisions by accepting information from others (Bearden et al.). While interpersonal influence may be universal in all cultures, consumers within different cultures exhibit different extents of susceptibility in terms of normative and informational influences (D'Rozario & Choudhury, 2000). For instance, prior research has found that consumers within individualistic cultures tend to be susceptible to informational influence, whereas those within collectivistic cultures tend to be subject to normative influence (Feick et al., 1986; Mourali et al., 2005).

Along the same line of reasoning, American and Chinese SNS users' susceptibility to interpersonal influence may depend on cultural orientations in the two countries, thus leading to SNS users' divergent eWOM behavior. Unique to online social networking, however, with their tightly knit social network readily accessible, Chinese users may turn to their contacts for information as well as for norms in SNSs. Furthermore, Chinese users may emphasize the process of transmission and relationship building in addition to the informational values gained from eWOM, whereas American users may focus on the informational value of the message transmitted only. Even for informational influence, for American consumers, personal attitude and internal judgments are the key determinants of behavior (de Mooij, 2004; Doran, 2002) and may not weigh the information received from their contacts in SNSs as heavily as do Chinese consumers. On the other hand, social norms are the primary determinant of behavior in the Chinese society and may enhance the susceptibility to interpersonal influence, both informational and normative, among Chinese SNS users. As a result, it is speculated that Chinese users tend to display higher levels of informational and normative social influence in SNSs than users in the United States. Thus, the fifth set of hypotheses is put forth as follows.

H5: Chinese SNS users are more susceptible to (a) informational and (b) normative interpersonal influence than their American counterparts.

As discussed earlier, the qualities of social relationships within SNSs may be closely associated with eWOM among the users. For a fuller understanding of the impact of social relationship variables on eWOM in SNSs and its variations between the two national cultures, the following research question is additionally proposed.

RQ: What social relationship factors influence consumers' engagement in eWOM in SNSs? Are there differences in the identified predictors between the United States and China?

METHOD

eWOM in online social networking platforms was tested in two cross-national samples. The online surveys were administered to American and Chinese college student samples that comprise the majority of SNS users in each country. Despite of differences in cultural orientations, the United States and China represent two countries with the largest numbers of Internet users in the world (Chiu, 2009). Further, SNSs in both the United States and China have enjoyed immense popularity in their perspective countries, with more than half of the Internet users log on their country-based SNS regularly (CNNIC, 2009; Lenhart, 2009). The social networking platforms in the two countries are similar in that they both enable users to create a personal file and allow global brands to set up communities to engage with their consumers (e.g., Facebook in the United States and Kaixin.com in China). Thus, the comparison between the United States and China was deemed appropriate.

Sample

Three hundred sixty-three American undergraduate students and 300 Chinese undergraduates from large universities in the respective

countries participated in the study. American respondents were recruited from a major south-western university in the United States. The American sample was composed of approximately 46.6% males and 53.4% females and ranged in age from 18 to 46, with an average of 21 years. More than 32% of the American participants were juniors, followed by 28.4% seniors, 25.9% sophomores, and 13.2% freshmen. More than 58% of the American respondents were Caucasian, followed by 14.3% Hispanic Americans, 12.1% Asian Americans, and 5.2% African Americans. Chinese respondents were recruited from a national online panel consisting of a large number of college students. The Chinese sample consisted of 48.7% males and 51.3% females, and respondents' ages ranged from 16 to 42, with an average of 22 years. More than 33% of the Chinese respondents were seniors, followed by 25% sophomores, 21.3% freshmen, and 20.3% juniors. The ethnic make-up of the Chinese sample was 100% Chinese.

Measures

The self-administered online survey comprised questions assessing key constructs that investigated eWOM and social relationships in SNSs. The questionnaire was originally developed in English and then translated into Chinese through the standard translation and back translation procedure with two bilingual graduate students. The specific items and reliability coefficients are presented in the Appendix.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth

eWOM was assessed by using opinion leadership, opinion seeking (Flynn et al., 1996), and pass-along behavior (Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006) scales. An 18-item, 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" was used to examine eWOM in SNSs. Note that these measures were intended to gauge respondents' actual behavioral tendency with respect to eWOM.

Social Capital

To measure social capital, an online social capital scale developed by Williams (2006) was

used. Ten items were used for each to assess bridging and bonding social capital. As a result, a 20-item, 7-point Likert scale, with anchors of "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree," assessed social capital on SNSs.

Tie Strength

Tie strength was measured by adopting items from previous studies and included four questions about (a) the respondents' social relation, (b) frequency of communication, (c) perceived importance, and (d) perceived closeness attached to the social relation (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Norman & Russell, 2006; Reingen & Kernan, 1986). Social relations with contacts were assessed by asking respondents the number of contacts they have on their "friends" list for the different categories (e.g., close friends and acquaintances). The average number of strong ties was obtained by summing up the average numbers of contacts in the family, relatives, and close friends categories (United States $M = 65.54$; China $M = 30.68$). On the other hand, the average numbers of connections in the acquaintances, classmates, neighbors, and others categories were subtotaled to gain the average number of weak ties (United States $M = 453.95$; China $M = 118.13$).

Frequency was measured using a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 being "never" and 7 being "very frequently." Perceived importance and perceived closeness were measured on two 7-point scales, with the endpoints of not at all important/very important and not at all close/very close, respectively.

Trust

Trust was operationalized using 7 Likert items reflecting respondents' perceived trust in SNS contacts (Lin, 2006; Mortenson, 2009; Smith et al., 2005). Responses on the trust scale were made on a 7-point scale, with anchors of "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree."

Interpersonal Influence

Interpersonal influence was assessed by adopting 12 items developed by Bearden et al. (1989). The normative subscale contained eight items whereas four items were included in the

informational subscale. Thus, a 12-item, 7-point Likert scale, with anchors of “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree” was used to assess the interpersonal influence of SNS contacts.

RESULTS

All measures were proved to be satisfactorily reliable and index scores were obtained by averaging up the corresponding items for analysis. The index of the perceived tie strength was calculated by using the mean of three subscales: frequency of communication, perceived importance, and perceived closeness. To obtain the relative composition of the two types of ties in social networks in each sample, the ratio of strong ties was estimated by dividing the total number of strong ties by the sum of both strong and weak ties. In testing the hypotheses, a series of *t*-tests first examined the mean differences in the key social variables between the United States and China. Next, regression analysis was used to identify predictors of eWOM within SNSs—opinion giving, opinion seeking, and pass-along in the two countries. The results are presented in this section, whereas detailed discussion and implications of the findings are outlined in Discussion and Conclusion.

Hypothesis Testing

eWOM in Social Networking Sites (H1)

The first set of hypotheses was to determine whether American and Chinese SNS users engage in eWOM via SNSs at different levels. With independent-samples *t*-tests, three eWOM behaviors—opinion giving, opinion seeking, and pass-along—between the groups were examined. Consistent with the prediction, Chinese participants appeared to engage in eWOM significantly more than their American counterparts. Specifically, Chinese SNS users were more likely to offer opinions (China: $M = 4.02$ versus United States: $M = 3.49$, $t(1,661) = -8.37$, $p < .001$), to seek opinions (China: $M = 4.27$ versus United States: $M = 3.28$, $t(1,661) = -12.69$, $p < .001$) and to pass along opinions (China: $M = 4.38$ versus United States: $M = 3.34$, $t(1,661) = -10.66$, $p < .001$) in the

context of SNSs than were their American counterparts. Accordingly, H1a, H1b, and H1c were all supported.

Social Relationships in Social Networking Sites (H2 Through H5)

The second set of hypotheses examined bridging and bonding social capital American and Chinese SNS users perceived acquiring from their networks within SNSs. In contrast to the prediction, Chinese participants ($M = 4.55$) reported gaining a greater level of bridging social capital in SNSs than did their American counterparts ($M = 4.32$) ($t(1,661) = -2.43$, $p < .01$). Therefore, H2a was not supported. For bonding social capital, American and Chinese participants did not show a significant difference (China: $M = 4.34$ versus United States: $M = 4.25$, $t(1,661) = -1.02$, $p = .31$), **disconfirming H2b.**

To further examine the nature of social relations of SNSs, another independent samples *t*-test compared the ratio of strong ties between the United States and China. The results indicated that Chinese participants ($M = 26\%$) maintained a greater portion of strong ties in their networks in SNSs than did their American counterparts ($M = 16\%$) ($t(1,636) = -7.30$, $p < .001$), lending support for H3a. In addition, perceived tie strength between the two groups was examined with *t*-tests. The results demonstrated that Chinese participants ($M = 5.41$) perceived a greater level of tie strength than did their American counterparts ($M = 4.77$) ($t(1,659) = -6.90$, $p < .001$), thereby confirming H3b.

In examining the fourth hypothesis, another *t*-test compared SNS users' trust in their contacts in SNSs. Chinese participants ($M = 4.84$) showed greater trust in their “friends” in SNSs than did their American counterparts ($M = 4.26$) ($t(1,661) = -6.12$, $p < .001$). Thus, H4 was well supported.

Next, the last set of hypotheses focused on the relative extent of two forms of interpersonal influences in the two countries. Two independent-samples *t*-tests examined whether Chinese participants were more susceptible to both informational and normative influences compared to their American counterparts.

Chinese participants ($M = 4.75$) reported being more susceptible to informational interpersonal influence within SNSs than did their American counterparts ($M = 4.20$) ($t(1,661) = -5.68$, $p < .001$). Similarly, Chinese participants ($M = 4.24$) exhibited a greater level of susceptibility to normative influence than did American participants ($M = 3.33$) ($t(1,661) = -9.30$, $p < .001$). Accordingly, both H5a and H5b were confirmed. All hypothesis testing results are presented in Table 1.

Impact of Social Relationships on eWOM in Social Networking Sites (RQ)

In this section, regression analysis was used to understand the degree to which opinion giving, opinion seeking, and pass-along behaviors were predicted by the previously examined social relationship variables. In each of the three regression models, eWOM behavior was regressed on the following social relationship predictors: (a) bridging social capital, (b) bonding social capital, (c) tie strength, (d) ratio of strong ties, (e) trust, (f) informational interpersonal influence, and (g) normative interpersonal influence.

The procedure followed two steps. First, a regression model was run with the merged data set of both countries to determine whether cul-

ture served as a significant predictor of eWOM behaviors in SNSs as well as the other above-mentioned variables. Culture was included as a dummy variable and the United States and China were entered as 0 and 1, respectively. As presented in Table 2, the regression analysis results showed that culture indeed significantly predicted SNS users' engagement in eWOM. Across all of the three variables, Chinese users consistently appeared to engage in eWOM in the SNS environment to a greater extent than did their American counterparts: opinion giving ($\beta = .21$, $t = 5.09$, $p < .001$), opinion seeking ($\beta = .33$, $t = 8.57$, $p < .001$), and pass-along ($\beta = .22$, $t = 6.25$, $p < .001$). From the combined analysis, bonding social capital ($\beta = .12$, $t = 2.85$, $p < .005$) was an only significant predictor of online giving, while bridging social capital ($\beta = .16$, $t = 3.78$, $p < .001$) and informational influence ($\beta = .12$, $t = 2.57$, $p < .05$) had significant impacts on opinion seeking. For pass-along behavior, bridging ($\beta = .13$, $t = 3.40$, $p < .005$) and bonding social capital ($\beta = .10$, $t = 2.71$, $p < .01$), trust ($\beta = .09$, $t = 2.35$, $p < .05$), informational ($\beta = .16$, $t = 3.95$, $p < .001$), and normative influences ($\beta = .22$, $t = 5.25$, $p < .001$) all emerged as significant predictors. The three regression models were all significant at $p = .001$.

TABLE 1. *t*-Test Results of eWOM and Social Relationship Variables

	United States		China		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>Electronic Word-of-Mouth</i>					
Opinion giving	3.49	.95	4.02	.66	−8.37***
Opining seeking	3.28	1.21	4.27	.79	−12.69***
Pass-along behavior	3.34	1.36	4.38	1.15	−10.66***
<i>Social Capital</i>					
Bridging social capital	4.32	.99	4.55	1.31	−2.43*
Bonding social capital	4.25	1.07	4.34	.94	−1.02
<i>Tie Strength</i>					
Ratio of strong ties	.16	.16	.26	.17	−7.30***
Perceived tie strength	4.77	1.14	5.41	1.26	−6.90***
<i>Trust</i>	4.26	1.06	4.84	1.31	−6.12***
<i>Interpersonal Influence</i>					
Informational influence	4.20	1.25	4.75	1.22	−5.68***
Normative influence	3.33	1.29	4.24	1.21	−9.30***

*Significant at .05. **Significant at .01. ***Significant at .001.

TABLE 2. Regression Results for the Influence of Culture on eWOM

Independent Variables	United States and China		
	β	R^2_{adj}	F
<i>Opinion Giving</i>		.15	14.53***
Culture (U.S.: 0; China: 1)	.21***		
Bridging social capital	.05		
Bonding social capital	.12**		
Tie strength	.07		
Ratio of strong ties	.01		
Trust	.06		
Informational influence	.05		
Normative influence	.08		
<i>Opinion Seeking</i>		.28	31.46***
Culture (U.S.: 0; China: 1)	.33***		
Bridging social capital	.16***		
Bonding social capital	.03		
Tie strength	.06		
Ratio of strong ties	.06		
Trust	.06		
Informational influence	.12*		
Normative influence	.05		
<i>Pass-Along Behavior</i>		.39	51.81***
Culture (U.S.: 0; China: 1)	.22***		
Bridging social capital	.13**		
Bonding social capital	.10**		
Tie strength	.05		
Ratio of strong ties	.04		
Trust	.09*		
Informational influence	.22***		
Normative influence	.16***		

*Significant at .05. **Significant at .01. ***Significant at .001.

The significant impact of culture on eWOM behaviors observed in the regression analysis with the combined dataset led to the decision to more closely examine the effects of social relationships factors on eWOM in each country. As illustrated in Table 3, the results of the two regression models suggested that **bonding social capital was a significant predictor of SNS users' engagement in opinion giving in both countries** (United States: $\beta = .11, t = 1.98, p < .05$; China: $\beta = .17, t = 2.50, p < .05$). Additionally, in the United States, normative influence ($\beta = .16, t = 2.35, p < .05$) was also found to produce a significant influence, whereas informational influence ($\beta = .23, t = 3.03, p < .01$) was a significant predictor in China.

As for opinion seeking aspect of eWOM, bridging social capital (United States: $\beta = .20, t = 3.26, p < .01$; China: $\beta = .13, t = 2.05, p$

$< .05$) and normative influence (United States: $\beta = .21, t = 3.18, p < .01$; China: $\beta = -.25, t = -3.85, p < .001$) were found to be significant predictors in both countries. Another significant predictor, informational influence ($\beta = .39, t = 5.60, p < .001$) was additionally identified in China.

When pass-along behavior among American SNS users was examined, the results indicated that bridging social capital ($\beta = .23, t = 3.86, p < .001$), bonding social capital ($\beta = .12, t = 2.20, p < .05$), and normative influence ($\beta = .13, t = 2.01, p < .05$) were significant predictors. For Chinese users, bonding social capital ($\beta = .03, t = .61, p > .05$), informational influence ($\beta = .11, t = 2.21, p < .05$), and normative influence ($\beta = .23, t = 4.42, p < .001$) appeared to significantly relate to pass-along behavior. **Taken together, these results suggested both similarities and differences existed in the impact of social relationship variables on eWOM between the United States and China.** These results are summarized in Table 3.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In today's online environment, consumers easily congregate and share product-related information with each other irrespective of spatial or temporal perimeters. The advent of SNSs has further fueled the participatory culture among consumers who are willingly networked together. In the growing SNS sphere, consumers build, sustain, and expand their own networks, and eWOM therein occurs in real time and multidimensional ways as the readily available networks of social contacts and myriad of communication channels. Consumers these days are no longer passive receivers of product-related information, but they are also active communicators who take on multiple roles in the eWOM process: they seek for peer consumers' wisdom and opinions and pass them on to others as well as offer their own knowledge and opinions. The rate and intensity of eWOM in SNSs are dependent upon the social networks therein, understanding the characteristics of social relationships consumers hold in the venue is instrumental in explicating the eWOM mechanism.

TABLE 3. Regression Results for eWOM in the United States and China

Independent Variables	United States			China		
	β	R^2_{adj}	F	β	R^2_{adj}	F
<i>Opinion Giving</i>		.07	4.97***		.09	4.68***
Bridging social capital	.08			-.01		
Bonding social capital	.11*			.17*		
Tie strength	.08			.03		
Ratio of strong ties	.04			-.02		
Trust	.04			.04		
Informational influence	-.05			.23**		
Normative influence	.16*			-.07		
<i>Opinion Seeking</i>		.14	9.00***		.20	10.77***
Bridging social capital	.20**			.13*		
Bonding social capital	.01			.12		
Tie strength	.07			.01		
Ratio of strong ties	.10			.03		
Trust	.03			.05		
Informational influence	-.02			.39***		
Normative influence	.21**			-.25***		
<i>Pass-along Behavior</i>		.21	14.74***		.48	37.76***
Bridging social capital	.23***			.03		
Bonding social capital	.12*			.11*		
Tie strength	.02			.05		
Ratio of strong ties	.03			.07		
Trust	.08			.08		
Informational influence	.12			.44***		
Normative influence	.13*			.23***		

*Significant at .05. **Significant at .01. ***Significant at .001.

The purpose of the present study was to comprehend this link between social relations and eWOM in the rising online social venue. Adding another dimension to the configuration, culture is still an important force in eWOM, a form of mediated interaction. As culture is the guiding principle for consumer attitude and behavior as well as relationship with others, the prevailing values of the culture from which consumers are should influence their social engagement and eWOM behavior in SNSs. Along these lines, this study examined the characteristics of social relations and eWOM in SNSs in two different cultures: the United States and China. From the recent conceptualization, the two national cultures are diametrically different: the United States and China represent VI and HC, respectively.

As predicted, our findings suggest that culture does play a role in determining social relations in the online environment. Reflecting their cultural backgrounds, American SNS users focus

more on the extension of their networks by making a large number of remote or loose contacts, whereas Chinese users maintain more tightly knit networks with close ties. Chinese users also place greater trust in their contacts and perceive the relationships as stronger and influential in SNSs than do their American counterparts. Of note is that contrary to the expectation, Chinese users acquire more bridging social capital from their networks in SNSs than do American users. Considering that American users in fact hold a far greater number of weak ties and larger networks that should lead to enhanced bridging capital, Chinese users may view SNSs in general as socially gratifying and beneficial. The positive qualities of social relationships Chinese users enjoy in SNSs appear to translate to their greater engagement in eWOM. Chinese users take part in all eWOM activities, opinion giving, seeking and passing to a greater extent than do their American counterparts.

Another set of findings further illuminates cultural variations in the influence of social relation related factors on eWOM. For instance, while informational interpersonal influence is a significant predictor of all three eWOM behaviors in China, it makes no significant impact among American users. Both bridging and bonding social capital significantly influence American users' spreading information, but only bonding affects opinion passing among Chinese users. Yet commonalities are also observed: bonding social capital influences both American and Chinese users' opinion giving and bridging exerts a significant influence on opinion seeking in both countries. Similarly, normative interpersonal influence is a significant determinant of both opinion seeking and pass along behaviors among both American and Chinese users.

Managerially, this study provides important practical implications for global marketing strategies in the era of Web 2.0. Because Chinese SNS users seem to be more active in engaging in eWOM than are users in the United States, global marketers' marketing efforts should focus more on encouraging Chinese consumers to share brand information with their contacts in social media. For example, to appeal to Chinese SNS users who have a relatively large number of strong ties and a high level of perceived trust, marketers could emphasize the trust in community relations and rely on buzz marketing that stimulates positive eWOM.

As with other empirical studies, the present study is not without limitations that should be discussed toward directions for future research. Although college students account for the largest portion of social networking population, the convenience sample of college students used in this study limits generalizability of the findings to the entire college student population or the general SNS user population. Future research should replicate this study with a more representative sample of college students as well as with diverse samples covering other age groups. Along the same line, only two national cultures, VI and HC, were examined in this study. Further exploration of social relationships and eWOM in the two other archetypal cultures, HI and VC, should advance our knowledge in this area. Another concern that merits future research is that the

self-reported, memory-based measures of network size and composition (i.e., number of contacts) and eWOM behavior may not be accurate. A content analysis of the "friends" lists and interactions and behavioral data may supplement the methodology of this investigation. A related issue is measurement equivalence in cross-cultural research. While the procedure of translation and back translation ensured measure comparability in the two countries, potential response biases specific to the cultures are unknown, which deserves attention of future studies.

Taken together, our findings reaffirm the importance of cultural sensitivity in designing effective marketing campaigns targeting at consumers around the world even if the arena has been shifted from offline to online. Companies are no longer in control of their brands. With the proliferation of SNSs and increasing force of eWOM among consumers, companies should harness the power of SNSs as a channel for eWOM. Our findings suggest that a first step toward the mission is to comprehend the character of social interaction and cultural norms and nuances that shape the eWOM process.

REFERENCES

- Aaker, J., & Maheswaran, D. (1997). The effect of cultural orientation on persuasion. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(3), 315–328.
- Arndt, J. (1967). Role of product-related conversations in diffusion of a new product. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 4(3), 291–295.
- Bearden, W. O., Netemeyer, R. G., & Teel, J. E. (1989). Measurement of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(4), 473–481.
- Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210–230.
- Brown, J. J., & Reingen, P. H. (1987). Social ties and word-of-mouth referral behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(3), 350–362.
- Burnkrant, R. E., & Cousineau, A. (1975). Informational and normative social influence in buyer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2(3), 206–215.
- Chen, C. C., Meindl, J. R., & Hunt, R. G. (1997). Testing the effects of vertical and horizontal collectivism: A study of reward allocation preferences in China. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 28(1), 44–70.

- Chevalier, J. A., & Mayzlin, D. (2006). The effect of word of mouth on sales: Online book reviews. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 43(3), 345–354.
- Chiu, L. (2009). *Top Chinese web sites in world's largest Internet population*. Retrieved from <http://chineseculture.about.com/od/mediainchina/a/topchinesesites.htm>
- Choi, S. M., Kim, Y., Sung, Y., & Sohn, D. (2011). Bridging or Bonding? A cross-cultural study of social relationships in social networking sites. *Information, Communication & Society*, 14(1), 107–129.
- Chow, W. S., & Chan, L. S. (2008). Social network, social trust and shared goals in organizational knowledge sharing. *Information & Management*, 45(7), 458–465.
- Chu, S. & Kim, Y. (2011). Determinants of consumer engagement in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in social networking sites. *International Journal of Advertising*, 30(1), 47–75.
- CNNIC. (2009). *Chinese social networking service research report*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnnic.cn/html/Dir/2009/11/11/5721.htm>
- Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, 95–120.
- Dawar, N., Parker, P. M., & Price, L. (1996). A cross cultural study of interpersonal information exchange. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 27(3), 497–516.
- De Bruyn, A., & Lilien, G. L. (2008). A multi-stage model of word-of-mouth influence through viral marketing. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 25(3), 151–163.
- de Mooij, M. (2004). *Consumer behavior and culture: Consequences for global marketing and advertising*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Doran, K. B. (2002). Lessons learned in cross-cultural research of Chinese and North American Consumers. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(10), 823–829.
- D’Rozario, D., & Choudhury, P. K. (2000). Effect of assimilation on consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 17(4), 290–307.
- Dwyer, P. (2007). Measuring the value of electronic word of mouth and its impact in consumer communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 21(2), 63–79.
- Dwyer, S., Mesak, H., & Hsu, M. (2005). An exploratory examination of the influence of national culture on cross-national product diffusion. *Journal of International Marketing*, 13(2), 1–28.
- Eaton, M. (2009). Social media grows across China. *Adweek*. Retrieved from <http://www.adweek.com/aw/content.display/news/digital/e3ie26373dd9e4342618f0e00648bc966da>
- Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends”: Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1143–1168.
- Feick, L. F., Price, L. L., & Higie, R. A. (1986). People who use people: the other side of opinion leadership. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 13(1), 301–305.
- Flanagin, A. J. & Metzger, M. J. (2007). The role of site features, user attributes, and information verification behaviors on the perceived credibility of Web-based information. *New Media & Society*, 9(2), 319–342.
- Flynn, L. R., Goldsmith, R. E., & Eastman, J. K. (1996). Opinion leaders and opinion seekers: Two new measurement scales. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 24(2), 137–147.
- Fong, J., & Burton, S. (2006). A cross-cultural comparison of electronic word-of-mouth and country-of-origin effects. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(3), 233–242.
- Gilly, M. C., Graham, J. L., Wolfinbarger, M. F., & Yale, L. J. (1998). A dyadic study of interpersonal information search. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 26(2), 83–100.
- Goldenberg, J., Libai, B., & Muller, E. (2001). Talk of the network: A complex systems look at the underlying process of word-of-mouth. *Marketing Letters*, 12(3), 211–223.
- Goldsmith, R. E., & Clark, R. A. (2008). An analysis of factors affecting fashion opinion leadership and fashion opinion seeking. *Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management*, 12(3), 308–322.
- Graham, J., & Havlena, W. (2007). Finding the “missing link”: Advertising’s impact on word of mouth, web searches, and site visits. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 47(4), 427–435.
- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360–1380.
- Gruen, T. W., Osmonbekov, T., & Czaplewski, A. (2006). eWOM: The impact of customer-to-customer online know-how exchange on customer value and loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(4), 449–456.
- Han, S. P., & Shavitt, S. (1994). Persuasion and culture: advertising appeals in individualistic and collectivistic societies. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 30(4), 326–350.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the Internet? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(1), 38–52.
- Hung, K. H., & Li, S. Y. (2007). The influence of eWOM on virtual consumer communities: Social capital, consumer learning, and behavioral outcomes. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 47(4), 485–495.
- Jansen, B. J., Zhang, M., Sobel, K., & Chowdury, A. (2009). Twitter power: Tweets as electronic word of mouth. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 60(11), 2169–2188.
- Jarvenpaa, S. L., Knoll, K., & Leidner, D. E. (1998). Is anybody out there? Antecedents of trust in global virtual teams. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 14(4), 29–64.

- Lam, D., Lee, A., & Mizerski, R. (2009). The effects of cultural values in word-of-mouth communication. *Journal of International Marketing*, 17(3), 55–70.
- Lenhart, A. (2009). *Adults and social network websites 2009*. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/272/report_display.asp
- Leonard, R., & Onyx, J. (2003). Networking through loose and strong ties: An Australian qualitative study. *International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 14(2), 189–203.
- Lewis, C. C., & George, J. F. (2008). Cross-cultural deception in social networking sites and face-to-face communication. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24(6), 2945–2964.
- Lin, H. F. (2006). Understanding behavioral intention to participate in virtual communities. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 9(5), 540–547.
- Money, B. R. (2004). Word-of-mouth promotion and switching behavior in Japanese and American business-to-business service clients. *Journal of Business Research*, 57(3), 297–305.
- Money, B. R., Gilly, M. C., & Graham, J. L. (1998). Explorations of national culture and word-of-mouth referral behavior in the purchase of industrial services in the United States and Japan. *Journal of Marketing*, 62(4), 76–87.
- Moorman, C., Deshpande, R., & Zaltman, G. (1993). Factors affecting trust in market research relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(21), 81–102.
- Mortenson, S. T. (2009). Interpersonal trust and social skill in seeking social support among Chinese and Americans. *Communication Research*, 36(1), 32–53.
- Mourali, M., Laroche, M., & Pons, F. (2005). Individualistic orientation and consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 19(3), 164–173.
- Nahapiet, J. S., & Ghoshal, S. (1998). Social capital, intellectual capital, and the organizational advantage. *The Academy of Management Review*, 23(2), 242–266.
- Nelson, M. R., & Shavitt, S. (2002). Horizontal and vertical individualism and achievement values: A multi-method examination of Denmark and the United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 33(5), 439–458.
- Nielsen Online (2009). *Nielsen online provides fastest growing social networks for September 2008*. Retrieved from <http://www.nielsen-online.com/>
- Norman, A. T., & Russell, C. A. (2006). The pass-along effect: Investigating word-of-mouth effects on online survey procedures. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(4). Retrieved from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol11/issue4/norman.html>
- Pfeil, U., Zaphiris, P., & Ang, C. S. (2006). Cultural differences in collaborative authoring of Wikipedia. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(1). Retrieved from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue1/pfeil.html>
- Pigg, K. E., & Crank, L. D. (2004). Building community social capital: The potential and promise of information and communications technologies. *The Journal of Community Informatics*, 1(1), 58–73.
- Putnam, R. D. (1993). *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Raacke, J., & Bonds-Raacke, J. (2008). MySpace and Facebook: Applying the uses and gratifications theory to exploring friend-networking sites. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 11(2), 169–174.
- Reingen, P. H., & Kernan, J. B. (1986). Analysis of referral networks in marketing: Methods and illustration. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 23(4), 370–378.
- Riegner, C. (2007). Word of mouth on the Web: The impact of Web 2.0 on consumer purchase decisions. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 47(4), 436–447.
- Robert, L. P., Jr., Dennis, A. R., & Ahuja, M. K. (2008). Social capital and knowledge integration in digitally enabled teams. *Information Systems Research*, 19(3), 314–334.
- Rogers, E. M. (1995). *Diffusion of innovations*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Rotter, J. (1967). A new scale for the measurement of interpersonal trust. *Journal of Personality*, 35(4), 651–665.
- Schurr, P. H., & Ozanne, J. L. (1985). Influence on exchange processes: Buyers' preconceptions of a seller's trustworthiness and bargaining toughness. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 11(4), 939–953.
- Shavitt, S., Lalwani, A., Zhang, J., & Torelli, C. J. (2006). The horizontal/vertical distinction in cross-cultural consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 16(4), 325–342.
- Singelis, T. M. (1994). The measurement of independent and interdependent self-construals. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(5), 580–591.
- Sivadas, E., Bruvold, N. T., & Nelson, M. R. (2008). A reduced version of the horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism scale: A four-country assessment. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(3), 201–210.
- Smith, D., Menon, S., & Sivakumar, K. (2005). Online peer and editorial recommendations, trust, and choice in virtual markets. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 19(3), 15–37.
- Smith, T., Coyle, J. R., Lightfoot, E., & Scott, A. (2007). Reconsidering models of influence: the relationship between consumer social networks and word-of-mouth effectiveness. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 47(4), 387–97.
- Stephen, A. T., & Lehmann, D. R. (2008). Recipient characteristics and product-related—transmission:

- The role of social capital. Retrieved from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1150996>
- Sun, S., & Wang, Y. (2010). Familiarity, beliefs, attitudes, and consumer responses toward online advertising in China and the United States. *Journal of Global Marketing*, 23(2), 127–138.
- Sun, T., Youn, S., Wu, G., & Kuntaraporn, M. (2006). Online word-of-mouth (or mouse): An exploration of its antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(4). Retrieved from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol11/issue4/sun.html>.
- Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Triandis, H. C., & Gelfand, M. J. (1998). Converging measurement of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(1), 118–128.
- Tse, A. C. B. (1999). Conducting electronic focus group discussions among Chinese respondents. *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 41(4), 407–416.
- Valenzuela, S., Park, N., & Kee, K. F. (2009). Is there social capital in a social network site? Facebook use and college students' life satisfaction, trust, and participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14(4), 875–901.
- Wang, X., Li, F., & Wei, Y. (2010). How do they really help? An empirical study of the role of different information sources in building brand trust. *Journal of Global Marketing*, 23(3), 243–252.
- Williams, D. (2006). On and off the “net”: Scales for social capital in an online era. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(2), 593–628.
- Willis, M. (2009). Tradition versus change: Evaluating the currency of some traditional Chinese values in today's business environment. *Journal of Global Marketing*, 22(1), 67–89.
5. On the SNS, I often influence my contacts' opinions about products.
6. When they choose products, my contacts on the SNS do not turn to me for advice. (R)

Opinion Seeking (United States $\alpha = .83$; China $\alpha = .71$)

1. When I consider new products, I ask my contacts on the SNS for advice.
2. I don't need to talk to my contacts on the SNS before I buy products. (R)
3. I like to get my contacts' opinions on the SNS before I buy new products.
4. I rarely ask my contacts on the SNS about what products to buy. (R)
5. I feel more comfortable choosing products when I have gotten my contacts' opinions on them on the SNS.
6. When choosing products, my contacts' opinions on the SNS are not important to me. (R)

Pass-Along Behavior (United States $\alpha = .93$; China $\alpha = .89$)

1. I tend to pass on information or opinion about the products to the contacts on my “friends” list on the SNS when I find it useful.
2. On the SNSs, I like to pass along my contacts' comments containing information or opinions about the product that I like to other contacts on the SNS.
3. When I receive product related information or opinion from a friend, I will pass it along to my other contacts on the SNS.
4. On the SNS, I like to pass along interesting information about products from one group of my contacts on my “friends” list to another.
5. I tend to pass along my contacts' positive reviews of products to other contacts on the SNS.
6. I tend to pass along my contacts' negative reviews on products to other contacts on the SNS.

**APPENDIX: MEASUREMENT ITEMS
AND RELIABILITY**

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”)

Opinion Leadership (United States $\alpha = .68$; China $\alpha = .73$)

1. I often persuade my contacts on the SNS to buy products that I like.
2. My contacts on the SNS rarely come to me for advice about choosing products. (R)
3. My contacts on the SNS pick their products based on what I have told them.
4. My opinion of products seems not to count with my contacts on the SNS. (R)

Social Capital (1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”)

Bridging Social Capital (United States $\alpha = .87$; China $\alpha = .93$)

1. Interacting with people on the SNS makes me interested in things that happen outside of my town.

2. Interacting with people on the SNS makes me want to try new things.
3. Interacting with people on the SNS makes me interested in what people different from me are thinking.
4. Talking with people on the SNS makes me curious about other places in the world.
5. Interacting with people on the SNS makes me feel like part of a larger community.
6. Interacting with people on the SNS makes me feel connected to the bigger picture.
7. Interacting with people on the SNS reminds me that everyone in the world is connected.
8. I am willing to spend time to support general community activities on the SNS.
9. Interacting with people on the SNS gives me new people to talk to.
10. I come in contact with new people on the SNS all the time.

Bonding Social Capital (*United States* $\alpha = .84$; *China* $\alpha = .72$)

1. There are several members of the SNSI trust to help solve my problems.
2. There is a member of the SNSI can turn to for advice about making very important decisions.
3. There is no one on the SNS that I feel comfortable talking to about intimate personal problems. (R)
4. When I feel lonely, there are members of the SNS I can talk to.
5. If I needed an emergency loan of \$500, I know someone on the SNS I can turn to.
6. The people I interact with on the SNS would put their reputation on the line for me.
7. The people I interact with on the SNS would be good job references for me.
8. The people I interact with on the SNS would share their last dollar with me.
9. I do not know members of the SNS well enough to get them to do anything important. (R)
10. The people I interact with on the SNS would help me fight an injustice.

Tie Strength (*United States* $\alpha = .82$; *China* $\alpha = .84$)

1. Approximately how frequently do you communicate with the contacts on your "friends"

list on this SNS? (1 = "never" and 7 = "very frequently")

2. Overall, how important do you feel about the contacts on your "friends" list on this SNS? (1 = "not at all important" and 7 = "very important")
3. Overall, how close do you feel to the contacts on your "friends" list on this SNS? (1 = "not at all close" and 7 = "very close")

Trust (1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree") (*United States* $\alpha = .93$; *China* $\alpha = .94$)

1. Generally speaking, most contacts on my "friends" list on the SNS can be trusted.
2. I feel confident about having discussions with the contacts on my "friends" list on the SNS.
3. The contacts on my "friends" list on the SNS will do everything within their capacity to help others.
4. I trust most contacts on my "friends" list on the SNS.
5. I have confidence in the contacts on my "friends" list on the SNS.
6. My contacts on my "friends" list on the SNS offer honest opinions.
7. I can believe in the contacts on my "friends" list on the SNS.

Interpersonal Influence (1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree")

Normative (*United States* $\alpha = .94$; *China* $\alpha = .90$)

1. I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them.
2. It is important that others like the products and brands I buy.
3. When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of.
4. If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy.
5. I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others.
6. I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.
7. If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy.

8. I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase.

Informational (*United States* $\alpha = .84$;
China $\alpha = .87$)

1. To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what others are buying and using.
2. If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product.
3. I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class.
4. I frequently gather information from friends or family about a product before I buy.

Copyright of Journal of Global Marketing is the property of Taylor & Francis Ltd and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.