Is this for our sake or their sake? Cross-cultural effects of message focus in cause-related marketing

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine how cause-related marketing (CRM) messages with a global focus and a national focus influence perceived brand authenticity and participation intentions among consumers across two countries, USA and South Korea, based on the social identity perspective. In addition, the study examines how perceived altruism of the brand mediates these relationships.

Design/methodology/approach – Hypotheses were tested by 2×2 between-subject quasi-experiment among about 260 US and Korean consumers. Data were analyzed using multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) and a moderated mediation analysis.

Findings – Results indicated that, overall, US consumers perceive higher brand authenticity and participation intentions toward CRM in than Korean consumers. Korean consumers perceived higher brand authenticity and participation intentions from a CRM message with a national focus, while US consumers did not have a significant preference between message focuses. According to the result of moderated mediation analysis, consumers' perceived altruism toward the brand mediated the effects of interaction between message focus and consumer nationality.

Originality/value – This study provides a unique perspective about what specific kind of CRM message could be more effective for consumers in different cultures, and proposes a theoretical explanation of why such difference is observed based on consumers' social identities and in-group favoritism.

Keywords Social identity, Cross-cultural, Cause-related marketing, Brand authenticity, Perceived altruism

Paper type Research paper

People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it. (Simon O. Sinek, Author/Organizational Consultant)

Introduction

Cause-related marketing (CRM) programs link fundraising for a cause to sales of a brand's products and/or services (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). The RED campaign is a well-known example: on World AIDS Day, Starbucks donated 10 cents for every beverage sold in stores to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS. Global brands like H&M and Zara also actively engage in CRM by donating part of their sales to causes (Mahoney, 2014).

One reason why global brands engage in CRM is because altruistic gestures appeal to consumers (Nan and Heo, 2007). According to CauseGood Marketing Statistics, 90 percent of US consumers are likely to switch to a cause-branded product and 42 percent are willing to pay premium prices for brands that are committed to social and environmental causes. Consumers' motivation to participate in CRM is driven by their desire for social acceptance, as

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researchers in clinical psychology explain that people as social actors seek to enhance their happiness and subjective well-being through altruistic behavior that are accepted positively by others (e.g. Borgonovi, 2008; Corral-Verdugo *et al.*, 2011; Post, 2005). Also, consumers tend to prefer to associate themselves with socially respected brands while they prefer to avoid socially disrespected brands, to maintain their social reputation (Lee *et al.*, 2009). Because CRM satisfies consumers' needs for social acceptance, CRM has become an effective marketing tool to build brand–customer relationships and improve brand image – brands spent over US$2bn on CRM in 2017 – nearly three times the amount spent in 2000 (e.g. Hoeffler and Keller, 2002; Varadarajan and Menon, 1988).

Global brands that generate revenues outside their home countries (Perlmutter, 2017) are fueling the proliferation of CRM campaigns. This trend is evident in rankings such as *Fortune*'s Most Generous Companies (Preston, 2016) and *Forbes*'s Most Reputable Companies for Corporate Responsibility (Strauss, 2017), which are dominated by well-known global brands such as Walmart, Google, Microsoft, BMW and Cisco. Some researchers have suggested that global brands' extensive resources enable them to invest more in CRM than smaller domestic brands (McWilliams and Siegel, 2000). Others have posited that social expectations are higher for leading global brands to demonstrate social responsibility (Paharia *et al.*, 2010). From either perspective, it is clear that CRM is becoming an especially important tool used by global brands to demonstrate their social responsibility (Bondy *et al.*, 2012).

However, effective execution of CRM can be more challenging for global brands than domestic firms because they must address the needs of consumers from diverse nations and cultures with substantially different social expectations and perceptions of CRM (Lavack and Kropp, 2003). Carroll (1979) defined corporate social responsibility (CSR) as the society's ethical expectations of businesses. However, consumers' expectations of global brands can differ significantly across countries and cultures. Thus, global brands must be highly sophisticated and culturally intelligent to develop effective CRM campaigns for foreign markets (Lavack and Kropp, 2003). Another recent trend that threatens global brands is global consumers' rapidly increasing skepticism about the motives underlying CRM (Anuar *et al.*, 2013; Singh *et al.*, 2009). Consumers in some cultures perceive the CRM campaigns of domestic companies more favorably than those of global brands (Choi *et al.*, 2016; La Ferle *et al.*, 2013), which can be perceived as manipulative and insincere (Anuar *et al.*, 2013). Consumers in some countries have low awareness and favorability toward companies' socially responsible acts, which also makes it difficult to execute CRM for global brands (Tang and Li, 2009; Welford, 2005). To ensure that CRM programs are effective and appealing to local consumers, it is becoming increasingly important for multi-national corporations to understand varying level of CRM perceptions across countries, and to tailor CRM messages to each foreign market's culture (Kim and Lee, 2009).

Nevertheless, insufficient research exists to inform effective CRM strategies for global brands. Scholars have not fully explored CRM opportunities from an international marketing perspective, and scant information exists about which approaches global brands should take to develop culturally-aware CRM campaigns for diverse foreign markets (Vrontis *et al.*, 2018). Several researchers have noted a need to compare cultural differences to explain how and why global brands' CRM strategies could yield different effects across cultures; doing so could inform effective CRM campaign design strategies that reflect "nuanced phasing and appeals" for target markets (Laroche, 2017, p. 5; Vrontis *et al.*, 2018).

This research gap is critical, because global brands target an array of multicultural markets, which means a one-size-fits-all approach to CRM programs may be ineffective (Choi *et al.*, 2016). Localization, which requires an understanding of the culture of a target market is a fundamental element of marketing tactics (Ramarapu *et al.*, 1999) that can be especially relevant in CRM contexts. Consumers' perceptions of CRM are significantly shaped by cultural norms that define what is "good" (Carroll, 1979). Launching a culturally

ignorant CRM campaign could disappoint consumers and harm a brand's image globally. Thus, it is crucial to understand cultural differences to develop an appealing cross-cultural CRM campaign (Vrontis *et al.*, 2018).

Answering this call, we investigate effective message framing for global brands' CRM campaigns by comparing cross-cultural differences in consumers' message focus preferences. Specifically, we compare the effects of two different message focuses (national vs global) in a global brand's CRM campaign on consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity and intention to participate in the CRM, between the USA and South Korea. Moreover, we examine the mediating role of perceived brand altruism in the effect of the interaction between nationality and message focus on consumers' responses. Given the recent increase of consumer skepticism and distrust toward companies' socially responsible marketing, many researchers have emphasized the importance of having consumers perceive brands' effort to be truly altruistic to make CRM effective (Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013). Addressing this concern, this study examines if perceived brand altruism plays a mediating role in delivering the effects of CRM variables to consequential consumer responses. Furthermore, to strengthen the accuracy of this comparison, we consider within-country consumer heterogeneity by controlling for individual consumers' personal attitudes toward the global brand's home country. To begin, literature will be reviewed to discuss the theoretical background of our study, as well as previous studies that have been conducted on international CRM.

Literature review
Theoretical background: the social identity perspective
The social identity perspective is one of the most widely-accepted and established theoretical explanations for consumer behavior (Hornsey, 2008). The social identity theory posits that people's identities are based on a sense of belonging (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). The social categorization theory extends the social identity theory by explaining how people identify themselves as members of social ingroups in contrast to outgroups (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Together, these two theories comprise the social identity perspective (Hornsey, 2008). For over three decades, the social identity perspective has informed human behavior studies across a wide range of academic disciplines (Nason *et al.*, 2018).

A core tenet of the social identity perspective is that social identities determine reactions to stimuli. People tend to exhibit in-group bias by reacting more positively and passionately to stimuli that benefit their ingroups, and less positively to stimuli that are unrelated to their ingroups or related to outgroups; moreover, people tend to perceive that their ingroups' interests should be prioritized (Brown, 2000). As such, the social identity perspective theoretically explains why people perceive "us/ours" to be more important than "them/theirs" (Brown, 2000; Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

Individuals exhibit varying levels of in-group bias based on the extent to which they identify with their ingroups. Regarding this varying extent to in-group bias, individualism vs collectivism, a cultural characteristic of each culture or country, provides an explanation of how different levels of the "strength" of such in-group bias can exist across countries (Kropp *et al.*, 2005). Following the social identity theory, which explains how individuals form a group-based self-identification, individualism and collectivism explain how such group-based self-identification is observed at varying levels of strength across countries (Gundlach *et al.*, 2006). Individualism/collectivism is one of the five dimensions that Hofstede (2001) proposed to describe cultural differences across countries, which have been heavily accepted as an established framework that theorizes cultural differences in the literature (Taras *et al.*, 2010). According to the Hofstede's (2001) conceptualization, individualism and collectivism represent the two contrasting sides on the extent of how much an individual puts importance on his/her own groups (individualism puts less importance, while collectivism puts greater importance on groups), mainly, his/her own country. Findings show that members of collectivistic

cultures place greater emphasis on in-group identities, and thus exhibit stronger in-group bias than members of individualistic cultures, who place greater emphasis on individual identities (Kropp *et al.*, 2005; Triandis *et al.*, 1988; Yuki, 2003). In collectivistic cultures, groups are more important than individuals; likewise, group goals and shared benefits are a higher priority than individual values (Triandis *et al.*, 1995; Yuki, 2003). Members of collectivistic cultures more strongly identify with their cultural groups; they tend to exhibit strong group loyalty, and are more likely to perceive their group's collective goals and values as their own (Triandis *et al.*, 1995; Yuki, 2003). Because the description of a collectivistic culture is similar to that of the collective self-concept in the social identification perspective, researchers have acknowledged that they are correlated; the social identification perspective provides a robust theoretical foundation for these concepts by explaining how self-identities form around group affiliations (Kropp *et al.*, 2005; Yuki, 2003).

Many researchers have applied the social identity perspective and the collectivism vs individualism framing to study cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior. The existing literature focuses predominantly on cultural variances in the strengths of in-group bias, and how such bias is revealed through consumers' brand choices and responses to marketing activities. Some common approaches include examining how consumers' social identities (e.g. nationality, cultural group, ethnicity, etc.) influence favoritism, loyalty or ethnocentrism toward ingroup-made products and brands (e.g. El Banna *et al.*, 2018; Lantz and Loeb, 1996), and preferences toward advertisements aligned with their social identities (e.g. Grier and Deshpandé, 2001; Sierra *et al.*, 2009; Westjohn *et al.*, 2012). Often, researchers study these phenomena in collectivistic cultures with strong in-group favoritism (Khare *et al.*, 2012). Researchers have found that consumers' ethnocentric bias toward domestic products, brands, and issues are stronger in collectivistic cultures, as they are more likely to perceive that their actions directly affect their social ingroups (Hui and Triandis, 1986; Triandis *et al.*, 1988).

Despite widespread adoption of the social identity perspective in consumer research, it has not been fully utilized to explore how cultural differences may affect consumers' responses to CRM campaigns. A review of the literature reveals no examinations of the effectiveness of CRM approaches in cross-cultural contexts from a social identity perspective. Scholars have highlighted a need for research on this topic, as there is potential influence of social identification on consumers' CRM preferences. Nichols *et al.* (2016) found that consumers tend to respond more positively to CRM campaigns that feature their hometowns due to strong attachments to societal ingroups. Summers and Summers (2017) proposed that consumers' in-group identities generate stronger emotional ties to causes that benefit their ingroups, increasing their likelihood to respond more proactively. Furthermore, Pérez (2009) suggested that consumers desire to patronize corporations that identify as members of their ingroups, and respond to those corporations' marketing activities more favorably. Findings from cross-cultural CRM studies generally suggest that cultural values emphasizing group identities could significantly impact consumers' responses to CRM (e.g. Choi *et al.*, 2016; La Ferle *et al.*, 2013; Wang, 2014). Overall, these researchers collectively suggest that consumers' social identities undergird their preference for CRM campaigns that benefit their ingroups. Successfully tapping into this bias could significantly drive consumers' support for CRM campaigns.

Cross-cultural differences and CRM
Despite global brands' increasing interest, CRM has not been sufficiently studied from an international marketing perspective (Vrontis *et al.*, 2018). Only a handful of studies have examined cross-cultural differences in consumers' responses to CRM. For instance, Lavack and Kropp (2003) found that consumers' attitudes toward the same CRM campaign could differ across cultures depending on which personal values are dominant.

Some researchers found that consumers in some cultures tend to appreciate the social actions of domestic companies more than foreign companies. For example, La Ferle *et al.* (2013) found that Indian consumers perceive a domestic (vs multi-national foreign) company's CRM more positively. Similarly, Choi *et al.* (2016) found that consumers from a collectivistic culture make more positive attributions about a domestic (vs global) company's CRM. Wang (2014) examined the impact of cultural orientation further by investigating how US and Chinese consumers' vertical or horizontal (whether there is a hierarchy across individuals [in the case of individualism] or groups (in the case of collectivism)) individualism and collectivism influence their attitudes toward CRM. Despite these noteworthy attempts, however, cross-cultural research in the context of international CRM is very scarce. Due to the limited number of studies, it is difficult to predict how and why consumers from different cultures would respond similarly or differently to CRM. Furthermore, no scholars have examined how different messages could generate different effects among consumer across countries, which could reveal which specific CRM appeals would be more effective in specific contexts.

Although they did not specifically focus on CRM, researchers have identified some clear cultural patterns regarding CSR activities in international business contexts. CSR awareness and engagement levels vary from country to country; most findings show that awareness and acceptance of CSR are generally higher in Europe and North America than in Asia (e.g. Tang and Li, 2009; Welford, 2005; Woo and Jin, 2016a). Although the underlying reasons for this pattern are still being investigated, some researchers have suggested that because the concept originated in Europe and North America, CSR is more widespread and familiar to consumers in those regions (Tang and Li, 2009; Welford, 2005). Others have highlighted that ethical regulations and standards are generally higher in those regions (Woo and Jin, 2016a), which causes firms to pursue CSR more explicitly (Matten and Moon, 2008). Overall, findings in the CSR literature suggest that in some countries, CSR is more widely accepted and favorably perceived than in other countries (e.g. Tang and Li, 2009; Welford, 2005; Woo and Jin, 2016a). This poses a question which has not yet been addressed: Could consumers' acceptance and perceptions of CRM – which is a specific type of CSR activity (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988) – also differ from country to country? Particularly, toward a global brand's CRM campaign, could different cultural characteristics, such as strong collectivism and in-group favoritism, influence consumers' varying level of acceptance of the campaign across cultures? The current study examines this question by comparing the different levels of perceived brand authenticity and participation intention toward a global brand's CRM campaign among US and Korean consumers, which is going to be discussed in the later part of this paper.

Effect of message focus and CRM

In communications research, evidence shows that message framing is a powerful tactic that adds nuance and ensures the intended effects of marketing campaign messages (Lee *et al.*, 2017). Because message framing directly affects a marketing campaign's persuasiveness, it is a critical variable in many marketing, advertising and communication studies (Smith and Petty, 1996).

Cross-cultural effects of message focus have been examined in international marketing contexts. For example, Uskul *et al.* (2009) found that the effectiveness of gain-focused and loss-focused advertising campaigns differ across cultures depending on local consumers' regulatory focus. Laroche *et al.* (2001) found differences in the effectiveness of the same fear message focus in advertising campaigns in China and Canada. Focusing more on consumers' cultural orientations, Zhang and Neelankavil (1997) found that messages with an individualistic focus appeal more to consumers in individualistic culture, while messages with a collectivistic focus appeal more in a collectivistic culture. Collectively, these findings

clearly show cross-cultural differences in message focus effectiveness. To ensure maximum effectiveness, it is thus important to examine which message focuses best appeal to consumers in different cultures and tailor marketing messages accordingly (Zhang and Gelb, 1996).

Extending this line of research, scholars have studied the effects of different message focuses in CRM contexts. For example, Grau and Folse (2007) examined the effects of message proximity (locally-targeted vs nationally-targeted) and message focus (positive vs negative) in CRM campaigns, and found that locally-targeted messages with positive appeals lead to more favorable attitudes and participation intentions among consumers. Chang (2011) found that the effect of guilt-focused messages in CRM differs by product type and donation magnitude, while Samu and Wymer (2009) found that the effectiveness of brand-focused messages and cause-focused messages differ based on brand-cause fit.

Given the scarcity of literature on the effect of message focus in CRM in general, information about the cross-cultural effectiveness of different message focuses in international CRM campaigns is quite limited. Kim and Johnson (2013) examined the effectiveness of different types of moral appeals in CRM on consumers' intentions to purchase social-cause products across cultures; findings show that an ego-focused emotional appeal is more effective for consumers in an independent culture (USA) while an other-focused emotional appeal (guilt) is more effective for consumers in an interdependent culture (South Korea). Focusing on a different aspect of message focus, Okazaki *et al.* (2010) compared the effects of hard-sell (direct and information-based) and soft-sell (indirect and image-based) CRM appeals on US and Japanese consumers' perceptions of a CRM ad, but found rather homogenous effects of both appeals across consumer groups.

Combining these previous findings, it is apparent that the effectiveness of different message focuses in marketing campaigns can vary significantly across cultures (Laroche *et al.*, 2001; Uskul *et al.*, 2009; Zhang and Gelb, 1996; Zhang and Neelankavil, 1997); yet, what is still lacking in existing literature is an investigation of the effect of where the CRM campaign targets to, such as, the benefiting location (global vs national) that is emphasized in the CRM message. Existing studies do not provide sufficient information to help global brands develop effective international CRM campaigns for this aspect, which might particularly be related to consumers' different levels of in-group favoritism across countries. Specifically, global brands would benefit from understanding which message focuses, based on the location of the beneficiary (global vs national), are likely to be most effective in different foreign markets.

The effects of CRM on consumers' participation and brand authenticity
For means to assess the effectiveness of a global brand's CRM campaign, most previous researchers have examined consumers' behavioral intention to participate in that CRM as an important indicator because the ultimate purpose of CRM is to encourage consumers' participation in the campaign (e.g. Chang, 2011; Grau and Folse, 2007; Kim and Johnson, 2013; La Ferle *et al.*, 2013; Samu and Wymer, 2009). CRM participation intentions indicate the extent of how much a consumer is willing to engage in the CRM campaign (La Ferle *et al.*, 2013). As an immediate effect of CRM, consumers' increased CRM participation intention indicates that the CRM campaign actually generated an impact, thus purchasing the brand/product that is promoted in the CRM, and concurrently, contributing to the promoted cause. Following these previous studies, we decided to examine the effects of different message focuses (national vs global) on consumers' CRM participation intentions across cultures.

In addition, we examined another indicator of the effectiveness of the CRM campaign through perceived brand authenticity (brand authenticity from here) among consumers. Brand authenticity is defined as "the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful and true toward itself and its consumers, and to support consumers being true to

themselves" (Morhart *et al.*, 2015, p. 202). Although the term of brand authenticity sometimes addresses a wide variety of conceptual associations due to its pertinence to the humanities and social sciences, its core tenet is perceived "trustworthiness" of a brand (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012). To utilize the concept for marketing research, Bruhn *et al.* (2012) operationalized brand authenticity by four dimensions: continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness. Continuity presents how much a brand offers continuity by maintaining consistent brand concept and offerings, while originality indicates the extent of how much the brand stands out from other brands with unique reputation (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012). In addition, reliability indicates how much the brand possesses a stable relationship with consumers, based on credibility and trust, whereas naturalness presents how the brand is perceived as genuine and sincere (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012). Leveraging this concept of brand authenticity to CRM, brand authenticity could measure if the CRM campaign was effective by strengthening consumers' trust and respect toward the brand, besides their immediate participation intention. Because the goal of CRM is not only increased consumer participation but also enhanced brand reputation in the long-term (Hoeffler and Keller, 2002), brand authenticity, which indicates how much consumers believe the overall brand image is sincere, trustworthy and genuine (Beverland, 2005; Morhart *et al.*, 2015; Napoli *et al.*, 2014) due to its CRM effort, could be useful. Previous researchers also suggested that establishing brand authenticity helps global brands overcome consumers' growing skepticism about their altruistic actions, so that their CRM effort could be more accepted among consumers (Anuar *et al.*, 2013; Singh *et al.*, 2009).

Based on these, our research hypotheses were developed to examine the effects of a global brand's CRM campaign on US and Korean consumers' CRM participation intentions and brand authenticity perceptions. According to Hofstede's cultural comparison, the US and South Korea represent the distinguished sides of individualism-collectivism (USA = individualistic, South Korea = collectivistic) (Hofstede Insights, 2019). This strong difference between two countries' emphasis on ingroup suggests a possibility of consumers' different perceptions toward a global brand's CRM campaign. For the first hypothesis, findings in the CSR literature, which were discussed in the literature review above, suggest that the effectiveness of a CRM campaign could vary across countries, being higher in certain countries than others because some countries have greater awareness of and emphasis on social responsibility (Tang and Li, 2009; Welford, 2005; Woo and Jin, 2016a). In particular, previous researchers suggested that consumers in the USA and other countries in North America and Europe have more established perceptions about CSR than consumers in Asian countries (Tang and Li, 2009; Welford, 2005). This reveals a possibility of a different level of effectiveness of a CRM campaign across countries, which has not yet to be clearly examined in either the CRM or the CSR literature. In particular, when a global brand (neither from the USA nor South Korea) presents a CRM campaign, US consumers' perceptions toward the campaign could be higher than Korean consumers, who have stronger in-group favoritism than US consumers. Previous researchers provide some support to this assumption, by finding that consumers with stronger collectivism can be less favorable toward a foreign brand's CRM than toward a domestic brand's CRM (La Ferle *et al.*, 2013; Lavack and Kropp, 2003). Based on this, we hypothesize that the effects of the same CRM campaigns from a global brand could result in higher brand authenticity perception and participation intention among US consumers than Korean consumers:

H1. US consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity (a) and participation intentions (b) toward a global brand's CRM campaign are higher than South Koreas consumers.

We also examined the effectiveness of different message focuses in these two countries. Due to in-group bias – a core concept of the social identity perspective – a CRM message focused

on national benefits is likely to be more effective than a message focused on global benefits (Grau and Folse, 2007). This could be particularly salient among consumers in a collectivistic culture such as South Korea where in-group identities are strong; however, consumers in an individualistic culture like USA, where the overall awareness and perceptions toward global brands' CRM are higher, could be less likely to be affected by such an appeal due to weaker in-group identities and favoritism (Choi *et al.*, 2016). According to previous researchers, consumers in an individualistic culture (i.e. USA) tend to perceive themselves as unique individuals rather than a part of a group, with lower level of belongingness to their ingroups (Kropp *et al.*, 2005; Triandis *et al.*, 1988; Yuki, 2003). Also, as discussed for *H1*, US consumers are expected to have higher perceptions toward a global brand's CRM campaign, which might also drive their favorability toward a globally-focused CRM message that fits to the brand's identity as global. Based on this, it is speculated that while a nationally-focused CRM message could appeal to collectivistic Korean consumers more strongly than a globally-focused CRM message, a globally-focused CRM message might be more effective than a nationally-focused message among US consumers. In this sense, it is hypothesized that the interaction between consumers' nationality and CRM message focus is likely to affect US and Korean consumers' perceived brand authenticity and participation intentions in the CRM campaign:

H2. South Korean consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity (a) and participation intentions (b) are more favorable when CRM messages focus on national (vs global) benefits.

H3. US consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity (a) and participation intentions (b) are more favorable when CRM messages focus on global (vs national) benefits.

The mediating role of perceived brand altruism

Lastly, to obtain a more precise understanding of the interaction effect of nationality and message focus, we examined the mediating role of perceived brand altruism, which is the extent to which a brand is perceived to care about philanthropy and others' welfare (Rifon *et al.*, 2004). Due to the recent increase of consumer skepticism and distrust toward companies' socially responsible marketing, many researchers have argued that it is important to build consumer perception that the brand's CRM effort is truly altruistic, to make the CRM campaign more accepted and effective among consumers (Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013). According to Kim and Lee (2009), to make the effect of CRM actually be generated as an outcome by driving consumer participation, consumers need to perceive that the intention and motive of the brand are truly altruistic; for consumers to react favorably to CRM campaigns, they may need to perceive altruistic motives. Similarly, when CRM increasing brand authenticity as an outcome, consumers may need to determine whether the brand has altruistic motives before they can evaluate brand authenticity because brand authenticity is a holistic perception of whether a brand is faithful and sincere in overall relationships with consumers (Beverland, 2005). Previous findings also supported this assumption by showing that consumers' perceptions of brand altruism are a critical determinant of participation intentions (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012; Kim and Lee, 2009), and consumers' perception about altruism could influence their perception of brand credibility in CRM (Bigné-Alcañiz *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, we examine whether perceptions of brand altruism prior to exposure to the brand's CRM campaign mediate the effect of the interaction between nationality and message focus on consumers' responses:

H4. Perceived altruism mediates the effect of the interaction between nationality and CRM message focus on consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity (a) and participation intentions (b).

Research methods
Employing cross-cultural consumer panel data, we performed the study in three stages: two pre-tests and the main experiment. Three research experts with expertise and experience in consumer research, CRM and quantitative research methods examined all stages of the study to ensure its appropriate execution. In this section, we describe each of these three stages in detail.

Sample
To perform the cross-cultural comparison proposed in the hypotheses, we recruited two samples of consumers: one from a collectivistic country (i.e. South Korea) and one from an individualistic country (i.e. the USA) based on strong precedents in the literature (e.g. Choi *et al.*, 2016; Han and Shavitt, 1994; Kim and Johnson, 2013; Shim *et al.*, 2018; Woo and Jin, 2016b). South Korea's very low individualism score of 18 indicates a strong collectivistic culture that stands in stark contrast to that of the USA, which has an individualism score of 91 (Hofstede Insights, 2019).

Pre-Test I: brand selection and stimulus development
To test the hypotheses, we needed to select a well-known, internationally-marketed global brand. To identify appropriate brands that possess a clear brand awareness as "global" among consumers, brands were first selected through a collection of primary data, by asking consumers what brands are widely considered to be "global." After obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from two US universities, we constructed a pool of potential global brands (that are neither from the USA nor South Korea) by visiting marketing and retailing classes and asking 81 students to anonymously write down the name of what they perceived to be the most widely known global brand, defined as a brand marketed in multiple countries worldwide with operations in foreign markets (Perlmutter, 2017). Based on their responses, we created a short list of the 20 global brand names, which were most frequently mentioned in consumer responses, and confirmed to have a presence across multiple countries internationally (operating in five or more different countries), based on the brands' official websites and reports.

Following similar studies in the CRM literature (e.g. Choi *et al.*, 2016; Kim and Johnson, 2013; Lee *et al.*, 2017), we developed four mock CRM messages to be used as experimental stimuli: global focus in English, national focus in English, global focus in Korean and national focus in Korean. We modeled the English messages on recent CRM campaigns of global brands. To minimize the confounding effects of visual and textual elements other than message focus, we used exactly the same visual background (an image portraying clean water surrounded by green trees) and tagline ("a part of the sales will be donated to plant trees around the world/nation to preserve the global/national environment") in both campaigns, manipulating only the message focus. These two campaigns were then translated into Korean by two bilingual researchers who are fluent in English and Korean, working separately at first and then comparing minor differences and reconciling them. Following this, the two campaigns were translated back to English using an online translation software, to further confirm the consistent delivery of meanings across the stimuli. After this, the three experts collectively evaluated the quality of the stimuli and finalized them for the second pre-test, a pilot survey.

Pre-Test II: pilot survey
The second stage of the research, a pilot survey of American and South Korean consumers, had a twofold purpose: to select the global brand for the experiment, and to test the manipulation of the four stimuli. The survey included questions to assess brand awareness

and familiarity for each of the 20 shortlisted brands from Pre-Test I, the four stimuli (CRM messages), and corresponding manipulation check items. Consumers responded to items designed to measure brand awareness and familiarity using seven-point semantic differential scales ranging from 1 (e.g. "do not know this brand at all" or "not familiar at all") to 7 (e.g. "know this brand very well" or "very familiar"). Using similar scales, they also responded to three manipulation check items measuring the perceived message focus (1 = national; 7 = global), and three manipulation check items measuring the perceived beneficiary of the message (1 = nation, 7 = world). The survey, which was developed in English, was translated into Korean using the same procedure as Pre-Test I.

After receiving IRB approval, we distributed the pilot survey to 30 American consumers and 30 Korean consumers via an online market survey platform in the USA and an online consumer survey firm in South Korea. Among the 20 brands on the short list, we selected the global brand with the highest brand awareness and familiarity and low variance across American and South Korean respondents for the main experiment. This brand was neither American nor South Korean to minimize bias. Paired sample t-tests confirmed that our manipulations were successful: US consumers recognized a clear different ($t = 4.42$, $p < 0.001$) between messages with a global focus ($M_{31} = 5.92$) and a national focus ($M_{31} = 3.95$), and so did Korean consumers ($t = 5.74$, $p < 0.001$, global focus $M_{31} = 4.25$, national focus $M_{31} = 2.43$). Based on these results, we finalized the CRM campaign stimuli for the main experiment by incorporating the global brand name.

Main experiment
The main experiment was based on a 2 (nationality: South Korea vs USA) × 2 (message focus: national vs global) between-subjects quasi-experimental design. After receiving IRB approval, we recruited 130 American consumers and 130 Korean consumers using the procedure from Pre-Test II, and randomly assigned them to one of the four conditions. Participants were exposed to the same order of questions across all conditions to prevent item order effects (Dillman, 2011). First, we measured their attitudes toward the brand's origin country as a control variable using Rifon *et al.*'s (2004) four-item semantic differential scale (e.g. "the country where this brand originated from is: unappealing/appealing, bad/good, unfavorable/favorable, unlikeable/likeable"). We controlled for consumers' personal attitudes toward the brand's origin country because they significantly influence other perceptions about the brand's activities (Pappu *et al.*, 2007). Next, consumers were exposed to CRM campaign stimuli and responded to the manipulation check items (see Pre-Test II). Afterwards, consumers responded to items adapted from established scales in the literature to measure their perceptions of brand authenticity (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012), CRM participation intentions (Grau and Folse, 2007) and perceptions of brand altruism (Rifon *et al.*, 2004) (see Table I). Finally, they provided demographic information (i.e. age, gender, ethnicity, education level and household income).

Results
Demographics
After eliminating incomplete responses, the final usable dataset included 121 Korean responses and 117 US responses. The descriptive statistics indicate that age, gender, income, education and employment status were fairly distributed across South Korean and US participants (see Table II).

Manipulation checks
We checked the manipulation for message focus using the measures from Pre-Test II. Results of an independent sample t-test ($t = 9.89$, $p = 0.000$) confirm that respondents clearly

Measure	Source	Scale	Items	Cronbach's α
Dependent variables				
Brand authenticity	Bruhn *et al.* (2012)	7-point Likert scale	Strongly disagree (1)–strongly agree (7) I think this brand is consistent over time This brand offers continuity This brand has a clear concept that it pursues This brand stands out from other brands I think this brand is unique The brand makes a genuine impression This brand makes reliable promises	0.90
Participation intention	Grau and Folse (2007)	7-point Likert scale	Strongly disagree (1)–strongly agree (7) I would be willing to participate in this campaign I would consider purchasing this product in order to provide help to the cause It is likely that I could contribute to this cause by getting involved in this campaign	0.90
Mediator				
Perceived Altruism	Rifon *et al.* (2004)	7-point Likert scale	Strongly disagree (1)–strongly agree (7) This brand launched this campaign because it truly cares about the consumers This brand has a genuine concern for the welfare of its consumers This brand cares about providing a healthier environment to its consumers	0.86
Covariate				
Attitude toward the brand's origin country	Rifon *et al.* (2004)	7-point semantic differential	The country where this brand originated from is Unappealing (1)–appealing (7) Bad (1)–good (7) Unfavorable (1)–favorable (7) Unlikeable (1)–likeable (7)	0.93

Table I.
Summary of measures

distinguished between messages with a global focus ($n = 116$, $M = 5.99$) and those with a national focus ($n = 122$, $M = 4.06$). Thus, our manipulation for message focus was successful. Also, we checked the manipulation for collectivism and individualism across two countries, using an established scale from Sivadas *et al.*'s (2008) study (e.g. "I would do what would please my family, even if I detested that activity," "I would sacrifice an activity that I enjoy very much if my family did not approve of it," "I enjoy being unique and different from others in many ways" and "I often do my own thing"). Results of an independent sample t-test ($t = 3.51$, $p = 0.001$) confirm that Korean consumers ($n = 121$, $M = 5.31$) showed higher collectivism scores than US consumers ($n = 117$, $M = 4.88$). On the other hand, the results ($t = 3.81$, $p = 0.000$) reveal that US consumers ($n = 117$, $M = 5.03$) showed higher individualism scores than Korean consumers ($n = 121$, $M = 4.46$).

H1–H3: multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA)
The results of an independent t-test show that US consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity (MU.S. $= 5.24$, MKorean $= 4.71$, $t_{120} = 4.24$, $p = 0.000$) and participation intentions (MU.S. $= 5.16$, MKorean $= 4.60$, $t_{120} = 3.62$, $p = 0.000$) were significantly higher than those of South Korean consumers. Therefore, *H1a* and *H1b* are supported.

To test *H2* and *H3*, we performed a 2 (nationality: South Korea vs USA) × 2 (CRM message focus: national vs global) MANCOVA on perceived brand authenticity and participation intentions as the dependent variables, while controlling for attitudes toward

Variable	South Korea ($n = 121$)	USA ($n = 117$)
Age	21–59 (Mean = 38.02)	19–76 (Mean = 36.19)
Gender		
Male	52 (43.0%)	63 (53.8%)
Female	69 (57.0%)	54 (46.2%)
Income		
Under $2,000	17 (14.0%)	9 (7.7%)
$2,000–$3,499	19 (15.7%)	12 (10.3%)
$3,500–$4,999	33 (27.3%)	23 (19.7%)
$5,000–$6,499	19 (15.7%)	28 (23.9%)
$6,500–$7,999	19 (15.7%)	20 (17.1%)
$8,000–$9,999	7 (5.8%)	12 (10.3%)
$10,000 or above	7 (5.8%)	13 (11.1%)
Education		
High school graduate	20 (16.5%)	9 (7.7%)
Some college or associate's degree	25 (20.7%)	26 (22.2%)
Bachelor's degree	69 (57.0%)	58 (49.6%)
Master's degree	6 (5.0%)	19 (16.2%)
Doctoral degree	1 (0.8%)	4 (3.4%)
Employment		
Employed for wages	75 (62.0%)	69 (59.0%)
Self-employed	12 (9.9%)	21 (17.9%)
Out of work and looking for work	3 (2.5%)	6 (5.1%)
Out of work but not looking for work	1 (0.4%)	2 (1.7%)
Homemaker	14 (11.6%)	8 (6.8%)
Student	14 (11.6%)	4 (3.4%)
Retired	1 (0.8%)	5 (4.3%)
Unable to work	1 (0.8%)	2 (1.7%)

Table II.
Participant
demographics

the brand's origin country as a covariate. To access possible bias that can occur from age and cosmopolitanism (i.e. individual consumer's exposure to foreign culture and international mindset; Cleveland *et al.*, 2009), we also tested the covariate effect of these variables, but they did not significantly influence dependent variables ($p > 0.10$). Thus, age and cosmopolitanism were included in our final analysis. Since the MANCOVA yielded a significant interaction between nationality and CRM message focus on the dependent variables (Wilks's $\lambda = 0.966$, $F_{(3, 231)} = 2.696$, $p = 0.047$), we performed separate univariate analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) to further investigate the simple effects on each dependent variable (see Table III).

For brand authenticity, we found a main effect of nationality ($F_{(1, 233)} = 7.433$, $p = 0.007$), but no main effect of message focus ($p > 0.10$). As expected, however, the results show a significant interaction effect ($F_{(1, 233)} = 7.192$, $p = 0.008$) (see Table III). The planned contrasts depicted in Figure 1 show that South Korean consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity were significantly higher when exposed to the message with a national (vs global) focus ($M_{national} = 5.015$, $M_{global} = 4.637$, $F_{(1, 233)} = 6.308$, $p = 0.013$). Conversely, US consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity did not differ significantly across two message focuses ($M_{national} = 5.027$, $M_{global} = 5.219$, $F_{(1, 233)} = 1.614$, $p = 0.205$). Accordingly, *H2a* is supported, while *H3a* is not supported.

For CRM participation intentions, we found a main effect of nationality ($F_{(1, 233)} = 4.086$, $p = 0.044$), but no main effect for message focus ($p > 0.10$). As predicted, the interaction

Independent variables	Dependent variables	MANCOVA			ANCOVAs	
		Wilk's λ	F(3, 231)	p	F(1, 233)	p
Nationality		0.965	2.784	0.042*		
	Brand authenticity				7.433	0.007**
	participation intention				4.086	0.044*
CRM message focus		0.992	0.601	0.615		
	Brand authenticity				0.753	0.386
	participation intention				1.708	0.193
Nationality × CRM message focus		0.966	2.696	0.047*		
	Brand authenticity				7.192	0.008**
	participation intention				5.051	0.026*
Attitude toward the brand's origin country (covariate)		0.647	42.029	0.000***		
	Brand authenticity				80.004	0.000***
	participation intention				75.760	0.000***

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

Table III.
Results of MANCOVA and ANCOVAs for the interaction of nationality and CRM message focus on dependent variables
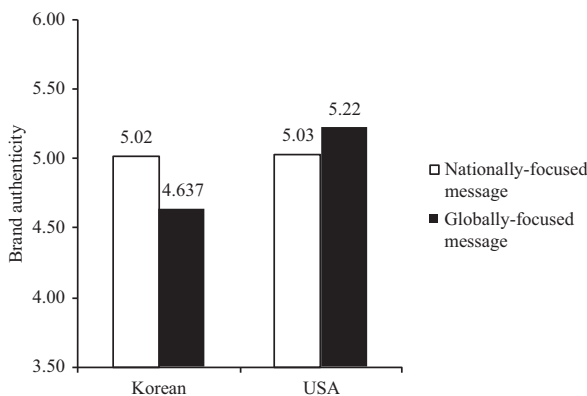

Figure 1.
Interaction between nationality and CRM message focus on brand authenticity

between nationality and CRM message focus is statistically significant for participation intentions ($F_{(1, 233)} = 7.192$, $p = 0.008$) (see Table III). The planned contrasts depicted in Figure 2 show that South Korean consumers' participation intentions were higher after exposure to the message with a national (vs global) focus ($M_{national} = 4.979$, $M_{global} = 4.490$, $F_{(1, 233)} = 6.335$, $p = 0.013$). In contrast, US consumers' participation intentions did not differ significantly based on message focus ($M_{national} = 4.955$, $M_{global} = 5.083$, $F_{(1, 233)} = .428$, $p = 0.513$). These findings support *H2b* but not *H3b*.

Mediated moderation analysis for perceived altruism
In *H4*, we proposed that interaction between nationality and message focus on consumers' CRM responses is mediated by perceived altruism, which, in turn, leads to brand authenticity and CRM participation intentions. ANCOVA analysis results on perceived altruism indicated a significant main effect of nationality ($F_{(1, 233)} = 6.243$, $p = 0.013$) and, importantly, a significant two-way interaction ($F_{(1, 233)} = 4.025$, $p = 0.046$). The main effect of message focus on perceived altruism was not significant ($p > 0.10$). Planned contrasts showed that South Korean consumers' showed a higher perceived altruism when the CRM

Figure 2.
Interaction between
nationality and CRM
message focus on
participation intention
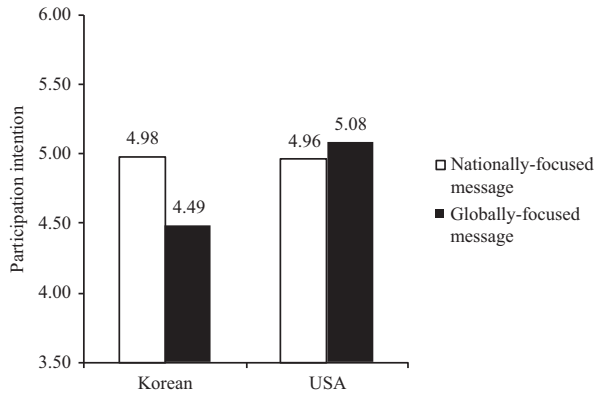
message is nationally focused than globally focused ($M_{national} = 4.973$, $M_{global} = 4.607$, $F_{(1, 233)} = 4.700$, $p = 0.031$). On the other hand, US consumers' altruism were not significantly different between two types of CRM messages ($M_{national} = 5.152$, $M_{global} = 5.039$, $F_{(1, 233)} = 0.439$, $p = 0.508$). Next, we performed a mediated moderation analysis with 5,000 bootstrapped samples using model 8 of the PROCESS macro for SPSS to test this hypothesis (Hayes, 2013). Findings relevant to the mediation role of perceived altruism are shown in Figures 3 and 4.

Results from this analysis indicated that nationality significantly predicted perceived altruism ($\beta = 0.24$, $p = 0.009$) in the mediator model under the national focus condition. Perceived altruism significantly predicted brand authenticity ($\beta = 0.74$, $p = 0.000$) and CRM participation intentions ($\beta = 0.81$, $p = 0.000$). Nationality significantly predicted brand authenticity ($\beta = 0.18$, $p = 0.049$) and CRM participation intentions ($\beta = 0.17$, $p = 0.050$). The effects of nationality on brand authenticity ($\beta = 0.01$, $p = 0.934$) and CRM participation
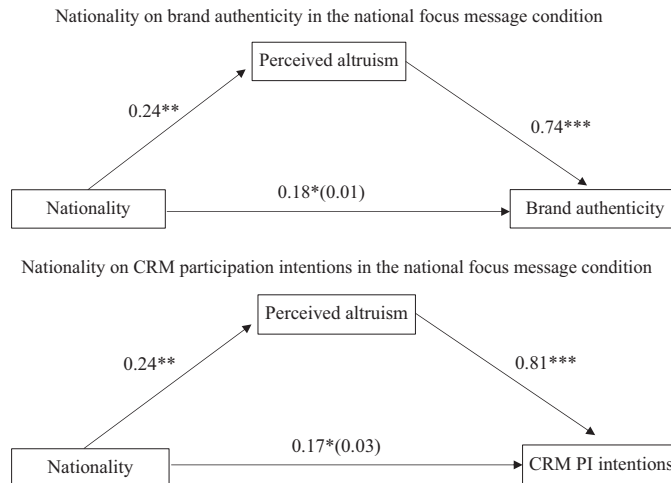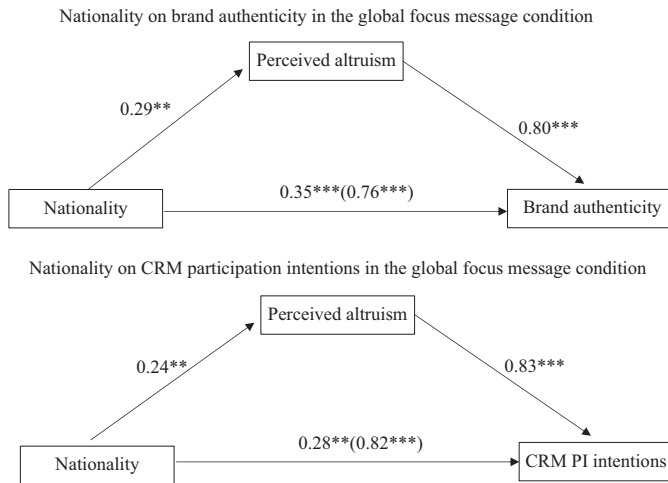

Figure 3.
Mediated moderation
model of perceived
altruism when the
CRM message is
nationally focused

Notes: Standardized coefficient values in parentheses indicate the effects of nationality on the dependent variables when controlling for perceived altruism. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

Nationality on brand authenticity in the global focus message condition

Nationality on CRM participation intentions in the global focus message condition

Notes: Standardized coefficient values in parentheses indicate the effects of nationality on the dependent variables when controlling for perceived altruism. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

Figure 4.
Mediated moderation model of perceived altruism when the CRM message is globally focused

intentions ($\beta = 0.03$ $p = 0.675$) were not significant when including perceived altruism. Thus, we found that perceived altruism fully mediates the effects of nationality on our DVs when the CRM message is nationally focused.

Under the global focus condition, nationality predicted perceived altruism ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.001$) in the mediator model. Perceived altruism significantly predicted brand authenticity ($\beta = 0.80$, $p = 0.000$) and CRM participation intentions ($\beta = 0.83$, $p = 0.000$). Nationality significantly predicted brand authenticity ($\beta = 0.35$, $p = 0.000$) and CRM participation intentions ($\beta = 0.28$, $p = 0.002$). The effects of nationality on brand authenticity ($\beta = 0.76$, $p = 0.000$) and CRM participation intentions ($\beta = 0.82$ $p = 0.000$) were significant when including perceived altruism. Accordingly, we found that perceived altruism does not mediate the effects of nationality on our DVs when the CRM message is globally focused.

Specifically, the bootstrapping analysis showed that the conditional indirect effect of nationality on brand authenticity is significantly mediated by perceived altruism when CMR message is nationally focused ($B = 0.32$, SE $= 0.12$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.58]), but not when it is globally focused ($B = 0.04$, SE $= 0.10$, 95% CI [−0.15, 0.24]). Also, results indicated that the conditional indirect effect of nationality on CRM participation intentions is significantly mediated by perceived altruism when CRM message is nationally focused ($B = 0.38$, SE $= 0.13$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.64]), but not when it is globally focused ($B = 0.05$, SE $= 0.12$, 95% CI [−0.19, 0.28]). A 95% confidence interval that does not include 0 confirms significant mediation (Hayes, 2013). Thus, *H4a* and *H4b* are partially supported.

Discussion
Because retail brand participation in CRM can improve brand image and enhance customer-brand relationships (Hoeffler and Keller, 2002; Brink *et al.*, 2006; Varadarajan and Menon, 1988), it is no surprise that a record number of brands are developing CRM campaigns (Nan and Heo, 2007). Despite these extensive benefits, implementing a CRM strategy can be more complex for global brands than domestic brands because the same messages may not be effective in every market due to cultural differences

(Choi *et al.*, 2016). In this case, it may be challenging for brands to understand whether they should standardize or adapt their CRM message to attract local consumers. Despite this need there are surprisingly few researchers that have investigated cross-cultural effects of CRM message framing. To address this critical gap in the literature, we used an experimental research design to capture the effects of different CRM message focuses (national vs global) on consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity and participation intentions in the USA and South Korea. To reveal the influence of consumers' established brand perceptions, we also investigated the mediating role of perceived brand altruism in these effects. Our findings reveal how CRM messages can be tailored to different cultural contexts to maximize campaign effectiveness.

Results related to *H1* demonstrate that, in general, US consumers respond more favorably to CRM than South Korean consumers, with higher perceptions of brand authenticity (*H1a*) and participation intentions (*H1b*). While this finding aligns with previous research which identifies that consumers in some countries may more readily accept CSR-related marketing messages (Tang and Li, 2009; Welford, 2005; Woo and Jin, 2016a), previous researchers were interested in understanding how CRM practices were communicated and implemented by companies in different countries (e.g. Tang and Li, 2009; Welford, 2005) and how their specific CSR strategy influenced company image (e.g. Woo and Jin, 2016a). Previous research has tended to ignore consumers' responses to company CRM practices by country. An understanding of consumers' specific responses cross-culturally to CRM-related practices is vital, considering that CRM practices are used as a means to build brand–customer relationships (Hoeffler and Keller, 2002; Brink *et al.*, 2006; Varadarajan and Menon, 1988) and are widely implemented by firms operating in a multi-national marketplace (Bondy *et al.*, 2012; Preston, 2016). A major contribution of *H1* findings is the understanding that following CRM initiatives, consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity and participation intentions can be altered based on the where (by country) CRM practices are implemented. This is vital because it highlights whether CRM practices are effective at generating an impact on the consumer; altering consumers' view of the brand's credibility and authenticity and encouraging campaign participation, the ultimate purpose of implementing CRM practices (Chang, 2011; Grau and Folse, 2007; Kim and Johnson, 2013; La Ferle *et al.*, 2013; Samu and Wymer, 2009). Thus, consumers' opinions of specific CRM practices help to shape an effective marketing strategy for global enterprises. Overall, our data demonstrates that CRM strategies may be more effective in the US market than in the South Korean market, thus providing consumer-specific responses based on country-specific empirical evidence.

The most interesting finding of this study is the cross-cultural difference in the effectiveness of specific types of CRM messages. That is, findings specify whether to standardize or adapt CRM messages to local markets. Specifically, South Korean consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity (*H2a*) and participation intentions (*H2b*) were higher after exposure to messages focused on national (vs global) benefits. In contrast, US consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity (*H3a*) and participation intentions (*H3b*) did not differ significantly based on message focus. As a plausible explanation of why such difference has occurred between US consumers and South Korean consumers, previous research indicates that consumers in collectivistic cultures may respond more favorably to CRM messages focused on national benefits (Kropp *et al.*, 2005; Triandis *et al.*, 1988; Yuki, 2003). Specifically, Choi *et al.* (2016) found that collectivist consumers form opinions of domestic (vs foreign) firms CSR practices based on their social identity rooted in collectivism or individuals. Collectivist (i.e. South Korea) consumers have stronger favoritism toward their ingroup compared to individualist (i.e. USA.) consumers (Hofstede Insights, 2019). In collectivistic countries like South Korea, individuals tend to exhibit a strong sense of responsibility toward in-group members because their social identity is drawn from their group identity.

In this way, the Korean respondents in our study might have been more likely to prioritize collective goals over their own, thus responding less favorably toward a foreign brand's CRM when compared to a domestic brand's CRM (La Ferle *et al.*, 2013; Lavack and Kropp, 2003). On the other hand, US consumers whose culture is individualistic likely feel less obligated to their ingroups and tend to be more concerned about themselves and their individual goals and initiatives (Triandis *et al.*, 1995; Yuki, 2003). To US consumers, there was no significant difference between messages with a national focus and those with a global focus, because benefits were collective, not individual.

Lastly, we proposed that the effect of the interaction between nationality and message focus on consumers' responses is mediated by perceived altruism. Results of mediated moderation analysis indicate that the indirect effect of nationality on perceptions of brand authenticity (*H4a*) and participation intentions (*H4b*) is significantly mediated by perceived altruism when consumers are exposed to messages focused on national, but not global benefits. Specifically, when Korean consumers were exposed to CRM messages focused on national benefits, their perceptions of altruism were enhanced, which in turn leads to brand authenticity and CRM participation intentions. When they were exposed to CRM messages focused on global benefits, their perceived altruism was enhanced, but did not mediate the effects of nationality on brand authenticity and CRM participation intentions. On the other hand, US consumers still showed higher scores of perceived altruism than Korean consumers. However, their perceptions of altruism were not changed by reading different types of CRM messages, and thereby did not affect brand authenticity and CRM participation intentions.

Thus, *H4a* and *H4b* are partially supported. This finding is unique in the literature, and demonstrates the influence of a brand's pre-existing image. When a brand is perceived as altruistic, consumers may perceive the brand as authentic and not question its motives for implementing a CRM campaign (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012; Kim and Lee, 2009). However, when a message focuses on global benefits, consumers may feel skeptical about the feasibility of altruism on such a broad scale.

Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to literatures grounded in the social identity perspective (Brown, 2000; Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and the individualism vs collectivism dichotomy (Kropp *et al.*, 2005; Triandis *et al.*, 1988; Yuki, 2003). Although these frameworks have been widely applied to understand cross-cultural differences (e.g. El Banna *et al.*, 2018; Escalas and Bettman, 2005), they have been underutilized to understanding differences in consumers' responses to CRM campaigns. This is surprising, particularly because it is established that one's social identification influences consumers' responses to CRM campaigns (Pérez, 2009; Summers and Summers, 2017).

In light of the social identity perspective, this study provides a deeper and clearer understanding of why consumers may react differently to CRM campaigns. The social identity perspective supports that one's identity provides a sense of belongingness, which influences how individuals craft their everyday human behavior and reactions to stimuli (Hornsey, 2008; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Along these lines, this research determined that consumers that identity with an in-group (i.e. South Korean consumers) are likely to exhibit in-group bias, reacting more positively to in-group interests (i.e. when CRM messages are nationally focused). Contributing to the social identity perspective, this study extends the theoretical understanding of in-group bias to include CRM stimuli. That is, consumers with in-group bias react more positively to CRM messages with in-group interests.

Additionally, this study extends literature utilizing the individualism vs collectivism dichotomy (Kropp *et al.*, 2005; Triandis *et al.*, 1988; Yuki, 2003). In previous research

investigating cross-culture differences in responses to CRM campaigns, scholars mainly focused on consumers' responses to CRM based on firm attributes (La Ferle *et al.*, 2013; Wang, 2014). Specifically, researchers found that consumers from collectivist cultures generate more positive responses to domestic (vs global) firms (Choi *et al.*, 2016). Since an understanding of CRM is vital from an international marketing perspective (Vrontis *et al.*, 2018), this study extends our understanding of cross-culture effects (i.e. individualism and collectivism) that should be considered when studying CRM messages.

Moreover, we are among the first to examine how message-related factors affect consumers' responses to CRM campaigns. Evidence shows that people from collectivistic cultures may respond more favorably to different message orientations than people from individualistic cultures (Brown, 2000; Grier and Deshpandé, 2001; Sierra *et al.*, 2009; Westjohn *et al.*, 2012). Our results confirm that it is important to consider message factors when analyzing cross-cultural consumers' responses to a brand's CRM campaign. Because people with collectivistic identities feel a greater sense of obligation toward in-group members, they tend to respond more favorably to messages focused on national benefits.

Practically, this study highlights the benefits of implementing CRM campaigns for global brands and provides specific strategies regarding standardization or adaption of CRM messages for foreign markets. Specifically, when exposed to CRM campaigns, US consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity and participation intentions are higher than those of South Korean consumers. Because US consumers tend to be more familiar with CRM campaigns, they may respond more favorably than consumers in other markets. In this case, US domestic brands or foreign brands entering the US market may strongly consider implementing CRM campaigns; these strategies may attract US consumers to purchase cause merchandise. Importantly, CRM messages may help to craft a brand as sincere, trustworthy and genuine (i.e. authentic). This is particularly important for brands looking to overcome negative attention within the US market.

Furthermore, our results suggest the marketers may consider adapting their CRM message focus when operating in collectivist countries, whereas marketers may consider standardizing their CRM strategies when operating in individualist countries. Specifically, findings of this study demonstrate that brands need to carefully craft their CRM messages and adapt to local market needs when operating in a collectivist country. This study found that South Korean (i.e. collectivist) consumers respond more favorably to CRM messages focused on national benefits. Due to their highly collectivistic culture, South Koreans may find CRM messages highlighting benefits to their in-group much more attractive than those highlighting global benefits. Thus, when targeting highly collectivistic markets, global brands should adapt CRM marketing practices so that messages focus on benefits to local consumers. A successful industry example embodying this recommendation is Spar, a multi-national convenience and food retail store. Although the company is headquartered in the Netherlands, it sponsors local sports teams in each country where it operates, strengthening its image as a neighborhood store, rather than a multi-national corporation.

In contrast, US (i.e. individualist) consumers' responses to CRM messages do not differ significantly based on national or global focus. This is promising for both national and foreign brand looking to enter the US market; brands may not need to develop a specific CRM campaign to attract US consumers. Instead, firms may utilize a standardized approach when targeting US consumers as part of a CRM campaign. Although additional research is needed to confirm, it is possible that CRM messages focused on individual benefits (e.g. "Giving makes you feel great") are more effective in individualistic markets.

Lastly, our results reveal the importance of building an altruistic brand image prior to implementing a CRM campaign, particularly when targeting individuals who respond more

favorably to messages focused on national benefits. Since brand altruism is rooted in brand trust and sincerity (Beverland, 2005; Morhart *et al.*, 2015; Napoli *et al.*, 2014), developing perceptions of altruism may take time and attention. It is important for firms to consistently craft their brand image as trustworthy and genuine. In fact, these qualities should be included and integrated as part of a long-term marketing effort. Since altruistic brands are more favorably perceived in general (Rifon *et al.*, 2004), an altruistic image enhances the favorability of consumers' responses to CRM messages.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has some limitations that present opportunities for future studies. First, while we investigated two countries with cultures at either end of the collectivism-individualism spectrum, some countries might fall somewhere in between. To expand the current study to more comprehensive cross-cultural projects, future studies may include countries with neutral level of individualism/collectivism, and compare their consumers' CRM perceptions to the others with high/low individualism/collectivism. To more fully understand the impact of culture on a multi-national firm's CRM campaigns, additional research is needed in countries with different individualism scores. Also, although the current study was focused on the in-group favoritism at the country-level (USA vs South Korea), future research might explore the other ways to define ingroups and outgroups (e.g. consumers' sub-cultural groups, generational groups, political groups) and their influence on consumers' perceptions toward CRM.

In addition, while this study was the first to examine the impact of a message factor (i.e. national vs global focus) on responses to a brand's CRM campaign in a cross-cultural context, additional message factors should be investigated. In particular, researchers should investigate the impact of CRM messages focused on individual benefits because consumers in individualistic markets may be more attracted to this message frame. Furthermore, brands not only support a national cause or global cause, but also can support a particular region; for example, as a temporary disaster relief, many brands including Walmart, GM and Target raised funds to support Haiti when the country experienced a serious earthquake in 2010 (Clark, 2010). This kind of approach suggests another possible type of CRM, such as a regional CRM, and future research might compare the effectiveness of a regional CRM message to a national or global CRM message.

Conclusion

Global brands have found it challenging to develop CRM campaigns that effectively target consumers in international markets; these challenges have been exacerbated by a lack of research evidence on which types of messages are most effective in specific cultural contexts. In this experimental study, we investigated the effect of different CRM message focuses (national vs global) on consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity and participation intentions in two starkly different cultural contexts: the USA and South Korea. Additionally, we investigated the mediating role of perceived brand altruism on the effect of the interaction between nationality and message focus on consumers' responses. Results indicate that while US consumers respond more favorably to CRM campaigns overall, Korean consumers respond more favorably to CRM messages focused on national (vs global) benefits. A CRM message focused on national benefits is particularly effective when consumers perceive a brand as altruistic. The responses of US consumers did not differ significantly based on message focus. Overall, our results reveal that multi-national brands need to tailor the focuses of CRM messages to specific cultural contexts.

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