

Like Us on Facebook: Social Capital, Opinion Leadership, and Social Media Word-of-Mouth for Promoting Cultural Goods

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While the role of paid advertising in online environments has diminished, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become increasingly valuable. This study sought to determine if consumers' trust in their social media network, defined as social capital, or identification as an opinion leader better predicted social media eWOM related to cultural goods. Using a survey distributed to a sample of Facebook users (N = 241), the study determined that

while bridging social capital is related to Facebook social sharing, it is perceived opinion leadership that consistently best predicts Facebook eWOM. Individual perceptions of their opinion leadership play an important role in determining social sharing intentions.

Keywords: social capital, opinion leaders, social media, word-of-mouth

After submitting her detective novel to multiple publishing houses and receiving no offers of publication, retired British police detective Rebecca Bradley decided to fire her agent and publish her novel, *Shallow Waters*, on her own. Her book was a success, and she has since published several more novels leading to a second career as a full-time mystery writer. While self-publishing typically lacks the marketing resources available through traditional publishing contracts, Bradley was able to successfully promote her self-published novel and build her audience without advertising or an expensive marketing campaign. Her success can be attributed almost entirely to positive word-of-mouth generated via social media networks (Burnett, 2018).

It is commonly understood by marketers that word-of-mouth is a powerful predictor of consumer behavior and sales, with ample research conducted to support this claim (e.g. Brown & Reingen, 1987; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991). In the electronic age, much

attention has been paid to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and a key source of eWOM is social media activity. According to social media marketers, while advertising will continue to be important in its ability to provide content, it can not be considered on equal footing with social media eWOM, as one “interrupt(s) your experience” while the other is “something your best friend just shared with you” (Skid & Hall, 2015, para. 5). In other words, in-network advertising is an intrusion into consumers’ social media experience, while marketing material shared via social media eWOM is a welcomed part of the social experience.

eWOM has been particularly useful for the creators of cultural goods, most notably books and music. Fueled by e-commerce titans such as Amazon.com and Apple’s iTunes, self-publishing and distribution have moved from a sign of professional failure for content creators to a desired path. Successful authors are able to generate revenue beyond the contracts and book advances offered by traditional publishing houses (Henn, 2014), and successful music producers can leverage their online sales to dictate terms to record labels in contract negotiations (Ross, 2017). Without the marketing budget of an established producer, Amazon bestsellers attribute the communal nature of social media sites such as Facebook as key to building relationships with future consumers who will promote their work through their own status updates and recommendations (Lewis, 2016).

The cultural goods industry demonstrates that eWOM can generate sufficient attention that impacts sales. The traditional understanding of word-of-mouth marketing is that it is dependent on key influencers, known as opinion leaders, to introduce and spread information about products, including cultural goods (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). However, given that social media allows any individual to become a broadcaster, reaching audiences beyond what was possible with traditional, person-to-person word-of-mouth, it is unclear whether or not opinion leadership is a key part of the eWOM process on social media. The purpose of this study is determine whether an individual’s perceived trustworthiness and strength of their online social network or their perceived opinion leadership status best influences their willingness to share consumer recommendations for cultural goods on social media sites, specifically Facebook. In doing so, this study seeks to better understand and refine two-step flow theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Weimann, 1991) – which describes the role of the opinion leader in the flow of mass communication – in the context

of online communication, while clarifying the relationship between social capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Putnam, 2000) and opinion leadership in relation to social media consumer sharing behaviors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most eWOM research has focused primarily on how eWOM influences consumers. In computing environments where online reviewers were often anonymous or unknown to consumers, eWOM-guided purchasing intentions are often determined by how the consumer evaluated the reviewer, in particular in terms of the reviewer's trustworthiness, expertise, and experience (Baber et al., 2016). In addition, the valence of individual reviews often influences consumer attitudes towards products (Lee, Rodgers, & Kim, 2009). Regarding the sale of cultural goods, eWOM exerts a significant impact on sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). In regards to social media, it has been demonstrated that eWOM distributed through social networking sites significantly influences purchasing intentions (Themba & Mulala, 2013), with the network structure of social networks – in particular the strength of social ties in social networks along with the trust enabled by social connections – facilitating eWOM behaviors (Chu & Kim, 2011).

eWOM manifested in social networks is influential on consumer behaviors; however, what is not clear is what motivates social media users to engage in the social sharing eWOM of cultural goods. It has yet to be determined whether network ties or opinion leadership are most predictive of social sharing behaviors in online social networks. As Jin, Bloch, and Cameron (2002) argued at the dawn of the Web 2.0 era, the co-existence of traditional, interpersonal word-of-mouth and opinion leadership models appeared to be possible in online environments. However, whether or not opinion leadership is essential to social sharing through social media sites is contested. Zhang, Zhao, and Xu (2015) determined in their study of Weibo (the Chinese version of Twitter) trends that while opinion leaders can create a localized trend, it is up to the crowd of online sharers, not specifically opinion leaders, to expand the impact of the trend beyond a local setting. In other words, individual sharers may be just as essential to the diffusion of brand-related trends as opinion leaders in an age when “everyone is a social sensor detecting and experiencing news, and vast numbers of individuals across the globe

continuously share news, statuses and sentiments through their online social networks” (Zhang et al., 2015, p. 1).

The role of individuals versus the role of opinion leaders is a key point of contention in understanding how information is distributed through social networks. As such, understanding how individuals are positioned in their social networks, through their ties to the network, as well as their perception of their own opinion leadership traits, and how that position influences social sharing behaviors, is the focus of this particular study.

Social Capital

One theory that has been utilized to understand individual interactions on social media, and how well the individual is tied to their network, is the theory of social capital. Bourdieu and Wacquant define social capital as “the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 14). Putnam (2000) describes social capital in terms of norms of reciprocity and trust in the network. Broadly stated, both definitions suggest social capital is a perception of the strength and trustworthiness of an individual’s social network. Putnam (2000) identified two different types of social capital: bridging and bonding. Bridging social capital is related to an individual’s connection with others in broader social networks, while bonding social capital is related to emotional support and connections with family members and close friends. In other words, bridging social capital is associated with acquaintances and loose connections we use to “get ahead,” while bonding social capital is associated with intimate support we use to “get by.”

Recently, the nature of the software has encouraged researchers to pay particular attention to social capital as built through online social networks. Seeking information via social networking sites is a positive predictor of individual’s social capital (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). Specifically information seeking and sharing on social networks, along with building social connections, have been shown to be predictors of bridging social capital, while convenience is a significant predictor of bonding social capital (Mo & Leung, 2015). While the convenience of social media is most useful in maintaining intimate ties through bonding social capital, the sharing and information seeking aspects of social media are most useful in building bridging social capital. Indeed,

bridging social capital best predicts individuals' intention to speak up on social media sites (Sheehan, 2015) as well as satisfaction with and intentions to continue using social media (Chang & Zhu, 2012). Likewise, bridging social capital is key to understanding how opinion leaders make recommendations in social networks, as opinion leaders often serve as the bridges between tight networks of social connections (Burt, 1999). Regarding Facebook specifically, while Facebook use is predictive of building social capital in general, it is particularly useful for building bridging social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Johnston, Tanner, Lalla, & Kawalski, 2011). As such, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Bridging social capital positively relates to the sharing of electronic word-of-mouth in online social networks.

Two-Step Flow and Opinion Leadership

Two-step flow theory and the concept of the opinion leader was introduced by Katz's and Lazarsfeld's (1955) book *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*. Two-step flow theory posits that mass media do not directly influence individuals. Rather, mass media is filtered via a two-step process through influential community members with specialized interests who then influence the individual. Katz and Lazarsfeld were interested in studying what they referred to as "horizontal opinion leadership" (p. 3), where opinions were formed as the result of personal relationships with certain peer leaders within social groups, as opposed to being shaped directly by the community elite and mass media. According to Katz and Lazarsfeld, opinion leadership was a product of knowledge and peer reliance, and it operated in intimate, informal communities. Their conception of the opinion leader was more focused on micro level influentials versus prominent figures in both local and national environments. Opinion leaders are "those individuals who, through day-to-day personal contacts, influence others in matters of decision and opinion formation" (Wright & Cantor, 1967, p. 34), and "... opinion leaders are not people at the top of things so much as people at the edge of things, not leaders within groups so much as brokers between groups" (Burt, 1999, p. 17). In other words, opinion leaders are social connections people look to for information and guidance regarding particular subjects in their everyday lives. In the case

of the current study, opinion leaders are able to provide guidance to their peers specifically regarding cultural goods.

In the context of social networks, opinion leaders actively follow prominent figures' presences on online social networks, and they are extremely involved in those networks, participating in conversations and significantly influencing other individuals' involvement (Karlsen, 2015; Park, 2013). Opinion leaders on Twitter actively participate socially via the sharing of information in an effort to increase their followers (Hwang, 2015), and in the context of online marketing, popular opinion leaders not only significantly, positively influence consumer behavior, but marketers look to opinion leaders to address issues in their own e-commerce models (Meng, Wei, & Zhu, 2011). Given opinion leaders' activity in both social media and e-commerce contexts, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Perceived opinion leadership positively relates to the sharing of electronic word-of-mouth in online social networks.

Personality Strength. Weimann (1991) added a wrinkle to the opinion leadership concept by focusing his study on the personality traits of opinion leaders. He coined the term "influentials" to describe individuals who rated highly on a measurement tool called the "Strength of Personality Scale." The strength of personality scale measures individuals' perception of themselves as confident, natural leaders who give advice and guidance across a range of subjects and who naturally serve as models for those around them. Individuals with high levels of personality strength were likely to be opinion leaders based on their personalities alone, independent of their position in the flow of mass communication. These influentials with strong personalities differed from the established concept of the opinion leader in that mass media was not necessarily their primary source of information, and they were more likely to be leaders in a variety of subjects, rather than just have a narrow focus. While Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) opinion leaders provided perspectives in specific contexts, Weimann's influentials felt confident exerting themselves across contexts.

Research examining personality strength has suggested that greater personality strength predicts higher levels of social capital, and as such, they are more likely to engage in their communities and encourage others to take their lead (Scheufele & Shah,

2000). Furthermore, those with greater personality strength frequently engage in interpersonal communication, are well-versed in current events and local issues, and their views may differ from public opinion more so than those with low strength of personality (Schenk & Rössler, 1997). Given the connection between personality strength, opinion leadership, and willingness to engage in the community and persuade others, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Personality strength positively relates to the sharing of electronic word-of-mouth in online social networks.

Knowledge Self-Efficacy. Beyond personality strength, another key variable related to an individual's leadership and engagement in social media is their knowledge self-efficacy. Bandura's social cognitive theory presents the idea of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982, 1986, 1997), which can be defined as "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of actions required to manage prospective situations" (Hsu, Ju, Yen, & Chang, 2007, p. 154). In other words, self-efficacy is related to individual beliefs in their abilities. In regards to leadership, self-efficacy is a key variable regulating leadership function (McCormick, 2001). Also, those with internet self-efficacy are more likely to engage in social networking sites (Gangadharbatla, 2008).

Knowledge self efficacy is the "personal efficacy belief in knowledge sharing" (Hsu et al., 2007, p. 155). Hsu et al. has demonstrated that knowledge self-efficacy is key to participants' sharing of knowledge in virtual communities. Individuals with high levels of expertise are more likely to share useful advice on computer networks (Constant, Sproull, & Kiesler, 1996). In addition, those who feel they lack useful knowledge are less likely to engage in online knowledge sharing (Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005).

Regarding online consumer behavior, those with higher knowledge self-efficacy are more likely to share product information in online message boards, and a lack of knowledge self-efficacy is a key inhibitor to online sharing. In the context of an online review service, where all members are invited and encouraged to share their opinions, knowledge self-efficacy did not influence participants' interest in sharing their opinions, as the nature of the service encourages active participation without regard for participants' skill as a reviewer (Cheung & Lee, 2012). However, on social networks, consumer sharing

is not overtly encouraged outside of advertisements. As such, knowledge self-efficacy may play a key role in sharing behavior. In the case of the particular study, participants with high knowledge self-efficacy will feel confident in their ability to share knowledge regarding cultural goods. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Knowledge self-efficacy positively relates to the sharing of electronic word-of-mouth in online social networks.

Research Question

While it would appear that social trends are determined by both opinion leaders and opinion followers (Zhang et al., 2015), previous research has not determined how perceived social capital and factors associated with perceived opinion leadership influence individuals to engage in specific sharing behaviors on social networks. Are sharing intentions best determined by the trustworthiness and strength of one's social network, or do individuals' perception of themselves as opinion leaders best predict their sharing intentions, especially considering the many viable ways brand-related content can be shared across social media platforms? As such, the following research question is asked:

RQ1: Do factors associated with social capital or opinion leadership best predict an individual's desire to produce online social network word of mouth?

METHODS

To test the hypotheses and propose an answer to the research question, an online survey was administered using Qualtrics survey software. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling via the Facebook social network. As the study was aimed at examining social media sharing behavior, this method was desirable. Recent research suggests that social media snowball samples produce results that are comparable to student samples and Amazon Mechanical Turk samples (Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013), and snowball sampling via social media can protect the privacy and anonymity of participants (Raissi & Ackland, 2012). In accordance with procedures approved by the institutional review board of the research location, messages were posted to the wall of researchers' Facebook pages asking Facebook friends to a) complete the anonymous survey and b) share the survey link with their Facebook friends via messages posted to their own

Facebook pages. The resulting sample ($N = 241$) was 89% Caucasian ($N = 215$) with the mean age of 40 ($SD = 13.2$). Consistent with previous studies employing social media snowball samples (Casler et al., 2013; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011), the sample was predominantly female, with 65% participation coming from women ($N = 156$).

After reading and agreeing to a statement of informed consent, respondents' Facebook social capital was measured first, followed by their personality strength; opinion leadership related to books and music; and knowledge self-efficacy related to books and music. Next, respondents' affinity for and intensity of use of Facebook, books, and music were measured. Statements for each measure were displayed randomly. Finally, the dependent variables were measured, followed by demographic measures.

Measurements

Social Capital. To measure both bridging and bonding social capital, measures were adapted from Williams's 2006 study to specifically reflect Facebook use. Both scales utilized seven-point, Likert scales ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Bonding social capital was measured using ten items, $\alpha = .90$. Sample statements included, "The people I interact with on Facebook would share their last dollar with me," and, "When I feel lonely, there are several people on Facebook I can talk to." Bridging social capital was also measured using ten items, $\alpha = .89$. Sample statements included, "Interacting with people on Facebook makes me want to try new things," and, "Interacting with people on Facebook gives me new people to talk to."

Two-Step Flow. As Park (2013) has suggested, self-identification measures of opinion leadership can be problematic as responses may be biased and as such fail to accurately represent an individual's position as an actual opinion leader. However, the strength in self-reported measures is in their reliability as "established by repeated measures by a variety of scholars" (p. 1644). Self-reported measures of opinion leadership have been repeatedly utilized and validated (Childers, 1986; Goldsmith & Desborde, 1991; Rogers & Cartano, 1962; Weimann, 1994), suggesting their use is acceptable in opinion leadership research. The self-reported measure of opinion leadership utilized in this study was adapted from Childers (1986) and Schäfer and Taddicken (2015). The measures utilized six statements measured on five-point scales, and the measure was repeated for books ($\alpha = .89$) and music ($\alpha = .89$). Sample statements included, "Compared with your

circle of friends, how likely are you to be asked about [books, music]?” measured from “Not at all likely to be asked” to “Very likely to be asked,” and, “When you talk to your friends and neighbors about [books, music] do you:” measured from “Give very little information” to “Give a great deal of information.”

Personality strength was measured using Noelle-Neumann’s (1983) scale as translated by Weimann (1994), adapted to social media applications by Park (2013). Six items, $\alpha = .83$, were measured on a seven-point, Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Sample statements included, “I like to assume responsibility,” and, “I often notice that I serve as a model for others.” Knowledge self-efficacy was measured using two statements adapted from Cheung and Lee (2012), measured on seven-point, Likert scales ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” The measure was repeated for books ($\alpha = .92$) and music ($\alpha = .95$). The two statements were, “I have confidence in my ability to provide knowledge/information about [books, music] that others consider valuable,” and, “I have the expertise needed to provide valuable knowledge/information about [books, music].”

Controls. Demographic variables, including gender and age, were measured. In addition, participants’ affinity for Facebook as well as their intensity of Facebook use were measured as controls. Affinity was measured using a scale adapted from Rubin (1981) and Rubin and Rubin (1982). Five statements were measured on a seven-point, Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” for books ($\alpha = .95$), music ($\alpha = .93$), and Facebook ($\alpha = .90$). Intensity was measured using a method similar to that of Perse and Ferguson (1993). Respondents were asked to indicate how many hours they spent on Facebook both yesterday and on a typical day, how many hours they spent reading books both this past week and in a typical week, and how many hours they spent listening to music both yesterday and on a typical day. For each medium, responses for their recent activity and typical activity were averaged to represent their intensity level with the medium.

Social Media Sharing. The dependent variables related to social media sharing intention were measured using four questions representing four different types of social sharing behaviors. A pretest ($N = 124$) of the four survey items was utilized to determine the relative willingness of individuals to engage in each type of sharing behavior. The

pretest was conducted using the Amazon Mechanical Turk (M-Turk) system. The four items were measured on a seven-point scale ranging from “Not at all likely” to “Very likely.” Respondents were asked, “How likely are you to:” 1) “‘Like’ or ‘Follow’ an author or book on social media?” (Like), 2) “share or re-tweet someone else’s review or recommendation of a book?” (Share), 3) “write a tweet or status update on social media recommending a book?” (Update), and 4) “write a blog post or online post reviewing and recommending a book, and share that post on social media?” (Blog). While the first option, the “Like,” is a one-click transaction that could be interpreted as a form of feedback versus a form of eWOM, it is still a form of user-generated content with informational value (Scissors, Burke, & Wengrovitz, 2016).

Based on the pretest, it was determined that respondents were most likely to Like and least likely to Blog, with no statistically significant difference between Sharing and Updating. For the complete study, these four measures were repeated for each media format – books, and music – regarding Facebook sharing. For example, participants were asked, “How likely are you to like a music artist or album on Facebook?” or “How likely are you to write a status update on Facebook recommending a book?”

RESULTS

To address the hypotheses, correlations were utilized. Correlations between the predictor variables, as well as correlations between the predictor variables and dependent variables are represented in Table 1. H1 one suggested bridging social capital positively relates to the sharing of eWOM on social media. There were positive, statistically significant correlations between bridging social capital and all four forms of sharing across both media, supporting this hypothesis. Likewise, there were positive, statistically significant correlations between perceived opinion leadership and all four forms of sharing across both media, which supports H2. H3 posited that personality strength positively relates to the sharing of eWOM on social media. There was not a statistically significant correlation between personality strength and Liking for Books ($r = .08, p > .05$), Liking for Music ($r = .04, p > .05$), and Sharing for Music ($r = .04, p > .05$). As such, this hypothesis was only partially supported. There were positive, statistically significant correlations

between knowledge self-efficacy and all four forms of sharing across both media, supporting H4.

Table 1

Pearson Correlations of Independent and Dependent Variables (N = 241)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	Like	Share	Update	Blog
Books												
1. Facebook Int.									.09	.03	.07	.06
2. Facebook Aff.	.47 ⁺								.20 ^{**}	.13 [*]	.21 ^{**}	.11
3. Book Int.	-.09	-.21 ^{**}							.18 ^{**}	.23 ⁺	.23 ⁺	.23 ⁺
4. Book Aff.	.23 ⁺	-.17 ^{**}	.55 ⁺						.46 ⁺	.42 ⁺	.44 ⁺	.31 ⁺
5. S.C. Bonding	.26 ⁺	.35 ⁺	-.01	-.01					.17 ^{**}	.17 [*]	.18 ^{**}	.15 [*]
6. S.C. Bridging	.38 ⁺	.53 ⁺	-.07	.01	.47 ⁺				.34 ⁺	.32 ⁺	.35 ⁺	.29 ⁺
7. Op. Lead.	-.16 [*]	-.09	.48 ⁺	.72 ⁺	.06	.09			.43 ⁺	.46 ⁺	.52 ⁺	.34 ⁺
8. Person. Str.	-.01	.06	.09	.17 [*]	.13	.15 [*]	.30 ⁺		.08	.15 [*]	.22 ⁺	.23 ⁺
9. K.S.E.	-.11	-.03	.36 ⁺	.72 ⁺	.13 [*]	.15 [*]	.78 ⁺	.30 ⁺	.45 ⁺	.45 ⁺	.53 ⁺	.37 ⁺
Music												
1. Facebook Int.									.22 ^{**}	.15 [*]	.27 ⁺	.10
2. Facebook Aff.									.23 ⁺	.15 [*]	.26 ⁺	.03
3. Music Int.	.05	-.09							.13 [*]	.17 ^{**}	.22 ^{**}	.15 [*]
4. Music Aff.	.02	.07	.45 ⁺						.38 ⁺	.32 ⁺	.35 ⁺	.27 ⁺
5. S.C. Bonding			.11	.10					.16 [*]	.15 ^{**}	.23 ⁺	.14 [*]
6. S.C. Bridging			-.04	.08					.27 ⁺	.26 ⁺	.32 ⁺	.18 ^{**}
7. Op. Lead.	.04	.02	.29 ⁺	.51 ⁺	.10	.11			.41 ⁺	.44 ⁺	.51 ⁺	.44 ⁺
8. Person. Str.			.01	-.01			.22 ^{**}		.04	.04	.14 [*]	.19 ^{**}
9. K.S.E.	.11	.02	.19 ^{**}	.50 ⁺	.14 [*]	.09	.79 ⁺	.21 ^{**}	.42 ⁺	.41 ⁺	.51 ⁺	.44 ⁺

Note: ⁺ $p < .001$ (2-tailed), ^{**} $p < .01$ (2-tailed), ^{*} $p < .05$ (2-tailed). Int. = Intensity, Aff. = Affinity, S.C. = Social Capital, Op. Lead. = Opinion Leadership, Person. Str. = Personality Strength, K.S.E. = Knowledge Self-Efficacy

RQ1 asked which factors related to social capital and opinion leadership would best predict different types of social sharing. To address the research question, hierarchical regressions were utilized to test the relations between the predictor variables and dependent variables. See Table 2 for a complete report of the hierarchical regressions for books, and Table 3 for a complete report of the hierarchical regressions for music. For each hierarchical regression, step one introduced the control variables: age, gender, media

affinity (books or music) and Facebook affinity. Step two introduced the variables associated with social capital, both bridging and bonding social capital. Step three introduced variables associated with two-step flow theory, including the perceived opinion leadership measure and the personality strength measure. Knowledge self-efficacy was highly correlated with perceived opinion leadership for both books ($r = .78, p < .001$) and music ($r = .79, p < .001$). As opinion leadership was the primary variable of interest related to two-step flow, knowledge self-efficacy was excluded from each regression to avoid possible issues with multicollinearity. The same regression procedure was repeated for each dependent variable, Like, Share, Update, and Blog, for each medium. No variable's tolerance was below .2, and no variable's variance inflation factor exceeded 4 in any step of any regression. As such, there did not appear to be issues with multicollinearity.

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses of Independent Variables with Likelihood of Online Social Sharing Variables for Books (N = 241)

	Like			Share			Update			Blog		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Step 1												
Controls												
Age	.02	.01	.13*	.03	.01	.17**	.002	.01	.01	.001	.01	.01
Gender (F)	-.21	.25	-.05	-.27	.24	-.07	-.38	.24	-.09	-.27	.21	-.08
F.B. Int.	.21	.10	.13*	.09	.10	.06	.10	.10	.06	.09	.09	.08
F.B. Aff.	.28	.09	.20**	.19	.08	.15*	.36	.09	.27+	.15	.08	.14
Books Int.	-.03	.02	-.08	.01	.02	.02	.003	.02	.01	.03	.02	.10
Books Aff.	.69	.08	.56+	.49	.08	.44+	.58	.08	.50+	.28	.07	.30+
<i>R</i> ²	.33			.26			.29			.14		
<i>F</i>	18.67+			13.11+			15.43+			6.27+		
Step 2												
Controls												
Age	.02	.01	.13*	.04	.01	.17**	.00	.01	.002	.00	.01	-.001
Gender (F)	-.19	.24	-.04	-.24	.23	-.06	-.36	.23	-.08	-.25	.21	-.07
F.B. Int.	.13	.10	.08	.01	.10	.01	.01	.10	.01	.02	.09	.02
F.B. Aff.	.13	.10	.09	.02	.10	.02	.19	.10	.14*	.01	.08	.01
Books Int.	-.02	.02	-.07	.01	.02	.03	.02	.02	.02	.03	.02	.12
Books Aff.	.65	.08	.52+	.44	.08	.39+	.53	.08	.46+	.24	.07	.26**

Social Cap.												
Bonding	.04	.10	.02	.06	.09	.04	-.002	.09	-.001	.01	.08	.01
Bridging	.42	.13	.22**	.45	.13	.26+	.49	.13	.28+	.41	.11	.28+
ΔR^2		.04			.05			.05			.06	
ΔF		6.20**			8.41+			8.74+			7.77**	
Step 3												
Controls												
Age	.02	.01	.14*	.03	.01	.20**	.01	.01	.05	.004	.01	.03
Gender (F)	-.26	.25	-.06	-.21	.24	-.05	-.25	.23	-.06	-.12	.21	-.04
F.B. Int.	.14	.10	.09	.03	.09	.02	.04	.09	.02	.03	.09	.03
F.B. Aff.	.13	.10	.09	.01	.09	.01	.17	.09	.13	-.002	.08	-.001
Books Int.	-.03	.02	-.10	-.003	.02	-.01	-.01	.02	-.03	.02	.02	.10
Books Aff.	.50	.10	.40+	.21	.10	.19*	.24	.10	.21*	.14	.09	.15
Social Cap.												
Bonding	.04	.10	.03	.06	.09	.04	-.01	.09	-.01	-.001	.08	.00
Bridging	.39	.13	.21**	.39	.12	.23**	.42	.12	.23**	.37	.11	.26**
2-Step Flow												
Op. Lead.	.45	.18	.21*	.62	.16	.32+	.74	.16	.37+	.21	.15	.13
Person. St.	-.17	.12	-.08	-.02	.11	-.01	.07	.11	.04	.16	.10	.11
ΔR^2		.02			.04			.06			.02	
ΔF		3.69*			7.36**			11.86+			2.89	

Note. * $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. F.B. = Facebook, Int. = Intensity, Aff. = Affinity, Cap. = Capital, Op. Lead. = Opinion Leadership, Person. St. = Personality Strength

Table 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses of Independent Variables with Likelihood of Online Social Sharing Variables for Music (N = 241)

	Like			Share			Update			Blog		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Step 1												
Controls												
Age	.01	.01	.03	.02	.01	.16*	-.01	.01	-.04	-.004	.01	-.04
Gender (F)	-.70	.27	-.15*	-.44	.24	-.11	-.73	.24	-.18**	-.63	.19	-.21**
F.B. Int.	.24	.11	.15*	.16	.10	.11	.25	.10	.17*	.10	.08	.09
F.B. Aff.	.22	.10	.15*	.09	.09	.07	.25	.09	.20**	.01	.07	.01
Music Int.	-.03	.05	-.04	.04	.05	.06	.06	.04	.08	.01	.04	.02
Music Aff.	.51	.09	.36+	.32	.08	.27+	.35	.08	.28+	.23	.07	.24**

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	R^2	.22	.16	.24	.12							
	F	11.03 ⁺	7.39 ⁺	12.25 ⁺	5.41 ⁺							
Step 2												
Controls												
Age	.004	.01	.02	.02	.01	.15 [*]	-.01	.01	-.05	-.01	.01	-.05
Gender (F)	-.70	.27	-.15 ^{**}	-.44	.24	-.11	-.73	.23	-.18 ^{**}	-.63	.19	-.21 ^{**}
F.B. Int.	.19	.11	.12	.10	.10	.07	.19	.10	.13	.06	.08	.05
F.B. Aff.	.11	.11	.08	-.03	.10	-.02	.12	.09	.09	-.08	.08	-.09
Music Int.	-.03	.05	-.04	.04	.04	.06	.05	.04	.08	.01	.04	.02
Music Aff.	.49	.09	.35 ⁺	.30	.08	.25 ⁺	.33	.08	.26 ⁺	.21	.07	.23 ^{**}
Social Cap.												
Bonding	.03	.11	.02	.03	.10	.02	.07	.09	.05	.05	.08	.05
Bridging	.30	.14	.15 [*]	.34	.13	.21 ^{**}	.35	.13	.20 ^{**}	.23	.10	.18 [*]
ΔR^2		.02			.03			.04			.03	
ΔF		2.70			4.39 [*]			5.58 ^{**}			3.72 [*]	
Step 3												
Controls												
Age	.01	.01	.03	.02	.01	.16 ^{**}	-.004	.01	-.02	-.002	.01	-.02
Gender (F)	-.56	.27	-.12 [*]	-.26	.23	-.07	-.46	.23	-.11 [*]	-.40	.19	-.13 [*]
F.B. Int.	.18	.11	.11	.09	.09	.06	.18	.09	.13 [*]	.06	.07	.06
F.B. Aff.	.13	.11	.09	-.01	.09	-.01	.14	.09	.11	-.08	.07	-.08
Music Int.	-.04	.05	-.06	.02	.04	.03	.04	.04	.05	-.004	.03	-.01
Music Aff.	.31	.10	.22 ^{**}	.09	.09	.08	.10	.08	.08	.07	.07	.07
Social Cap.												
Bonding	.03	.11	.02	.02	.09	.02	.06	.09	.04	.04	.07	.04
Bridging	.26	.14	.14	.30	.12	.18 [*]	.29	.12	.17 [*]	.18	.10	.13
2-Step Flow												
Op. Lead.	.61	.15	.28 ⁺	.70	.13	.37 ⁺	.79	.13	.40 ⁺	.50	.11	.34 ⁺
Person. St.	-.12	.12	-.06	-.10	.11	-.06	-.003	.10	-.002	.08	.09	.06
ΔR^2		.05			.09			.11			.09	
ΔF		8.12 ⁺			14.33 ⁺			20.20 ⁺			13.34 ⁺	

Note. ⁺ $p < .001$, ^{**} $p < .01$, ^{*} $p < .05$. F.B. = Facebook, Int. = Intensity, Aff. = Affinity, Cap. = Capital, Op. Lead. = Opinion Leadership, Person. St. = Personality Strength

For Liking, the complete model was statistically significant for Books, $F(10, 226) = 14.00$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .38$, and Music, $F(10, 226) = 9.34$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .29$. For Music, the addition of the social capital variables in step 2 was not statistically significant, $\Delta F(2, 228) = 2.70$, $p > .05$. Bridging social capital was a statistically significant predictor of Liking for

Books ($B = .39$, $SE B = .13$, $p < .01$), and perceived opinion leadership was a statistically significant predictor for both Books ($B = .45$, $SE B = .18$, $p < .05$) and Music ($B = .61$, $SE B = .15$, $p < .001$). The control variable affinity for the medium was the best predictor for Books ($B = .50$, $SE B = .10$, $\beta = .40$, $p < .001$), but perceived opinion leadership was the best predictor for Music ($\beta = .28$).

Regarding Sharing, the complete model was statistically significant for Books, $F(10, 224) = 12.10$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .35$, and Music, $F(10, 225) = 8.95$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .29$. Bridging social capital was a significant predictor of Sharing for both Books ($B = .39$, $SE B = .12$, $p < .01$) and Music ($B = .30$, $SE B = .12$, $p < .05$), as was perceived opinion leadership (Books: $B = .62$, $SE B = .16$, $p < .001$, Music: $B = .70$, $SE B = .13$, $p < .001$). Perceived opinion leadership was the best predictor for both Books ($\beta = .32$) and Music ($\beta = .37$).

For Updating, the complete model was statistically significant for Books, $F(10, 225) = 15.11$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .40$, and Music, $F(10, 226) = 14.27$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .39$. Bridging social capital was a significant predictor of Updating for Books ($B = .42$, $SE B = .12$, $p < .01$) and Music ($B = .29$, $SE B = .12$, $p < .01$). Perceived opinion leadership was also a significant predictor for Books ($B = .74$, $SE B = .16$, $p < .001$) and Music ($B = .79$, $SE B = .13$, $p < .001$). Perceived opinion leadership was the best predictor in the complete model for Books ($\beta = .37$) and Music ($\beta = .40$).

Finally, for Blogging, the complete model was statistically significant for Books, $F(10, 225) = 6.21$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .22$, and Music, $F(10, 225) = 7.18$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .24$. For Books, the addition of the opinion leadership variables in step 3 was not statistically significant, $\Delta F(2, 225) = 2.89$, $p > .05$. Bridging social capital was a significant predictor of Blogging for Books ($B = .37$, $SE B = .11$, $p < .01$), and perceived opinion leadership was a significant predictor for Music ($B = .50$, $SE B = .11$, $p < .001$). Perceived opinion leadership was the best predictor for Music ($\beta = .34$), but bridging social capital was the best predictor for Books ($\beta = .26$).

DISCUSSION

This study sought to determine if opinion leadership or social capital on social networks better predicted the social sharing of consumer goods, in this case, books and music. Using an online survey distributed to a nationwide convenience sample via

Facebook sharing, the key finding was that while bridging social capital was a key predictor of social sharing, perceived opinion leadership best motivated individual social media eWOM across different types of user-generated content. In particular, sharing and updating behaviors were best predicted by opinion leadership. While recent network analysis suggests opinion leadership does not play an essential role in the spread of eWOM (Zhang et al., 2015), this study suggests that when it comes to Facebook user sharing motivations, perceived opinion leadership plays an important role in that process. For Facebook users, it is their self-perception that they are an opinion leader on cultural goods that best predicts their desire to engage in eWOM activities related to cultural goods.

In addition, this study lends credence to a view of opinion leaders that is more in-step with Katz's and Lazarsfeld's (1955) presentation of the opinion leader, an individual who exists and operates within a social network whose primary qualification is attention and insight into a subject, rather than Weimann's (1991) view of influentials, whose personality strength makes them an opinion leader. This study suggests that individuals who perceive themselves to have some insight into the subject and who have confidence in their social network will feel free to share their opinions about a subject, regardless of whether they possess certain strong personality traits. In addition, this study found that knowledge self-efficacy was highly correlated with perceived opinion leadership, suggesting a strong connection between an individual's confidence in a subject area and their willingness to share their opinions regarding that subject area. Much research has been devoted to identifying online opinion leaders via their specialized knowledge and wider reach (e.g. Li & Du, 2011; Song, Chi, Hino, & Tseng, 2007). This research supports the idea that opinion leaders believe they have the knowledge necessary to have an informed opinion about the topic; however, they do not necessarily need a particularly strong personality in order to be willing to share their knowledge and experience via Facebook social media eWOM.

In support of previous research (Burt, 1999; Sheehan, 2015), bridging social capital was an important predictor of social sharing behavior when controlling for bonding social capital. This suggests that commercial sharing is more about connecting with a broader social network, and thus receiving the perceived benefits of that broader social network,

than it is about connecting with close, intimate relations. This supports previous research suggesting information gathering and sharing is about building and creating “weak ties” between individuals outside of consumers’ close, intimate social network (Burt, 1999; Mo & Leung, 2015; Sheehan, 2015). According to Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011), sharing is one of the foundational elements of social media, and individuals use social media to share information and content to find commonalities between themselves and others in their network and mediate those shared interests. Congruent with this study and previous research, this process of finding and maintaining commonalities seems to be more associated with consumers’ non-intimate networks. As Mo and Leung (2015) suggested, social media was best associated with convenience when bonding social capital was considered. For close, intimate circles, perhaps social media is best used to facilitate intimate conversations in a convenient way, whereas for non-intimate relationships where intimate conversations may be less desirable or less convenient, social sharing becomes a way to build and maintain those relationships through shared interests. As such, eWOM becomes a crucial part of social media relationship building.

While research has questioned whether or not opinion leaders are essential to information dissemination in the age of social media (Zhang et al., 2015), this study suggests that there is still a place for opinion leaders when it comes to the social sharing. People who perceive themselves to be opinion leaders are still valuable, as they are the most willing to take involved action to promote a brand or product through social media. However, social capital – in particular individuals’ weak ties with a broader network – is an important piece of the puzzle. In addition, for an accessible form of eWOM, such as a Facebook “like,” higher levels of social capital or perceived opinion leadership are not necessarily a requirement for engagement. This could be attributed to the complex nature of “liking” as more than just a form of eWOM (Scissors et al., 2016). For marketers, advertisers, or self-publishers trying to capitalize on social media sharing, it is important to know that the easiest ask that could result in the biggest return is to solicit simple social media actions, such as “Likes” or “Follows.” Understanding that users typically need to possess some sense of opinion leadership or increased level of trust and investment in their online social community in order to take more involved action regarding a brand is

important when crafting a social media strategy. While not everyone is going to blog for a brand, it is important to realize that there are consumers who are willing to take specialized, involved action. Their involvement in their network or perception of special knowledge may be enough to motivate their participation, regardless of whether or not they possess strong personality traits normally associated with influentials.

Limitations and Future Research

As this study employed a snowball, social media sample, it has limited generalizability. Future research should seek to use a probability sample to capture a more thorough and generalizable assessment of social media eWOM behaviors. Future research should also seek to more effectively parse the differences between social capital and opinion leadership for more advanced sharing, such as blogging and review writing, given the inconclusive findings from this study. Future research should also seek to better understand the Facebook “like” specifically as a form of eWOM in relation to other uses of that important social media function. Future research should also look at social sharing beyond the Facebook context, exploring other social media such as Snapchat or Instagram. In addition, future research should expand this study to address other products and services. While cultural goods present an excellent subject for investigation due to their success driven primarily by eWOM, marketers would also be interested in understanding how products that are supported by a significant paid media investment are shared socially. Considering this study’s finding that personality strength was not a significant predictor, future research should seek to understand the environments, platforms, and media where personality strength still plays a role in the opinion leadership process, if any.

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Online Connections

To follow Alec Tefertiller in social media: @alecteefer