

Skepticism toward CSR: A Cross-Cultural Perspective

Hyejoon Rim, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

Abstract

This study investigates publics perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the U.S., U.A.E., and South Korea by employing a cross-sectional survey (N=1,121). Based on previous literature that identified the sources of CSR skepticism (i.e., skepticism toward management, ulterior motives, communication, sincerity, informative preferences, and outcomes), the study compares relevant sources of CSR skepticism in three selected countries. In addition, the study examined the relationships between the sources of skepticism and the publics' CSR supportive intention. The results showed that the extent of skepticism in each source differed by countries. Consumers in South Korea showed a higher degree of skepticism across the sources. In the U.A.E., the study found that skepticism toward communication was predominant. Compared with the U.A.E. and South Korea, U.S. participants showed lower skepticism toward CSR overall, but they were more skeptical toward CSR outcomes and less likely to show CSR supportive intentions. Practical and theoretical implications are also discussed.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility (CSR); skepticism toward CSR; cross-cultural; CSR supportive intention

Introduction

Over the past few decades, corporations have become actively involved in public discourse on issues such as human rights, global warming, and deforestation. The motivations behind corporate social responsibility (CSR) are not only because of their global impact, but because of its direct and indirect economic benefits to the company, such as a favorable company image (Lee, 2008), enhanced organizational-public relationships (e.g., Hall, 2006; Hong & Rim, 2010) and positive evaluations of the company and its products (e.g., Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007; Kim, 2011). However, such positive effects of CSR are not guaranteed due to publics' skepticism toward CSR (Rim & Kim, 2016).

The news coverage on business scandals and corporate crises contributes to the development of negative feelings toward the business environment and corporate behavior (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006). A prevalent criticism is that CSR is a marketing gimmick or "greenwashing" used by businesses in a selfish manner. CSR practices are often perceived to be even hypocritical (Wagner, Lutz, & Weitz, 2009). The paradox between the nature of a for-profit company and the nature of CSR, and the discrepancy between a company's

active promotion of its philanthropy while failing to provide visible outcomes have led the public to develop CSR skepticism. A growing amount of CSR literature points out that skepticism is one of the barriers to CSR practices (e.g., Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010; Rim & Kim, 2016; Wagner et al., 2009), but antecedents of CSR skepticism and their consequences remain under-investigated (Rim & Kim, 2016).

What CSR means to society and how publics' view CSR can differ by society given their distinctive cultural and business environment (Williams & Zinkin, 2008). However, extant research on CSR has focused exclusively on western societies (Rettab, Brik, & Mellahi, 2009), and little attention has been given to cross-cultural contexts. Thus, to fill the gap, this study proposes a cross-cultural investigation of CSR communication in regions with distinct cultural roots: The United States, the United Arab Emirates, and South Korea. These countries were chosen to elucidate how CSR is perceived and evaluated from non-western perspectives in the Middle East and Asia when juxtaposed against the United States. Specifically, the study examines the sources of CSR skepticism in each country, and how these sources influence the public's CSR supportive intentions. This study aims to contribute to scholarship by providing diverse, and most importantly, non-western views of CSR.

Literature Review

Skepticism toward CSR

CSR has been a matter of discussion since Bowen (1953) argued that companies should consider the social consequences of their actions in addition to the economic results. The fundamental idea of CSR is that business and society are interwoven; therefore, as social institutions, corporations have a duty to invest their resources in the public and societies that have supported them (Wood, 1991). Over the past decades, corporations have made progressive efforts in addressing social issues in response to the increasing public expectations for CSR. Yet, diverse perspectives of defining and prioritizing business responsibilities in the society still exist.

The debate on what CSR means precisely translates into two major arguments. The narrow perspective of CSR suggests that corporations are economic and legal constructs, which only account for providing goods and services that lead to the maximization of profit within the boundary of legal compliance (Quazi & O'Brien, 2000). Scholars opposed to CSR believe that companies should be judged mainly by their financial performance, following Nobel Prize winning economist Milton Friedman's most notable argument against CSR – business is the business of business (Friedman, 1962). The broader conception of corporate responsibilities argues that CSR encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary responsibilities demanded by a business's various stakeholders (Maignan & Ferrell, 2000), requiring obligations beyond a firm's direct economic interests (Carroll, 1999).

Most recently, the concept of CSR has been progressively rationalized and associated with broader organizational goals such as reputation and stakeholder management (Lee, 2008). Researchers have documented benefits of CSR including enhanced positive attitudes toward a company, reputation, employee attractiveness, purchase intention and generating loyalty from publics (e.g., Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Du et al., 2007; Greening & Turban, 2000; Hur, Kim & Woo, 2014; Webb & Mohr, 1998).

Yet, some scholars have warned of the contingent effects of CSR practices, highlighting the importance of understanding the publics' skepticism toward CSR (Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009; Yoon, Gurhan-Canli, & Schwarz, 2006). Skepticism is broadly defined as an individual's tendency to doubt or question a specific claim (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Scholars have treated skepticism as dispositional, such as a personality factor, but also skepticism as a situational factor (e.g., Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009; Webb & Mohr, 1998). That is, for those with a cynical personality, the argument strength or marketers' persuasive attempts can contribute to the generation of skepticism (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009).

In a similar vein, Friestad and Wright (1994) suggested a persuasion knowledge model, which asserted that people develop persuasion knowledge over time, and that knowledge determines how consumers respond to the marketers' persuasive efforts. The persuasion knowledge model considers consumers as active thinkers who are able to recognize and evaluate persuasive attempts. This model explains that when persuasion knowledge is triggered, people deploy it as a coping mechanism so that they can process the persuasive messages more critically (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Skepticism, in this respect, is generated to cope with and evaluate the persuasion messages and efforts that publics encounter in their social interactions.

In the context of CSR, Rim and Kim (2016) identified the sources of CSR skepticism based on an extensive review of previous literature in the closely related disciplines. They also suggest that CSR skepticism encompass the public's inclination to question, disbelieve, and distrust an organization's CSR motives, management and business, CSR outcomes, and the claims of socially responsible positions and actions (Rim & Kim, 2016). Similar to advertising skepticism (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998), CSR skepticism is reflected by the public's perception of how honest and truthful the CSR information is that a company provides (Du et al., 2010; Rim & Kim, 2016). Publics are concerned about any discrepancy between the amount and size of the donation versus what was actually donated, and therefore, they suspect the ulterior motives behind the CSR efforts of businesses (Kim & Lee, 2012; Wagner et al., 2009; Yoon et al., 2006).

As discussed above, publics develop skepticism to protect themselves from marketers' conspicuous persuasive attempts and overflows of promotional information in the market (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Koslow, 2000). People with high skepticism are more likely to have greater persuasion knowledge, and are consequently resilient to persuasion tactics. As a result, they rarely believe corporate claims (Friestad & Wright, 1994). In this respect, as Webb and Mohr (1998) suggested, publics' perception of CSR is affected by the marketing practices of corporations and overall distrust about advertising and its messages.

Similarly, the more the public acknowledged a company's use of CSR as a marketing method or persuasion strategy, the less they take CSR at face value (Bae & Cameron, 2006; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Rim & Ferguson, 2017). The CSR deliberately triggers underlying motivations, whether they are self-interested or socially oriented (Kim & Lee, 2012; Yoon et al., 2006). The nature of CSR discourse implies a voluntary and unconditional commitment to the betterment of society. However, many companies adopt CSR, and this may contribute to the company's direct and indirect economic benefits (Lee, 2008; Porter & Kramer, 2002), and companies have used CSR initiatives to rebuild their reputations after a crisis (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Rim & Ferguson, 2017). Furthermore, the benefits of CSR have been discussed from a

business perspective rather than from the lens of social impact, which has resulted in developing the publics' skepticism toward CSR.

Rim and Kim (2016) also noted skepticism toward CSR derived from disbeliefs about a company's capacity to make social improvements or changes, managers' expertise, and tangible outcomes. This sentiment is consistent with Friedman's view on CSR, which argued that businesses lack the expertise to solve social problems. Singh, Kristensen, and Villasenor (2009) argued that CSR skepticism originates from a lack of awareness of its outcomes rather than publics' doubt toward company motives for CSR. Understanding the skepticism of publics toward CSR is particularly important because it alters its effectiveness. Past research suggests that skepticism toward CSR can negatively influence public attitudes and supportive intention toward the company (e.g., Forehand & Grier, 2003; Rim & Kim, 2016; Webb & Mohr, 1998).

CSR Perception in the U.S., U.A.E., and South Korea

Given that skepticism toward CSR originates from consumers' experiences in the market and their social interactions as discussed in a previous section, this may differ by regions based on their societal and cultural context. Based on U.S. context, Carroll (1999) proposed the CSR Pyramid which consists of four responsibility dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. Although these four dimensions are aggregated in a hierarchical structure, where economic and legal responsibilities are socially mandatory, ethical responsibility is socially expected, and philanthropic responsibility is socially desired, publics can weigh the importance of each domain differently (Maignan & Ferrell, 2000; Bae & Kim, 2013).

Hofstede (1983) argues that management theories are culturally bounded, because theorists cannot help but reflect the particular society where their work originates. Hofstede (1983) also argued that management cannot be a universal; the very concept of management may vary based on the different contexts and histories of each region (Hofstede, 1993). For example, in the U.S., a manager may be perceived as a champion of the organization, and his duty is to motivate others to produce. Japanese workers are controlled more by their peer group than by their manager. Chinese typically lack the separation between ownership and management typical in the West. Each of these management styles is reflective of the national culture of the country of its origin (Hofstede, 1993). Likewise, publics' expectations for CSR can vary by national culture. For example, Kim and Choi's (2013) survey research compared evaluations by young publics of the CSR practices of multinational corporations in the United States and South Korea, and found that the U.S. participants evaluated CSR more favorably than South Korean participants.

Past research also demonstrated discrepancies of CSR perceptions across the culture by applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1991), which included power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term/short-term orientation (e.g., Bae & Kim, 2013; Davis, Bernardi, & Bosco, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2010; Scholtens, & Dam, 2007; Williams & Zinkin, 2008). For example, based on a survey of about 90,000 stakeholders from 28 countries, Williams and Zinkin (2008) concluded that consumers' intention to punish socially irresponsible companies differed across countries, and the differences could generally be explained within the Hofstede framework. Kim and Kim (2010) examined South Korean public relations practitioners' perceptions of CSR, and showed that collectivism, Confucianism, and high uncertainty avoidance predicted positive perception of CSR. As the

authors explained, “Confucianism and collectivism are still deeply rooted in Korean society and high uncertainty avoidance is also a key Korean cultural value” (p. 497). These traditional Korean cultural values are tightly aligned with the nature of CSR philosophy, which seeks to create societal value (Kim & Kim, 2010).

Moreover, given that consumers’ positive evaluation of a company supports CSR, public relations practitioners consider CSR as a means to secure organizational success. This can explain the positive association between high uncertainty avoidance and positive CSR attitudes (Kim & Kim, 2010). Other studies have also found that collectivism is positively associated with consumers’ perception of CSR, whereas individualism is negatively associated with it (Bae & Kim, 2013; Hur & Kim, 2017). In sum, as previous studies have suggested, prevalent in South Korean CSR practices is the influence of Confucianism. The low trust perpetuated by Confucian values contributes to consumers’ expectations and skepticism about CSR practices (Bae & Kim, 2013; Kim & Kim, 2010).

In the Middle East region, Ararat (2006) pointed out that external factors such as laws and regulations imposed by international agreement, NGOs and multinational companies’ practices, were considered as main drivers of CSR practices. In addition, scholars suggest that Islamic religious philanthropy guides overall business practices, and Islamic CSR (*i*CSR) became the predominant style of corporate philanthropy (Zain, Darus, Yusoff, Amran, Fauzi, Purwanto, & Naim, 2014). Zain et al. (2014) noted that unique Islamic principles are embedded in law and values, and these principles provide a strong foundation for CSR practices of the companies in Middle East. Specifically, in an Islamic perspective, all possessions and wealth belong to Allah, so CSR can be seen as an act of obedience to Allah and as mandatory (Zain et al., 2014). Businesses should strive to gain profit so that they can contribute to zakat – a compulsory form of alms-giving for Muslims, which include creating employment, taking care of society, and protecting the environment (Zain et al., 2014).

While the Islamic culture has traditions of philanthropy that characterize its CSR practices, CSR in the Middle East has not received much attention or recognition, and much of this can be attributed to Islamic companies’ reluctance to disclose CSR activities (Jamali, 2014). In Islam, the intention behind a good deed is more important than the deed itself, so firms do not typically share their philanthropic efforts publicly. In a similar vein, studies suggested that religious and cultural values shape publics’ perception of CSR (e.g., Jamali, Zanhour, & Keshishian, 2009; Ramasamy, Yeung, & Au, 2010).

Therefore, publics’ skepticism toward CSR-related communication messages would be distinct in the region. Disclosure of CSR practices can accelerate public criticism in some cultures, but not necessarily in others. Given that the distinctive business environment and culture influences publics’ perceptions toward CSR practices, the following research questions are posed.

RQ1: To what extent do the sources of skepticism toward CSR differ across the U.S., U.A.E., and South Korea?

RQ2: Which sources of skepticism toward CSR best predict the publics’ CSR supportive intention and how do they differ across these three selected countries?

Method

Data Collection

The study employed an online survey. Data were collected from three countries with distinct cultural orientations: the U.S., the U.A.E., and South Korea. The samples were randomly drawn from a consumer panel operated by a marketing research firm in each country (the U.S. and the U.A.E.: ResearchNow, South Korea: Hankook Research).

The sampling frame for the study was constructed from the list of consumer panels managed by the market research firms, but modified to reflect the characteristics of each country. For the U.S. survey, email invitations were deployed on the basis of census data about gender, age, and race/ethnicity. For the U.A.E. survey, the main criterion for deploying email invitation was to have balanced samples in terms of nationalities. Given that the population of the country consisted of diverse nationalities, the email invitation was deployed based on nationalities reside in the U.A.E. (CIA, 2015). The panel used in the sampling consists of 7% locals (i.e., Emirati), 25% Arab expats, 59% Asians and the rest are from other nationalities including Western expats (e.g., the U.K., France, Canada, Romania, Spain, Finland, Bulgaria, etc.) and Africans (e.g., Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, etc.). The samples must reside in the U.A.E.

The online survey was programmed using Qualtrics. In the U.A.E., the survey was administered in English as it is spoken as a de-facto official language in all business and daily activities. Moreover, the study's population consisted of consumer publics doing economic activities in the U.A.E., rather than limited to the local ethnicity – Emiratis which represent about 10% of the total population (CIA, 2015). In South Korea, survey questionnaires were translated into Korean. In order to ensure that the questions imply the same meanings in each language, the translated survey was re-translated into English and then compared with the original survey question written in English and reviewed by research team members (graduate students and strategic communication professors). Considering the sensitivity of the religion issue in the Middle East region, we added a disclaimer to the religion-related questions in the U.A.E. survey: “Kindly note that we ask this question only for research purposes that help us make sure that our survey is representative,” and added a “prefer not to answer” option.

When they entered into the survey, participants were instructed to think about their general perceptions toward business when measuring CSR skepticism and CSR supportive behaviors. Cross-sectional data were gathered in the three countries: July 1-5, 2016 (the U.S.), July 7 – 13, 2016 (the U.A.E.) and July 20-23, 2016 (South Korea).

Participants

In the U.S., 410 participants responded. After eliminating unqualified responses such as speeders and straightliners, we had 380 valid responses. In the U.A.E., 370 participants responded, resulting in 355 valid responses. In South Korea, 400 participants responded, resulting in 386 valid responses. Of 1,180 completed responses, 1,121 samples used for analysis. Table 1 presents descriptions of the respondents.

Table 1. Sample Profile

		U.S. N=380	U.A.E. N=355	South Korea N=386
Age	Mean	41.88	32.89	39.50
	Minimum	18	19	20
	Maximum	74	62	59
Gender	Male	43.7%	49.3%	49.7%
	Female	56.3%	50.7%	50.3%
Education	Less than high school	1.3%	0.8%	0.3%
	High school graduate	33.2%	14.5%	18.7%
	College graduate	45.5%	57.4%	66.8%
	Masters Degree	17.6%	23.1%	14.2%
	Other	2.4%	4.2%	N/A

Demographic, religious and political characteristics did not significantly differ for respondents across three countries: gender ($\chi^2(2, 1123) = .346, p = .09$), education ($\chi^2(8, 1125) = 73.95, p = .884$), and political party identification ($\chi^2(6, 1124) = 350.34, p = .292$). However, there were significant differences for the age mean across the countries ($F(2, 1120) = 60.53, p = .001$). Our data showed that those participating in the U.A.E. samples ($M = 32.88, SD = 7.92$) were younger than those participants in South Korea ($M = 39.5, SD = 11.44$) and the U.S. ($M = 41.88, SD = 14.00$). Therefore, in our further data analysis, the study statistically controlled for participants' age. Gender and education were also entered as covariates, because past research has highlighted that these demographic factors influence the publics' perception of CSR (e.g., Hur, Kim, & Jang, 2015).

Measures

Skepticism toward CSR. Skepticism toward CSR was measured with six dimensions which were identified in the previous study (e.g., Mason & Mudrack, 1997; Mohr, Eroglu, & Ellen, 1998; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Rim & Kim, 2016): skepticism toward management, skepticism toward ulterior motives, skepticism toward communication, skepticism toward altruism, skepticism toward informativeness of CSR message, and skepticism toward CSR outcome.

First, skepticism toward management, operationalized as the extent to which publics believe that CSR activities are used to cover organizations' misdeeds, was measured with three items using Mason & Mudrack's (1997) scale. These three items include the following: (1) CSR is often used as an excuse for mismanagement; (2) much mismanagement is hidden under the guise of CSR, (3) CSR is a convenient term to cover a variety of actions which often have little relationship to true social benefit ($M=4.46, SD=1.15, \alpha =.84$).

Second, skepticism toward ulterior motives of CSR activities was operationalized as publics' inclination to question the true motives behind CSR activities (Rim & Kim, 2016), and measured with three items including: (1) I often question the company's true motives of CSR initiatives, (2) I believe that there are ulterior motives for the company's CSR decisions, (3) Most companies disguise their true motives for doing CSR activities ($M=4.73, SD=1.08, \alpha =.88$).

Third, skepticism toward communication, operationalized as the extent to which consumer publics consider whether the companies' CSR claims are truthful and believable, was measured with three items adopted from Mohr et al. (1998) and Rim and Kim's (2016) study. The measures include: (1) Most CSR messages communicated by a company are intended to mislead rather than to inform consumers, (2) I don't believe most CSR messages being communicated by a company, (3) CSR messages being communicated by a company lead people to believe things that aren't true ($M=4.36$, $SD=.98$, $\alpha=.78$).

Fourth, skepticism toward the informative nature of the CSR message was operationalized as the extent to which consumer publics consider whether the companies' CSR-related claims are useful, adopted from previous research (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Rim & Kim, 2016) and were reverse coded: (1) CSR messages are informative, (2) most CSR messages from companies provide consumers with essential information, (3) most CSR messages from companies provide consumers with useful information for making choices ($M=3.48$, $SD=.96$, $\alpha=.80$).

Fifth, adopted from previous research (Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004; Rim & Kim, 2016), skepticism toward a sincere motive was operationalized as the extent to which the publics attribute altruistic motives to companies' CSR efforts. This was measured using three reverse-coded items: (1) companies do CSR activities because they truly care about the public, (2) companies doing CSR activities have a genuine concern for the welfare of the public, (3) companies doing CSR activities really care about providing a better environment for the public ($M=3.79$, $SD=1.22$, $\alpha=.89$).

Finally, skepticism toward outcome was operationalized as the extent to which publics believe that CSR activities make a better society using Rim and Kim's (2016) scale with two reverse coded items: (1) I am quite confident companies' CSR activities will have the desired effects to make things better for society, (2) I think companies' CSR activities will make a better society ($M=4.92$, $SD=1.07$, $\alpha=.76$).

CSR supportive intention. Using the study of Ramasamy et al. (2010), publics' CSR supportive intention was operationalized as their inclination to engage in transactional behaviors for a company doing CSR. This was measured using five items: (1) I would pay more to buy products from a socially responsible company, (2) I consider the ethical reputation of businesses when I shop, (3) I avoid buying products from companies that have engaged in immoral actions, (4) I would pay more to buy products from companies that show care for the well-being of our society, and (5) if the price and quality of two products are the same, I would buy from a firm that has a socially responsible reputation ($M=5.24$, $SD=1.07$, $\alpha=.82$).

Cynicism toward business. Cynicism is defined as "stable, learned attitude toward the marketplace characterized by the perception that pervasive opportunism among firms exists and that this opportunism creates a harmful consumer marketplace" (Helm, 2006, p. 4). This was discussed in previous literature as one of the factors that predicts consumers' attitudes toward CSR (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Webb & Mohr, 1998). Given that the focus of the present study was to examine situational skepticism, rather than cynicism, which is a pre-dispositional personal trait, cynicism toward business was measured and entered as a control variable. Cynicism was operationalized as publics' tendency to question business practices in the market, and was measured using Rim and Kim's (2016) nine-item scale ($M=4.90$, $SD=1.03$, $\alpha=.82$).

Results

Skepticism toward CSR Across Countries

RQ 1 asked if the sources of skepticism toward CSR differ across the U.S., U.A.E., and South Korea. The correlation analysis for dependent variables confirmed the significant positive relationships between dependent variables. Thus, a Multivariate Analysis of Co-Variance (MANCOVA) was conducted to examine the effects of independent variables on combined dependent variables, covarying out demographic differences among the samples in the three countries (i.e., gender, age, and educational level). As expected, the MANCOVA revealed a significant main effect of country, Wilk's $\lambda = .616$, $F(14, 2218) = 43.43$, $p < .001$; $\eta^2_p = .215$. The univariate co-variance and pairwise comparison tests confirmed differences among the U.S., U.A.E., and South Korea participants with respect to each component of skepticism and to the publics' CSR supportive intentions.

The ANCOVA tests revealed that the degree of skepticism is significantly different across countries: skepticism toward management [$F(2, 1115) = 48.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .079$], skepticism toward ulterior motives [$F(2, 1115) = 23.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .041$], skepticism toward communication [$F(2, 1115) = 10.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .019$], skepticism toward sincere motives [$F(2, 1115) = 106.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .160$], skepticism toward informativeness of CSR message [$F(2, 1115) = 37.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .064$], and skepticism toward CSR outcome [$F(2, 1115) = 60.96$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .099$]. The extent the participants would support CSR initiatives were significantly different [$F(2, 1115) = 34.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .058$]. Table 2 presents one-way ANCOVA for CSR skepticism and supportive intention in three selected countries.

Specifically, in regard to skepticism toward management, which we operationalized as the perceived link between mismanagement and CSR investment and use of CSR to cover the organizations' misdeed, South Korean participants showed the highest level of skepticism toward management ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.03$), followed by the U.A.E. ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.12$), and U.S. ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.15$) participants. A similar pattern was detected with regard to skepticism toward ulterior motives. South Korean participants ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 1.05$), were more likely than the U.A.E. ($M = 4.68$, $SD = .99$) and U.S. ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.12$) participants to believe that there would be a hidden agenda behind the true motives of CSR. There were no statistically significant differences between the U.A.E. and U.S. participants.

Regarding communication, the U.A.E. participants ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.00$) showed a higher level of disbelief, compared to the U.S. participants ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.00$). There were no differences between the U.A.E. and South Korean ($M = 4.36$, $SD = .89$) participants. Next, South Korean participants showed the highest skepticism regarding the companies' sincere motives behind CSR efforts ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.23$). In regard to perceived informativeness of the CSR messages, the U.A.E. participants were less likely to be skeptical ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .93$) than the U.S. ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .95$) and South Korean ($M = 3.64$, $SD = .91$) participants. Moreover, South Korean participants ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.03$) were less likely to doubt the outcomes of CSR initiatives than and U.S. ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.00$) and the U.A.E. ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.03$) participants. That is, the South Korean participants tend to be more confident than the U.A.E. and U.S. participants about CSR contributions to society. Lastly, regarding publics' supportive intention for CSR, the U.A.E. ($M = 5.48$, $SD = .97$) and South Korean ($M = 5.34$, $SD = .89$) participants showed higher levels of supportive intention than the U.S. participants ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.22$).

Table 2. One-Way ANCOVA for CSR Skepticism and Supportive Intention in the U.S., U.A.E., and South Korea

	U.S. N=380	U.A.E. N=355	South Korea N=386	Univariate F ^b (among countries)	Pairwise Comparisons ^c		
	Mean (SD) ^a				US vs. UAE	US vs. KOR	UAE vs. KOR
Skepticism							
Management	4.06 (1.15)	4.47 (1.12)	4.86 (1.03)	48.07***	US < UAE*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .37	US < KOR*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .77	UAE < KOR*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .41
Ulterior motive	4.48 (1.12)	4.68 (.99)	5.01 (1.05)	23.78***	<i>n.s.</i> <i>M_{differ}</i> = .12	US < KOR*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .50	UAE < KOR*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .38
Communication	4.09 (1.00)	4.45 (1.00)	4.36 (.89)	10.68***	US < UAE*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .32	US < KOR*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .26	<i>n.s.</i> <i>M_{differ}</i> = .06
Sincerity ^(RC)	3.67 (1.07)	3.24 (1.05)	4.44 (1.23)	106.38***	US > UAE*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .43	US < KOR*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .78	UAE < KOR*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = 1.21
Infomativity ^(RC)	3.66 (.95)	3.13 (.93)	3.64 (.91)	37.90***	US > UAE*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .56	<i>n.s.</i> <i>M_{differ}</i> = .02	UAE < KOR*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .54
Outcome ^(RC)	3.53 (1.00)	2.97 (1.03)	2.74 (1.03)	60.96***	US > UAE*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .59	US > KOR*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .80	UAE > KOR** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .21
CSR Support	4.91 (1.22)	5.48 (.97)	5.34 (.89)	34.04***	US < UAE*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .64	US < KOR*** <i>M_{differ}</i> = .45	UAE > KOR* <i>M_{differ}</i> = .19

a. Based on observed means; b. The test is based on the linearly independent pairwise comparisons among the estimated marginal means; c. Based on estimated marginal means.

Note: 1) Covariates: gender, age, educational background; 2) RC: Reverse Coded items; 3) Measured on 1-7 point scale; 4) * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression: Skepticism Predictors and CSR Supportive Behaviors

Predictors	U.S.				U.A.E.				South Korea			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Block 1												
Gender					.24	.10	.12	2.25*				
Age					.02	.01	.15	2.77**	.02	.00	.20	3.89***
Education									-.16	.08	-.10	-2.02*
Block 2												
Cynicism	.15	.06	.12	2.36*	.04	.06	.04	.71	.34	.04	.40	8.66***
	$R^2 = .24$ $F(4, 375) = 2.30^*$				$R^2 = .32$ $F(4, 350) = 2.89^*$				$R^2 = .20$ $F(4, 381) = 24.04^{***}$			
Block 3												
Mgt	-.09	.06	-.09	-1.48	-.15	.05	-.17	-2.72**	-.04	.06	-.05	-.69
Motive	.06	.07	.06	.94	.202	.07	.20	3.09**	.173	.06	.20	2.78**
Comm	-.05	.08	-.04	-.62	-.01	.06	-.01	-.10	.07	.06	.07	1.19
Sincerity ^(RC)	.07	.07	.06	1.06	-.01	.06	-.01	-.21	-.04	.04	-.06	-1.16
Info ^(RC)	-.29	.08	-.23	-3.89***	-.15	.06	-.15	-2.39*	-.07	.05	-.07	-1.46
Outcome ^(RC)	-.49	.08	-.40	-6.23***	-.29	.06	-.30	-4.81***	-.23	.04	-.27	-5.64***
	$R^2 = .33$ $F(10, 369) = 17.75^{***}$				$R^2 = .24$ $F(10, 344) = 10.78^{***}$				$R^2 = .33$ $F(10, 375) = 18.63^{***}$			

Note: 1) RC: Reverse Coded items; 2) Measured on 1-7 point scale; 3) * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; 4) Mgt: Skepticism toward management; Motive: Ulterior motive; Comm: Skepticism toward CSR communication; Sincerity: Skepticism toward sincerity; Skepticism toward Info: Skepticism toward CSR message informativeness

Components of CSR Skepticism and Publics' CSR Support

RQ2 asked which sources of skepticism toward CSR best predict publics' CSR supportive intention. To examine which sources of skepticism would influence the publics' CSR supportive intention, we analyzed data using hierarchical regression. The results reveal that in the U.S., skepticism toward CSR outcome ($\beta = -.40, p < .001$) and CSR message informativeness ($\beta = -.23, p < .001$) negatively influenced the participants' CSR supportive intention. That is, the more publics believe that CSR activities would not make a positive impact on society, and the more they perceive that the CSR messages of companies would not contain essential information, the less likely they are to support CSR activities. In the U.A.E., our data revealed that skepticism toward management ($\beta = -.17, p < .01$), motive ($\beta = .20, p < .01$), outcome ($\beta = -.30, p < .001$), and message informativeness ($\beta = -.15, p < .05$) predicted publics' CSR supports. The more the publics believe that CSR is used to cover companies' misbehavior, the more they believe that there would be ulterior motives, and the less likely they are to support CSR. Lastly, in South Korea, more publics are skeptical about ulterior motives ($\beta = .20, p < .01$). The more they are skeptical about CSR outcomes ($\beta = -.27, p < .001$), the less likely they are to support CSR (See Table 3).

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The current study investigated cross-national perspectives of CSR focusing on sources of CSR skepticism and their influence on publics' supportive CSR intentions. The findings of RQ1, which examined the degrees of skepticism in each dimension, showed that they differed in the three selected countries, which implies publics' skepticism toward CSR are influenced by various cultural factors. First, the study demonstrated evidence of prevalent CSR skepticism in South Korea. Participants showed a greater degree of skepticism across the various areas: management, ulterior motives, communication, the informative nature of the CSR message, and sincerity. Interestingly, they tend to be the least skeptical toward CSR outcomes when compared to the U.S. and the U.A.E. participants. In other words, they were more likely to be confident in the outcomes of CSR practices and their contributions to society. This indicates the publics in South Korea are more likely to doubt a company's use of CSR to disguise its unethical behaviors and are suspicious about the true motives of CSR. Regarding CSR communication, South Korea participants are more likely to be skeptical about the promotional use of CSR communications, and the informativeness of the CSR messages the company disseminates to publics. Our findings are consistent with previous research, which argued that the low-trust perpetuated by Confucian values contributes to publics' expectations and skepticism about CSR practices (Kim & Kim, 2010). In addition to the cultural and social orientation, the lack of publics' trust in business may contribute to the skepticism (Rim & Dong, 2018).

Our findings of high skepticism toward CSR, particularly toward its ulterior motivations, can be related to publics' growing concern for Chaebol's unethical business practices. According to the recent Edelman's Trust Barometer (2016), South Korea was categorized as a distrusting country across public and private sectors. Major companies in South Korea, particularly those

characterized as *Chaebol* including Samsung and Hyundai, have contributed to South Korea's rapid economic growth in the past decades, despite their unlawful link with politicians, unethical management and transfer of ownership and wealth through illegitimate procedures. However, excessive and increasing dominance of economic power by *Chaebol* – top ten *Chaebols* control almost 80% of the South Korea economy – as well as their influence on major governmental and public agendas to get favorable treatment for their business, have constantly built negative image and distrust toward the overall business society (You, 2015). Many South Koreans acknowledge that *Chaebols* have led its nation's economy, but there have also been increased calls for reform, concerning their monopolized wealth, the close ties between business and politics, and corruption scandals (Tejada, 2017; Vaswani, 2017). Our data showed that publics are less skeptical toward the outcome of CSR but they doubt companies' ulterior motivations behind CSR practices, which reflect increased importance of embracing the deontological moral theory knowing that the end could not justify the means.

Second, in the U.A.E. the results showed a lower level of skepticism with regard to sincerity and the informative nature of the CSR message. This result can be explained based on the cultural influences, particularly stemming from religious belief in the region (Jamali et al., 2009). In the U.A.E., the concept of CSR is based on religiously guided moral expectations (Darrang & E-Bassiouny, 2013; Zain et al., 2014). A significant number of organizations participated in charitable and philanthropic giving, which highlights the strong religiosity and culture of generosity in the society (Ararat, 2006; El-Aswad, 2015; Zain, et al., 2014). Therefore, a company's CSR initiative is based on a tradition of moral and religious initiative, and is more likely to be regarded as altruistic. Studies also noted that small and medium enterprises, and family businesses have been deeply committed to the local community traditionally (e.g., Zain et al., 2014), which could contribute to a lower level of skepticism toward sincerity.

The study also provides evidence that publics in the U.A.E. tend to evaluate CSR messages as useful and informative. Interestingly, the participants in the U.A.E. showed a higher level of skepticism toward CSR communication, while they evaluated CSR messages being communicated as useful and informative. That is, the publics' skepticism toward CSR communication can be limited to the promotional intentions behind the messages rather than "communication efforts" itself. The findings reflect the fact that the Islamic culture put more importance on the altruistic intention rather than the deed itself, and the Islamic companies' have been reluctant to disclose CSR activities.

The U.S. participants showed a relatively low level of skepticism toward management, ulterior motives and communication compared to the participants from South Korea and the U.A.E. Our findings support the previous study that found the U.S. participants evaluated the CSR activities more favorably than the South Korean sample (Kim & Choi, 2013). Although the present study focused on skepticism, it might be possible that a lower level of skepticism could contribute to consumers forming favorable attitudes toward CSR practices. In contrast, compared to other countries, the U.S. participants were more skeptical toward CSR outcomes, and were less likely to support a company for performing CSR. It should be noted that a subsequent hierarchical regression analysis showed that skepticism toward CSR outcomes significantly predict the public's intention to support a cause. That is, in the U.S., public's lack of confidence in a company's CSR activities resulting in fruitful outcomes and positive social impact plays as an obstacle for publics' CSR supportive intentions.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

The findings provide practical implications for public relations practices which can be applied globally and locally. Across countries, the results indicated that skepticism toward outcomes negatively influence publics' supportive CSR intention. Communicating how CSR practices contribute to the community and the society is crucial to enhance publics' engagement in CSR practices. In addition, when communicating the firm's CSR activities, practitioners should clearly communicate its true motivations for engaging in CSR, regardless of the region in which it operates. Given that skepticism is highly related to the use of CSR as an excuse or remedy for organizational mismanagement, practitioners may also need to be cautious in employing CSR as a reactive strategy. In other words, CSR commitment should not be used as a reaction to organizational misdeeds.

The study also provides useful guidelines to better communicate CSR in each region, and thus it enhances publics' support. As mentioned above, in the U.S., the communication of a CSR initiatives should focus on what they have done and what results they have produced. In addition to emphasizing tangible outcomes, CSR messages should deliver concrete and transparent information. When a company operates in the U.A.E., in addition to CSR outcomes and message informativeness, publics' disbelief of its true motive would negatively influence CSR support of publics. Public relations practitioners may need to emphasize that there is no hidden agenda behind their CSR efforts. In South Korea, skepticism toward motives and outcomes predicted decreased publics' intention to support CSR. For a society where the business is distrusted, companies are suggested to abide by laws and regulations with higher priority than trying to actively participate in CSR activities of which intentions might be misinterpreted by publics. Public relations practitioners should understand the extent to which the organizations are trusted, and reflect that in CSR communications.

The findings of the study can be interpreted through institutional theory, which explains that organizational behaviors are determined by how organizations interpret and incorporate institutional forces due to their adoptability, complexity and autonomy (Scott, 2008). Business responsibility in society is shaped based on their institutional context, which consists of "collections of rules and routines that define actions in terms of relations between roles and situations" (March & Olsen, 1989, p. 160). Therefore, what CSR means to society and how companies integrate CSR into their business can differ across different societies depending on their distinctive political, financial, educational, labor, and cultural systems, which are key features in governing CSR (Matten & Moon, 2008). The findings add evidences that publics' perceptions and expectations of CSR are different in various cultures, reflecting each regions' unique culture and business situations.

Limitations and Future Research

While the cross-sectional survey provides insights for public relations practices, there are several limitations that should be addressed in a future study. First, the survey was conducted in the middle of the 2016 presidential campaign when publics have been exposed to continuous political scandals. This may influence the skepticism perception, not only toward politicians, but also toward business entities. In South Korea, it is worth to note that the survey was administered before former President Park's scandal was covered in the media. Therefore, the results were less likely to be influenced by the historical event. Second, in South Korea, the survey was

administered in Korean using back translation. Although the author followed the steps that previous research suggested to imply the same meanings in each language (i.e., English and Korean), there might be unexpected errors caused by use of translated questionnaires. Similarly, because the survey was conducted in English in the U.A.E., there might be potential limitation or bias resulting from having only English spoken samples. Third, this study demonstrated the differences between consumer publics' skepticism toward CSR based on the individual perceptions of those who participated in the survey in three countries. Future study should narrow down specific cultural, economic, or political factors of interest and examine how these social and cultural factors influence publics' CSR skepticism. Finally, publics' perception and evaluation of CSR practices might differ between local-based companies and multinational companies. Future research should address this limitation.

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