

“We Go Together”

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“We Go Together”: Understanding social cause-related purchase intentions of young adults

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ABSTRACT

Building on social identity theory, this study sheds light on the interplay of social connections and emotion regulation in determining social cause-related purchase intentions. The focus of the study is on young adults, an age segment whose active role in solving social problems is appreciated today. We examine the context of three South-East European countries with varying levels of familiarity with social cause-related purchases and test the conceptual model using multi-group structural equation modeling. The results show that social connections are positively related to young adults' social cause-related purchase intentions, while emotion regulation strengthens this relationship in countries where young adults have more opportunities for social cause-related purchases. The study has both theoretical and policy-related implications for multiple stakeholders, including managers, policy makers, and advocacy group representatives.

1. Introduction

Practitioner literature (e.g., Barakat, 2014) has identified young adults as a group prone to helping behavior. Consequently, they expect companies to do their part as well (Creyer & Ross, 1996). The IEG (2019) indicates that global corporate spending on charitable sponsorship has reached approximately 65.8 billion USD. Companies have realized that transparent cause-related marketing initiatives are a valuable marketing tool (Koschate-Fischer, Huber & Hoyer, 2016) that can help improve responsible consumption; customer loyalty; and sales of their products, services, and ideas (Foscht et al., 2018; Krishna, 2011).

Cause-related marketing (CrM) is a company's contribution to a designated cause that is linked to the involvement of customers in revenue-generating transactions with the company (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Through CrM activities, companies promote the idea that money is donated to a charity every time a consumer makes a purchase, thereby adding value for everyone involved—charities, consumers, and the company itself (Lafferty et al., 2016). By purchasing products from companies that donate a portion of the money raised to a charity, consumers receive the psychological satisfaction of having acknowledged and supported socially challenging situations (problems and issues)

through their involvement (Olsen, Pracejus & Brown, 2003; Demetriou et al., 2010), whereas companies can promote both a positive long-term image (Gupta & Pirsch, 2006) and short-term sales (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Some brands, such as TOMS shoes (who commit 1/3 of their profits to support grassroots goods) have focused their marketing strategy on social cause-related initiatives. Other companies, such as Patagonia (which donated 1% of its sales to groups working to preserve and restore the environment) have focused their cause-related initiatives on the environment.

Consequently, CrM can involve supporting different types of causes, such as social and/or environmental issues. In this study, we focus on CrM activities that address social issues. Social cause-related issues are particularly salient in young adults (individuals aged 18–35; AMCHP, n. d.), who are future decision-makers (Cui et al., 2003) and will live with the societal problems bequeathed to them by previous generations (Goldsmith, 2015). According to Morningconsult (2020), young adults think that the biggest problem facing the world today is, as expected, the pandemic; however, it is interesting to note that the second-most serious concern is social issues, such as racism, discrimination, and social injustice, followed by human fallibility and poverty. Climate change and environmental issues are fifth, holding the same percentage as issues

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related to government policies and corruption. Indeed, young adults (Steinberg & Morris, 2001) are “much more focused on social issues and are more aware than other generations of what is “right” and “wrong” when considering societal implications of decisions and actions” (Laroche, 2017, p. 8). In addition, this age group is very much sensitive to the effects of negative emotions (Herry et al., 2019) and thus they exhibit relatively high emotion regulation (Ahmed et al., 2015). However, previous research has not provided much insight into the reasons behind the social cause-related purchase intentions of young adults, the primary subjects of this study.

Both scholars and practitioners have extensively studied CrM strategies and tactics executed by companies, such as framing and association, product attributes, presentations of donations, pricing effects, and cause–brand fit (e.g., Pracejus, Olsen & Brown, 2003; Grau & Folse, 2007; Chang, 2008; Müller, Fries & Gedenk, 2014; Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2016). Although the core of CrM activities is to engage consumers who want to make a difference in society through their purchase behavior (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001), surprisingly little attention is paid to the recipients of CrM activities, i.e., the consumers, and their behavioral intentions. Social cause-related purchase intention represents the goal of consumers to perform a specific behavior of purchasing goods/services related to social and charitable causes (e.g., Ogle et al., 2014; Hyllegard et al., 2011). Of the limited body of work, most studies have focused their attention on consumers’ demographics (e.g., Hyllegard et al., 2011; Witek 2016). This limits the understanding of the reasons why consumers engage in social cause-related purchasing behavior (e.g., Kotler et al., 2021). In today’s world, understanding both, psychographic and sociographic characteristics, is key to understanding why people do what they do (Pitt et al., 2020). It is surprising that such factors that each individual consumer brings into play when making decisions about behavior in socially challenging situations (Quaglia et al., 2015) are found only in several studies (e.g., Arora & Henderson, 2007; Winterich & Barone, 2011; Robinson, Irmak & Jayachandran, 2012). In this study, we aim to address this gap by applying the premises of social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and examining the predictive effect of young adults’ social connection and emotion regulation in shaping consumers’ receptivity to CrM in the form of stimulating social cause-related purchase intentions.

Our intended contributions are fourfold. First, we contribute to the existing literature on CrM by leveraging SIT and extending knowledge about the antecedents of social cause-related behavior of carefully defined demographic group. As the customer journey is social (Hamilton et al., 2021), a social cause stimulus or challenging situations linked with a cause-related initiative can activate in-group cohesion, emotions, and a sense of common well-being if one decides to proceed with purchase behavior.¹ Thus, consistent with the propositions of SIT, we examine whether consumers with high levels of social connectedness when it comes to causes exhibit higher levels of social cause-related purchase intentions. Second, we uncover an important facilitating role of emotion regulation in social cause-related purchase intentions. Emotion regulation is an ability that is often manifested in social contexts (Gross et al., 2006), as it alters emotional processes in social interactions. Third, we test the stability of the proposed model in three countries with different levels of consumer familiarity with social cause-related purchases. Studies examining the effects of social cause initiatives are almost exclusively conducted in developed countries, where consumers have many opportunities for social cause-related purchases and companies have long exercised CrM (e.g., Lee & Riffe, 2019). Conversely, less is known about social cause-related purchases in less developed economies (Kim & Johnson, 2012; Kadic-Maglajlic et al., 2019), where companies are just beginning CrM initiatives. The three countries selected for our study are at different stages of development

(Roaf et al., 2014). Coupled with different levels of opportunities for social cause-related purchases (Ferle et al., 2013), cross-country differences are evident and serve as a basis for assessing model stability (Cadogan, 2010). Finally, in terms of managerial implications, this study recognizes four different segments of young adult consumers based on their levels of social connection and emotion regulation and provides an overview of the main traits of social cause-related purchases. The discussion and implications of the research results should serve managers, policy makers, and representatives of different advocacy groups in shaping their CrM activities.

2. Research background and hypotheses development

The topic of CrM is well-researched; which has been highlighted in various systematic literature reviews (e.g., Guerreiro et al., 2016; Lafferty et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2019). Based on the assessment of these literature reviews, we conclude that there is a lack of research focusing on the other side of the coin, i.e., looking at consumers and factors that drive their social cause-related purchase decisions. More specifically, there is a lack of knowledge about the psychographic and sociographic characteristics relevant for consumers’ social cause-related purchase decisions. For example, Guerreiro et al. (2016) identify only one of 24 themes that includes psychographic and sociological individual characteristics of consumers. Furthermore, Lafferty et al. (2016) show that there are few studies that address individual characteristics of consumers that are relevant to social cause-related purchases. Finally, the most recent systematic literature review (Thomas et al., 2019) shows that only 8% of the total articles analyzed in the broader CrM field fall into the consumer evaluation domain.

To better understand the role, position, and importance of social cause-related purchase decisions within the broader CrM literature, we conducted our own bibliometric analysis (see Appendix 1). Our bibliometric analysis shows that previous studies have analyzed a wide range of CrM topics, from consumers’ attitudes toward the cause, such as the health cause and human services cause (Lafferty & Edmondson, 2014), thematic partnerships (Mendini et al., 2018), the relevance of company–cause fit (Koschate-Fischer, Stefan & Hoyer, 2012), and the impact of CrM on company employees (He et al., 2019), to consumers’ perceived effectiveness of the purchase (Wei et al., 2020). Our identified clusters show that the CrM field encompasses the following four themes: Cluster 1 – Ethical aspects of CrM (corporate reputation, consumer reactions); Cluster 2 – Fit in CrM (cause–brand fit, product–cause fit); Cluster 3 – CrM effectiveness and CrM modeling; and Cluster 4 – Behavioral effects of CrM. Thus, we position our study under Cluster 4, as we evaluate the neglected individual-level emotion regulation as well as in-group support in social cause-related behavior.

To do in-depth assessment of the previous studies that deal with motivations/reasons for supporting social causes in purchase situations (Cluster 4), we developed an overview table (see Table 1) that includes influential empirical studies from Cluster 4 that belong to journals AJG3 or AJG4/4* as per the Academic Journal Guide (AJG) list. This table illustrates key methods and theoretical grounds, identifies antecedent (as well as mediating and moderating) variables together with key outcome variable(s), and presents the key findings of previous studies in regard to our study.

Table 1 shows that most research is conducted in the developed country settings such as US, Canada and Germany (e.g., Olsen, Pracejus & Brown; Tanford, Kim & Kim, 2020; Koschate-Fischer, Huber & Hoyer, 2016), while there is only one cross-country study (Kim & Johnson, 2012). Rarely the studies have focused on sociographic characteristics (e.g., Chang & Chu, 2020), while there are only few to capture both psychographic and sociographic characteristics (Arora & Henderson, 2007; Winterich & Barone, 2011; Robinson, Irmak & Jayachandran, 2012). Hence, this table illustrates that only the present study covers both psychographic and sociographic characteristics regarding CrM-related behavior in a multi-country setting.

¹ We thank an anonymous reviewer for guiding us towards this important reasoning.

Table 1
Empirical research in Cluster 4 (AJG3 and AJG4).

Authors	Journal	Method	Main Theoretical Underpinning	Outcome	Antecedents	Observed consumers' characteristics*		Multi-Country Study	Key Findings
						Psychographic	Sociographic		
Creyer & Ross (1996)	Marketing Letters	Experiment; 135 students (Study 1); 177 students (Study 2); 63 students (Study 3); US	Expectancy disconfirmation theory	Perceived value of consumer products	(Un)ethical corporate behavior; Conditions: CrM; Manufacturing correction; Volunteer; Sponsorship	✓			If consumers expect companies to conduct business ethically, then ethical behavior will not be rewarded, but unethical behavior will be punished. Corporate behavior influences perceived product value market choices.
Olsen, Pracejus & Brown (2003)	Journal of Public Policy & Marketing	Experiment; 62 students (Study 1); 142 students (Study 2); 29 students (Study 3); 133 students (Study 4); 137 students (Study 5); Canada	Not clearly specified	Donation estimate	Stated value/profit	✓			Expressing the donation amount as a percentage of profit leads to widespread confusion and near universal overestimation of the amount being donated.
Pracejus, Olsen & Brown (2003)	Journal of Advertising	Content analysis (Study 1) & Experiment (Study 2 & 3); 3,414 websites (Study 1); 424 students (Study 2); 33 students (Study 3); US	Theory of consumer choice	Donation estimate	Description of donation	✓			The vast majority of advertising copy used to describe CrM donations is abstract, which results in large differences in mean perceived donation level, and these donation levels can impact consumer choice.
Grau & Folse (2007)	Journal of Advertising	Experiment; 141 students (Study 1); 166 students (Study 2); US	Signaling theory; Message-framing theory; Social impact theory; Attribution theory	Participation intentions	Donation proximity; Message framing; Involvement; Perceived social responsibility	✓			Local donations and positive message framing serve as effective message cues to produce favorable CrM outcomes.
Arora & Henderson (2007)	Marketing Science	Experiment; 131 students (Study 1); 1650 participants national panel, (Study 2); 489 participants national panel (Study 3); US	Consumer choice theory	Increased utility	Embedded premium; Brand knowledge; Affinity toward the charity; Personal motivations; Demographics	✓	✓		Low denominations embedded premium is more effective than an equivalent price discount. Equivalent price benefits an unknown brand more than a known brand. An identifiable segment of individuals prefers the "other" (other entity) over "self" (consumer).
Chang (2008)	Psychology & Marketing	Experiment; 960 students; Taiwan	Framing theory	CrM effectiveness	Product type; Product price; Donation magnitude; Moderator: Donation framing	✓			Donation framing is insignificant when the donation magnitude is high. Influences of donation magnitude on CrM effectiveness are limited in high-priced items.
Winterich & Barone (2011)	Journal of Marketing Research	Experiment; 168 students (Study 1); 225 students (Study 2a); 252 students (Study 2b); 133 university staff and students (Study 3); 168 students (Study 4); US	Social identities literature; Sales promotion literature	Discount vs. donation-based promotions	Social identification; Self-construal; Moderator: Charity efficiency, Product type	✓	✓		Consumers possessing an interdependent self-construal prefer donations to a greater extent than those with an independent self-construal. These effects of the self-construal are moderated by charity efficiency and product type.
Koschate-Fischer, Stefan & Hoyer (2012)	Journal of Marketing Research	Experiment; 103 students (Study 1); 115 students (Study 2); 302 students (Study 3); 242 students (Study 4); Germany	Attribution theory	Willingness to pay	Donation amount; Moderators: Attitude toward helping others, Warm glow motive, Cause involvement, Cause organization affinity, Company-cause fit, Attributed motives; Product type	✓			Donation-related and cause-related predispositions moderate the link between donation amount and willingness to pay. The motives customers attribute to the company mediate the moderating effect of fit on the donation amount-willingness to pay link.
Robinson, Irmak & Jayachandran (2012)	Journal of Marketing	Experiment, 41 adults (Study 1a), 88 students (Study 1b); 95 students (Study 2); 112 students (Study 3); 90 students (Study 4); US	Theory of consumer choice	Purchase intentions; Perceived personal role	Collectivism/individualism; Perceptual fit (high/low); Moderator: Choosing the cause	✓	✓		CrM campaigns that allow consumers to choose the cause that receives the donation led to greater consumer support compared with those in which the company determines the cause.
Kim & Johnson (2013)	Journal of Business Ethics	Survey; 180 students (US) and 191 students (Korea)	Moral emotions theory	Purchase intentions	Moral emotions (pride vs. guilt); Cultural orientation; Self-construal	✓		✓	Moral emotions are significantly related to purchase intention for a social-cause product. Moral emotions effect varies across countries because of cultural orientation.
Müller, Fries & Gedenk (2014)	International Journal of Research in Marketing	Experiment; 1361 participants online panel; Germany	Framing theory; Warm glow theory; Information integration theory	Brand choice; Brand image	Size of the CrM donation; Moderator: Financial trade-off, Donation framing	✓			For brand choice, the effect of donation size is moderated by a financial trade-off for consumers, whereas the effect on brand image is moderated by donation framing.
Chang & Cheng (2015)	Journal of Business Ethics	Survey; 291 students; Taiwan	Not clearly specified	Skepticism toward advertising	Consumer shopping orientation; Consumer mindset; Gender	✓			A utilitarian (hedonic) orientation and an individualistic (collectivistic) mindset are positively (negatively) related to skepticism toward advertising. Gender differences exist.
Hagtvedt & Patrick (2016)	Journal of Retailing	Experiment; 96 students (Study 1); 167 students (Study 2); 79 adults AM Turk (Study 3); US	Not clearly specified	Choice of brand; Purchase intent toward the brand	Association with charity; Luxury vs. value; Guilt	✓			With real products and choice behavior, charity collaborations are related to the tendency to purchase a luxury brand. Association with charity led to increased purchase intent toward the luxury (but not the value) brand, and this is mediated by guilt reduction.
Koschate-Fischer, Huber & Hoyer (2016)	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Experiment; 128 students (Study 1); 575 participants GfK online panel (Study 2); 141 students (Study 3); 176 students (Study 4); Germany	Attribution theory	Perceived price fairness; Purchase intentions	Company donation amount; Moderator: CSR, Company-cause fit	✓			Company donation amount is positively related to consumers' perceived price fairness and purchase intentions. A positive moderating impact of the company's CSR reputation and a negative moderating effect of company-cause fit on the donation amount-perceived price fairness relationship.
Howie, Yang, Vitell, Bush & Vorhies (2018)	Journal of Business Ethics	Experiment; 175 students (Study 1); 250 students (Study 2); US	Cognitive dissonance theory; Neutralization theory; Theory of planned behavior	Participation intentions	Campaign effort; Cause importance; CRS perceptions	✓			Consumers rationalize not participating in CrM by devaluing the sponsored cause. Allowing the consumer to choose the sponsored cause seems to effectively refocus customer attention.
Chang & Chu (2020)	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Experiment; 136 adults (Study 1); 638 adults mySurvey pool (Study 2); 169 adults (Study 3); Taiwan	Not clearly specified	Desire to be prosocial; Likelihood of self-indulgent choices	Exposure to CrM; Purchase opportunity; Promotion type; Product type; Misattribution		✓		Mere exposure to CrM evokes in consumers a desire to be prosocial and reduces the likelihood of self-indulgent choices. The act of purchasing CrM products may provide consumers with a "warm glow" feeling from being prosocial.
Tanford, Kim & Kim (2020)	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	Survey; 319 adults Qualtrics; US	Priming theory; Framing theory	Booking intention; Willingness to pay more; Word of mouth; Electronic word-of-mouth	Emotion; CrM framing; Image; Environmental attitudes	✓			Positive affective priming and positively framed CrM advertising produce a favorable hotel image, which in turn leads to higher booking intention. Pro-environmental attitudes magnify the effects of image on multiple outcomes.
Current paper	Journal of Business Research	Survey; 614 young adults regional panel; Slovenia (200), Croatia (207), Bosnia and Herzegovina (207)	Social identity theory	Social cause-related purchase intentions	Social connections; Moderator: Emotion regulation	✓	✓	✓	Participation in socially friendly activities is positively related to young adults' social cause-related purchase intentions, while emotion regulation strengthens this relationship in countries where young adults have more opportunities for social cause-related purchases.

Notes: * Absence of a tick infers that the type of variables listed in a column have not been used; CrM – Cause-related marketing; CSR – corporate social responsibility; AJG3 and AJG4 – manuscripts published in journals that are ranked with 3 or 4 stars on the AJG list.

To address the gap identified in the literature related to the psychographic and sociographic characteristics underlying social cause-related purchase, we develop hypotheses inspired by Cameron's (2004) work on SIT. In his work, an important facet of social identity is denoted by specific emotions that arise from group membership. Relying on SIT, we explain the exchange of value between consumers and the social environment and how psychographic and sociographic characteristics are related to consumption behavior because of simultaneous interactions of consumers with their environment (Lunde, 2018). We further align the selection of the specific determinants of CrM purchase intentions of young adults (social connection and emotion regulation)

with the fact that social causes (in general) represent the situational context of socially challenging situations that activate the in-group mechanisms and push behavior. The hypotheses that follow in the next sections capture the facilitating mechanisms of the emotional aspects of social belonging (Hinkle et al., 1989).

2.1. Social connection as a driver of cause-related purchase behavior

Humans are profoundly social, and the need to connect with others is ingrained in them. Thus, the sense of belonging to a particular group is a central psychological need (Pavey et al., 2011). The development of

one's identity through belonging to a certain social category or group is explained through SIT (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Such a sense can be achieved through a variety of forms, one of which is social connection. Social connection is defined as the “enhancement of the interaction based on the inclusion of others with the focus of engagement, indicating mutual or reciprocal action in the presence of others” (Vivek et al., 2014, p. 407). Social connections are particularly important for young adults, as they tend to desire closer relationships, especially with their peers and with purchase influencers (Hyllegard et al., 2011). The enjoyment and love that come from in-group social activities are much appreciated. An example of a strong close social connection is friendship. Friendship is multifaceted and has different influences on individual behavior. For example, young adults are particularly likely to socialize with friends through different activities, and it is frequently the case that shared activities are more attractive, provide them more fun, and are more fulfilling than any other type of activities.

Young adults are more socially conscious than other generations (Landrum, 2017). When deciding their social cause-related purchases, they consider a company's background and its previous CrM actions to get an idea of the company's intentions, e.g., whether they are altruistic or aimed at increasing profits (Cui et al., 2003). Furthermore, young adults experience a high degree of social influence regarding their purchasing decisions (Parment, 2013), both from friends and from influential individuals. This influence is stronger today than ever before, as they can receive instant feedback from their peers through online platforms and social media. For example, a young adult can see if their friend supports a particular cause or CrM action by checking their likes on Facebook or Instagram. Consequently, their social connection becomes even more important, and their social cause-related purchase intentions are guided by their social interactions with peers while appreciating joint fulfilling and meaningful actions. Developing a social identity by connecting with a group that is aware of the importance of charitable and cause-related issues (such as joint/group support of persons in need or organized actions of help for ill children or children in institutions) can determine further cause-related behavior. Challenging situations with which cause-related stimuli are associated (Winterich & Barone, 2011; Howie et al., 2015) activate in-group cohesion and heighten individuals' sense of belonging and common well-being through enhanced social interaction of social connectedness. Consequently, individuals tend to rely on social connections and interactions with peers when engaging in a particular form of behavior (Vivek et al., 2014), such as buying behavior. Therefore, we postulate the following:

H1. The higher the degree of social connection, the stronger the social cause-related purchase intentions.

2.2. Facilitating effect of emotion regulation

Emotions play a crucial role in conveying important information about an individual's internal state to others (e.g., Izard, 1990; Kim & Johnson, 2012; Tanford, Kim & Kim, 2020). In line with SIT, emotions also define individuals and distinguish them from others (Hornsey, 2008; Reed 2002; Tajfel & Turner 1979). Emotions are part of a person's self-concept and “social identity” and thus members of a social group who identify with that group will model their emotions accordingly (Maldonado, Tansuhaj & Muehling 2003). However, while emotions are usually triggered by individual, environmental, and contextual stimuli (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014), regulation of these emotions is a relatively stable individual ability that can be altered over time (Oyserman, 2007). Emotions are not passively experienced and expressed but are frequently regulated; therefore, effective emotion regulation becomes important for the quality of social functioning (Quaglia et al., 2015).

Knowing how another person feels and adjusting one's own behavior and emotions accordingly is crucial for responding appropriately to the needs of others (e.g., Zaki et al., 2008). Emotion regulation “relates to the ability of people to regulate their emotions, which will enable a more

rapid recovery from psychological distress” (Wong & Law, 2002, p. 246). By regulating emotions, individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them (Gross, 1998, 2002), both for themselves and others. Therefore, the term “regulation” refers to changes in emotional response tendencies (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The main purpose of emotion regulation is to reduce, maintain, or enhance the emotional experience resulting from exposure to a stimulus. In the context of social cause-related purchase intention, we contend that a cause is a stimulus for young adult consumers.

The ability of individuals to regulate their emotions can help avoid unpleasant situations and reactions, as one aspect of emotion regulation is the selection and modification of situations (Urry & Gross, 2010). Research shows that individuals tend to use emotion regulation consistently, some more intensively than others (Blanke et al., 2020). Purchases for social causes are largely motivated by emotions (e.g., He et al., 2016; Urbonavicius et al., 2019) and using SIT lenses enables us to observe emotions as important part of individuality.

The functioning of social connections requires skillful responses to one's own and others' emotions (Zaki & Williams, 2013), as well as adaptive emotion regulation in socially challenging situations (Brown et al., 2012). People tend to experience strong emotions in response to a person in need of help, which is encouraged by a cause. When people are confronted with mass suffering and pain, they may experience intense emotions that they are unable to cope with, and this may cause them to disengage from the social connections that provided them with this emotionally charged cause situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For example, professional caregivers often experience compassion fatigue or reduced sensitivity to the people they are supposed to be helping (Figley, 1995), which reduces the effectiveness of their work. A similar phenomenon can happen to young adults who are part of a social group where there is a lot of discussion about social problems and who collectively participate in social cause initiatives, resulting in individuals becoming mentally detached from the group's activities. However, as Brackett et al. (2010) note, this is where emotion regulation comes into play, as it allows individuals to accurately assess their emotions, as well as the emotions of the group with which they are socially connected, and to choose approaches to suppress negative behavioral reactions. Because emotions play a key role in social connections, an individual's ability to understand and regulate their own emotions can be of immense help in responding to impulses that arise through the circle of social relationships with others (Lenaghan et al., 2007). This is of particular importance for young adults in their complex network of peers.

When young adults are introduced to a sponsored social cause initiative by their close peers, their emotion regulation skills enable them to manage their emotions and behaviors based on their evaluation of the emotions and behaviors of others (e.g., peers in the group to which they belong, and individuals influenced by social cause activities). Young adults with a strong ability to regulate emotions will be able to understand all the person- and situation-related factors (Higgins & Scholer, 2009) that shape the emotions of others involved around a particular cause. Those with a high emotion regulation ability will be best equipped to understand and regulate their own emotions and to positively balance the benefits of social connections and social cause-related purchase intentions (Gross, 1998). Hence:

H2. Emotion regulation positively moderates the relationship between social connection and social cause-related purchase intentions.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Cross-country context selection

To empirically verify our hypotheses, as well as to assess the stability and generalizability of sociographic and psychographic determinants of

social cause-related purchase intentions across nations, we conducted an online survey in three South-East European (SEE) countries: Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study was conducted by a professional research agency that used a country-representative regional panel. The selected countries share a similar historical background. Nonetheless, they differ in terms of culture (West, 2001) and economic development (Roaf et al., 2014). We use these countries as an adequate setting for assessing the universality of the proposed model and for analyzing potential differences. Slovenia and Croatia are more economically developed and are both European Union (EU) members (Slovenia since 2004 and Croatia since 2013), whereas Bosnia and Herzegovina is a developing country and is not an EU member. Moreover, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have similar languages, while the Slovenian language structure is different.

Furthermore, across the selected countries, the familiarity of consumers with CrM activities differs. Companies in Slovenia pioneered CrM activities, Croatian companies followed, and companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina are at their early beginnings. Although there are no previous studies that directly compare CrM activities and perceptions in all three countries, these differences can be indirectly evaluated through the findings of previous studies on individual countries or pairs of countries. Ćorić and Dropuljić (2015) found that Croatian consumers purchased cause-related brands, whereas Perić and Turalija (2018) stated that only 12% of Croatian corporations implemented CrM.

To statistically test for differences in opportunities for social cause-related purchase, we compared responses to the proxy question in our survey: “To what extent is social cause-related marketing used in your environment².” As expected, there were significant differences among the mean scores ($F = 43.131$, $p < 0.001$). Pairwise comparisons show that the mean score for Slovenia was the highest (mean = 4.84, std. error = 0.09), followed by the score for Croatia (mean = 4.35, std. error = 0.09) and finally for Bosnia and Herzegovina (mean = 3.66, std. error = 0.09).

3.2. Measures and understanding across countries

Following the guidelines for conducting international consumer research (Craig and Douglas, 2001), the study instrument was carefully developed through three steps. First, the study instrument was developed in English using scales validated and tested through literature. To capture the best possible measures, a panel of five bilingual academics was engaged to evaluate the representativeness of different scales that captured our domain of interest. Experts rated the available scales separately, and their ratings were then cross-analyzed to select the scales with the best content/face validity. Hence, to measure social connection, we adapted a scale from Vivek et al. (2014). For emotion regulation, the measure suggested by Wong and Law (2002) was used. Finally, for social cause-related purchase intentions, we adapted items from the scales developed by Hyllegard et al. (2011) and Ogle et al. (2014). All measures used a 7-point scale format (see Appendix 2). Then, the instrument was double-blind translated into local languages (i.e., Bosnian, Croatian, and Slovenian) and back-translated into the original format (Brislin, 1970). Independent natives for each linguistic group conducted these back translations.

Second, since the constructs in this study are highly socially embedded, careful attention was paid to understanding the concept in each context and to cross-cultural adaptation of the scales. To understand our concepts of interest and their interpretation in each country, an exploratory qualitative field study was considered an appropriate starting point. Qualitative studies are an appropriate method when phenomena are not well understood or the relationships between phenomena are unclear (Eisenhardt, 1989). This type of method can also be

used to inquire about reasons and explanations for consumer behavior. Therefore, we conducted five in-depth interviews with experienced marketing executives, marketing academics, psychologists, and two young adults in each country. In selecting the sample, our goal was to find individuals who had a lot of experience with emotions and social cause-related strategies/purchases, and who not only understood the concepts but were also involved in their execution. We developed a semi-structured series of questions that sought to explore the concepts of social connection, emotions, and social cause-related purchasing. Respondents were first asked to describe a situation that corresponds to social cause-related purchase in the context of their country. This stimulated the respondents to think about social cause-related behavior and to focus on the topic. These narratives allowed respondents to provide rich descriptions of social and emotional issues related to themselves and their environment. We then moved on to more specific questions about how young adults develop their social cause-related purchase behavior. The duration of each interview ranged from 60 to 90 min. Once the interviews were completed, an iterative analysis was conducted (see Glesne, 2016). This is where the research team met to go over notes and confirm the findings of each interview. Any questions or discrepancies the research team had with the data were clarified through telephone callbacks to the interviewees. This process was intended to increase the validity of the study (Yin, 2013). Once we were certain that there was a common understanding among respondents about the underlying concepts, we revised a series of protocol and debriefing sessions to adapt the final instrument to country-specific contexts. Finally, the quantitative scale was pretested to ensure full understanding of the questions asked.

We controlled our model for the following variables: gender of respondents, age of respondents, income of respondents (high vs. low), work status, and whether they live in an urban or rural area.

3.3. Data

The overall sample was made up of 614 respondents in total, of which 200 were from Slovenia, 207 from Croatia, and 207 from Bosnia and Herzegovina. In all countries, we targeted respondents aged 18–35, and the resulting sample structure is representative in terms of the age and gender structure: from 48% (Slovenia) to 52% (Croatia) of the respondents were female. In all three countries, the average age is 27. In terms of education, between 65% (Croatia) and 84% (Slovenia) of the respondents either possess a high-school diploma or have a bachelor's degree. This corresponds with the official census statistics available in these countries.

Most respondents (more than 60% in all countries) belong to the low-to-medium income category (with their monthly income being less than or equal to the average). In terms of employment, the unemployment rate ranged from 13.50% in Croatia and 16.50% in Slovenia to 26.60% in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The sample has a balanced structure in terms of respondents being in charge of socially related actions in their households: 52% (Slovenia), 64% (Croatia), and 65% (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model assessment

Prior to estimating our model and assessing separate measures, we performed a multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (MG-CFA) to test for measurement invariance (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Configural invariance was supported, as the multi-group CFA model fit was excellent (see Table 2). All factor loadings were significant at $p < 0.001$, and the within-group completely standardized loadings were all above 0.60. Metric invariance was tested next by adding an equality constraint to the factor loadings. The resulting model fit was also very good, without a significant chi-square change ($\Delta\chi^2 = 12.29$; $\Delta df = 10$; $p =$

² Respondents in all countries were presented with the same definition of CrM prior to responding to this question.

Table 2
Invariance testing.

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	p-value ($\Delta\chi^2, \Delta df$)	RMSEA	NNFI	CFI	CAIC
Configural invariance	90.080	51	–	–	–	0.061	0.976	0.985	513.020
Metric invariance	102.370	61	12.290	10	p = 0.266	0.061	0.975	0.980	527.236
Factor covariance invariance	113.670	67	11.300	6	p = 0.080	0.058	0.958	0.982	417.890

Table 3
Factor loadings, composite reliability, and correlations.

#	Constructs	Loadings	CR	1	2	3
Slovenia						
1	Emotion Regulation	(0.70–0.82)	0.80	0.76		
2	Social Connection	(0.76–0.90)	0.88	0.38	0.84	
3	Social cause-related purchase Intentions	(0.60–0.83)	0.68	0.07	0.69	0.72
Croatia						
1	Emotion Regulation	(0.79–0.87)	0.88	0.84		
2	Social Connection	(0.62–0.81)	0.77	0.32	0.73	
3	Social cause-related purchase Intentions	(0.71–0.78)	0.72	0.20	0.65	0.75
Bosnia and Herzegovina						
1	Emotion Regulation	(0.70–0.90)	0.87	0.83		
2	Social Connection	(0.72–0.81)	0.80	0.31	0.76	
3	Social cause-related purchase Intentions	(0.85–0.87)	0.85	0.31	0.70	0.86

Notes: CR = Composite Reliability; Squared roots of average variances extracted are shown on the diagonal in bold; Correlations are below the diagonal.

0.266). The RMSEA improved and the CAIC was lower, indicating improvements in model parsimony. Finally, we also tested for and established factor covariance invariance with no significant chi-square change ($\Delta\chi^2$) from metric invariance to factor covariance invariance models. This indicates that the relationships among the study constructs are comparable in the countries under consideration.

The MGCFA used for establishing the invariance was also used for the assessment of the properties of the used scales (see Table 3). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed a good model fit: Slovenia (contribution to $\chi^2 = 41.72$; RMSEA = 0.08; SRMR = 0.05; GFI = 0.948), Croatia (contribution to $\chi^2 = 21.98$; RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.03; GFI = 0.975), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (contribution to $\chi^2 = 26.35$; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.03; GFI = 0.970).

The convergent validity of the measures is also supported, as all indicators load significantly on respective latent variables across countries. The composite reliability (CR) and the average variance extracted (AVE) were all above the recommended threshold of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively. The discriminant validity of the measures used in all three countries was examined by testing whether the AVE score was higher than the squared correlations between the construct under consideration and other constructs in the model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

We also addressed concerns related to common method variance (CMV) by ensuring the application of the procedural remedies, as well as statistical tests proposed by Podsakoff et al. (2003). When it comes to procedural remedies, respondents were assured of their anonymity and research confidentiality, and that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. Furthermore, when designing the questionnaire, we scattered the items of our constructs so that the underlying constructs could not be recognized. In addition to procedural remedies, we conducted a marker variable test as proposed by Podsakoff et al. (2003). That is, a marker variable that is conceptually not related to any other variable in the study (“I like to gossip at times”) was added to our survey, and we examined the relationship between the marker variable and other variables in the model. All the relationships were non-significant, ensuring that the CMV in our data is not going to be a problem (Hulland et al., 2017).

4.2. Structural model assessment

To test the hypotheses, a multi-group modeling approach with maximum likelihood estimation in LISREL 8.8 was applied. In addition, to test the moderating effect, an interaction term (Social Connection × Emotion Regulation) was created and estimated in all data sets. By doing so, the procedure recommended by Aiken et al. (1991) was followed, and the direct effect (Emotion regulation → Social cause-related purchase intentions) was included as a control variable for the structural equation modeling (SEM) models, although it was not formally hypothesized. Given the presence of an interaction term, model complexity was reduced by using single-item indicators for all the latent variables used to create the interaction term (Social Connection × Emotion regulation; see Ping, 1996). As per Little et al. (2006), the interaction term was orthogonalized to avoid multicollinearity. The results are presented in Table 4.

As we can observe from the results, social connection has a strong positive impact on social cause-related purchase intentions in all three countries ($\beta_{\text{Slovenia}} = 0.84$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta_{\text{Croatia}} = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta_{\text{Bosnia and Herzegovina}} = 0.64$, $p < 0.001$); hence, the main effect and H1 are confirmed. Furthermore, emotion regulation is consistently not directly related to social cause-related purchase intentions. When it comes to the moderating effect assessment, we find similar results in Slovenia and Croatia, where emotion regulation boosts the relationship between social connection and cause-related behavior ($\beta_{\text{Slovenia}} = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta_{\text{Croatia}} = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$; see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, respectively), whereas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this effect is not significant ($\beta_{\text{Bosnia and Herzegovina}} = -0.11$, $p > 0.1$). Therefore, we can conclude that H2 is only partially confirmed. In terms of controls, most of them were consistently non-significant, except for age in Bosnia and Herzegovina and gender in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, suggesting that older young adults and female respondents have stronger social cause-related purchase intentions. Our models explain high proportion of variance in the dependent variable across countries ($R^2_{\text{Slovenia}} = 0.67$; $R^2_{\text{Croatia}} = 0.48$; $R^2_{\text{Bosnia and Herzegovina}} = 0.56$) which further indicates large effect sizes (Cohen, 1988).

Since there are obvious differences across countries in our results, we proceeded with additional analysis: we tested these country differences by using a Process tool, Model 3 (Hayes, 2017), where the country (1 = Slovenia, 2 = Croatia, and 3 = Bosnia and Herzegovina) is a multi-categorical dummy variable. The results of this analysis show that there is a positive and significant three-way interaction effect (Social connection * Emotion regulation * Croatia) being -0.23^{***} (LLCI = -0.37 ; ULCI = -0.09). An illustration of this effect is presented in Fig. 3, which shows a clear difference across the three countries.

4.3. Post-hoc analysis

Based on the results of our main analysis, it became apparent that profiling consumers across the dimensions of social connection and emotion regulation, and assessing whether meaningful segments exist, would be beneficial for understanding cause-related purchase behavior. For profiling, we used the whole dataset of 614 young adult consumers across three countries, and we profiled them based on demographic characteristics (gender, age, relationship status, education, and income), additional psychographics (perception of possibilities for socially friendly behavior), and behavioral characteristics (being in charge of socially responsible activities in their household). Consequently, we

Table 4
Results of the multi-group analysis.

Dependent variable: Social cause-related purchase intentions			
Description	Slovenia	Croatia	Bosnia and Herzegovina
<i>Independent variables</i>			
Social Connection	0.87***	0.60***	0.62***
Emotion Regulation	-0.27	0.01	0.10
<i>Moderating effect</i>			
Social Connection × Emotion Regulation	0.35***	0.16***	-0.10
<i>Controls</i>			
Gender	0.04	0.09	0.15***
Age	0.01	-0.09	0.14***
High Income	-0.01	-0.04	-0.01
Low Income	0.07	-0.01	0.07
Unemployment	0.04	-0.12	-0.01
Living in the City	-0.07	-0.11	-0.01
R ²	0.67	0.48	0.56

Global model fit: $\chi^2 = 362.27$; $df = 240$; $\chi^2/df = 1.51$; RMSEA = 0.050; NNFI = 0.939; CFI = 0.953.

Note: *** p < 0.001.

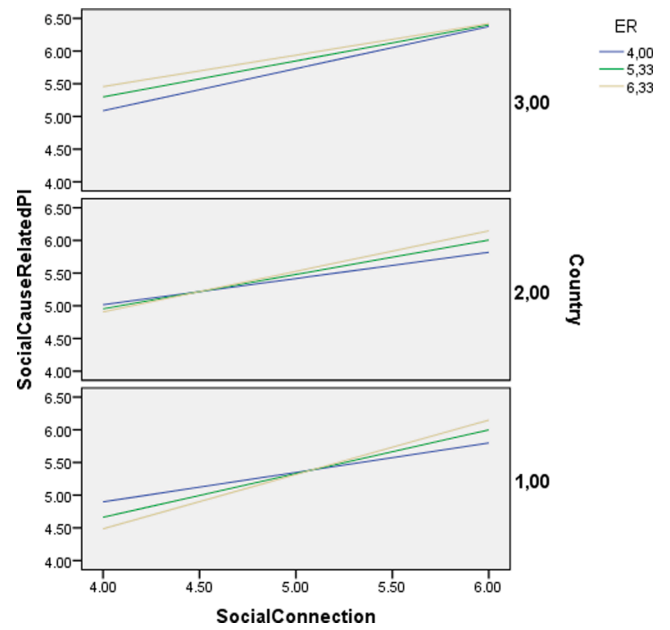


Fig. 3. Three-way interaction across countries. Notes: 1 = Slovenia; 2 = Croatia; 3 = Bosnia and Herzegovina; ER = Emotion regulation.

disconnected (high emotion regulation, low social connection, N = 186 or 30.3%), and *rationally connected* (high emotion regulation, high social connection, N = 219 or 35.7%).

When it comes to gender, the groups were evenly balanced. There is a significant difference in age between those who have low emotion regulation and those who have high emotion regulation. When it comes to income, the *rationally connected* have an average level income, whereas in all three other segments, most respondents have below-average income. In terms of education, the segments that score low on social connection are high-schoolers in the majority, whereas segments that score high on social connection are bachelor students in the majority.

It also seems that emotion regulation becomes vital when it comes to various perceptions of segments that are related to cause-related behavior. The *sensibly disconnected* segment has a significantly lower mean level than the *rationally connected* (Δ mean = - 0.493, p = 0.001) and *rationally disconnected* (Δ mean = - 0.706, p = 0.000) segments. When it comes to socially responsible activities in their households, it is interesting that those who score low on social connection claim to be majorly not in charge of those activities (54% in the *sensibly disconnected* and 51% in the *rationally disconnected* segments), whereas those who score high on social connection also take a stand for socially responsible actions in their households (67% in the *sensibly connected* segment and 77% in the *rationally connected* segment).

Finally, we analyzed the structure of segments across countries, compared with the overall sample share (see Table 5). The *sensibly connected* segment consistently has the lowest percentage in all three countries, with Slovenia having the lowest percentage of respondents with low emotion regulation and high social connectedness (8%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina having almost twice the percentage in this segment (14%). Young adults who score high on both dimensions, i.e., the *rationally connected*, make up the highest percentage at the overall level in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas in Slovenia, this segment is second in size. The *rationally disconnected* young adult segment is the largest in Slovenia, while it is second in size in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally, *sensibly disconnected* young adults are third in all three countries in terms of size, while in Croatia, the size of this segment is the same as that of the *rationally disconnected*. We can state here, and it is consistent with the empirical results and hypothesis testing, that the biggest differences were observed between Slovenia

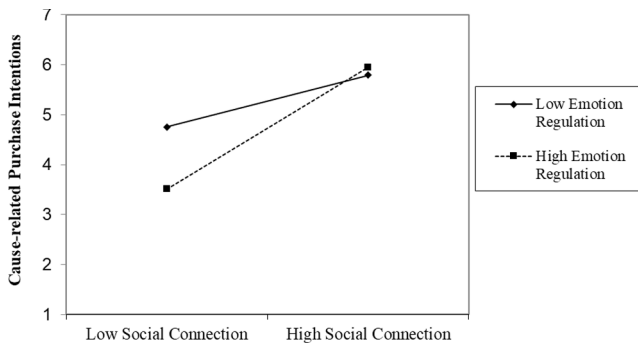


Fig. 1. A significant moderation effect – Slovenia.

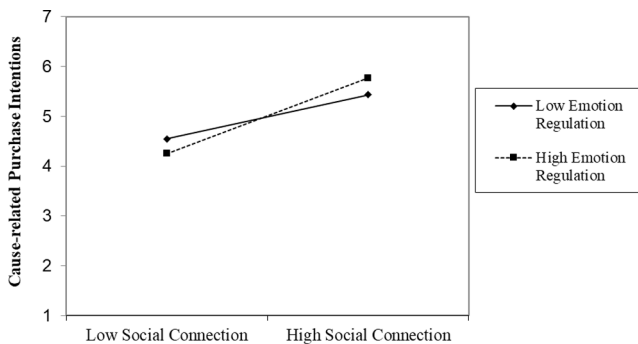


Fig. 2. A significant moderation effect – Croatia.

categorized a large group of young adults into clearly identifiable segments in terms of their receptivity to social cause-related purchase behavior. As listed above, various segmentation criteria were used to form segments that would respond similarly to marketing or policy strategies.

We grouped consumers by splitting the sample at the mean value point of the emotion regulation and social connection scales. For emotion regulation and social connection, scores of 4.97 and 5.03, respectively, were used to distinguish between “high” and “low.” This procedure yielded the following four segments of young adult consumers (see Fig. 4): *sensibly disconnected* (low emotion regulation, low social connection, N = 139 or 22.6%), *sensibly connected* (low emotion regulation, high social connection, N = 70 or 11.4%), *rationally*

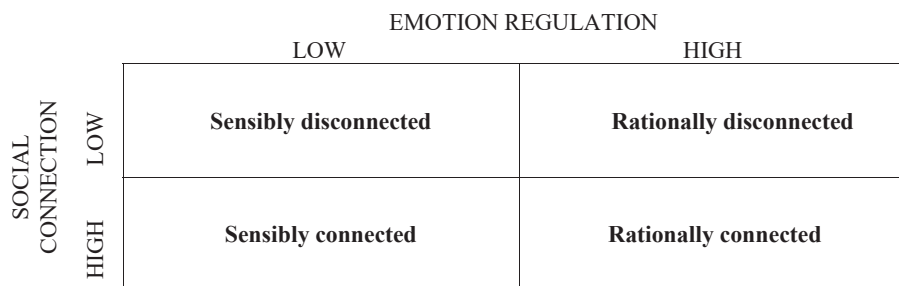


Fig. 4. Segments of young adults.

Table 5
Structure of the identified segments across countries.

Segment	Segment name	Slovenia	Croatia	BiH	Overall
L _{ER} -L _{SC}	Sensibly disconnected	23%	27%	18%	23%
L _{ER} -H _{SC}	Sensibly connected	8%	13%	14%	11%
H _{ER} -L _{SC}	Rationally disconnected	37%	27%	28%	30%
H _{ER} -H _{SC}	Rationally connected	33%	33%	41%	36%

Notes: ER = Emotion regulation; SC = Social connection; BiH = Bosnia and Herzegovina.

(the most developed country with the highest exposure to CrM activities) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (the least developed country with the lowest exposure to CrM activities), while Croatia has some similarities with Slovenia (the same percentage of *rationally connected*) and some with Bosnia and Herzegovina (almost the same percentage of *sensibly connected* and *rationally disconnected*).

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. Theoretical implications

By examining the role of social connection and emotion regulation in young adults, we aim to understand the reasons behind their social cause-related purchase intentions. According to SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Lunde, 2018), groups to which people belong are an important source of social identity and belonging in the social world. Social identity is based on group membership and a process of social categorization, putting people into groups and assuming similarities of people in the same group (in-group). The groups that people belong to give them a sense of self-esteem and pride. Group membership is not something attached to the person but a vital part of the person. Belonging to a social group is associated with value connotations that tend to be socially consensual within the group. Knowing that young adults are highly social (Laroche, 2017), this study, in a timely manner, sheds light on the importance of psychographic characteristics of social cause-related purchase intentions within this demographic group. Young adults are a relevant group to study owing to their significant intergroup behavior (Tarrant et al., 2001); however, their interest in social cause-related purchases has not been well covered. Social connections imply interaction with others, and when the social connections are related to the cause, they influence social cause-related purchase intentions. Social connections are associated with customer engagement beyond the connection with an organization’s offerings or activities (Vivek et al., 2014). The intrinsic connection young adults feel for each other, as well as their shared understanding, concerns, and beliefs (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001), bring implications for relationship marketing and attracting new customers (Vivek et al., 2014), as social connections strengthen psychological processes and increase the likelihood of a positive behavioral response in pursuing cause-related activities. Young adults’ customer journey from need to purchase decision takes place with “travel companions” (Hamilton et al., 2021); furthermore, their “in-group” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and other young adults play an important role in this

journey as social others.

Moreover, effective emotional regulation is important for high-quality social functioning (Quaglia et al., 2015). By examining the role of emotion regulation in the social functioning of cause-related purchase intentions, this study contributes to the CrM literature, which, to date, has focused primarily on factors under the control of companies (e.g., CrM strategies and tactics) and, to a very small extent, on consumer characteristics.

In addition, our study contributes to the line of literature that focuses on the behavioral effects of CrM (e.g., Chang & Chu, 2020; Chang & Cheng, 2015; Koschate-Fischer, Huber & Hoyer, 2016) and the key role of emotion regulation in social cause-related purchase intentions. Young adults enjoy and are more likely to participate in social actions when surrounded by friends with whom they socially identify; this leads to higher levels of social cause-related purchase intentions. This social dimension, as well as the aspect of in-group support, has been neglected in previous research on social cause-related behavior.

Our research also contributes to the understanding of social cause-related purchase intentions across contexts, where this type of study is rare (e.g., Kim & Johnson, 2012; Laroche, 2017). The selected countries differ in the extent to which consumers are exposed to opportunities for social cause-related purchases and serve as a basis for assessing model stability across national samples (Cadogan, 2010). We show that the proposed model is robust in two developed countries, while differences remain in a developing country setting (Ferle et al., 2013). When young adults exhibit higher levels of emotion regulation, this strengthens the relationship between social connection and social cause-related purchase intentions in countries (e.g., Slovenia and Croatia, as opposed to Bosnia and Herzegovina in our case). The reason for the non-significant moderating effect found in a developing country can only be speculated at this point, which leaves room for further research to look at this aspect in more detail. We speculate that consumers in less developed countries are more likely to face socially stressful situations and therefore have had to develop other sorts of coping mechanism. Therefore, they do not require emotion regulation to facilitate the transition from social connection to cause-related purchase intentions. In the specific case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is evident that although local companies are just starting CrM practices, there are certainly more CrM initiatives from global companies operating in the BiH market. Very often, these global companies support globally recognized social problems with their CrM practices in line with their global corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies, which does not necessarily mean that these problems are recognized as relevant social problems in a specific local context, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. This may also be a possible reason for the lack of impact of emotion regulation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.³

Finally, we provide insights into the appropriateness of consumer segmentation variables in the context of social cause-related purchase behavior, in line with social categorization and social identification stages in SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Specifically, we evaluate whether it is useful to segment consumers based on the theory-based dimensions

³ We thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

of social connection and emotion regulation by demonstrating differences in social cause-related purchase behavior across different consumer groups. Our results show that, in light of SIT, emotion regulation and social connection are theoretically relevant segmentation criteria that help explain variations in consumer behavior with respect to CrM.

5.2. Managerial implications

This research offers practical implications for various stakeholders, such as marketing managers, public policy officials, and advocacy groups. Marketing managers can use the results of our research to better understand the psychographic and sociographic factors that influence their social identity and social cause-related purchase intentions, which can help them better tailor CrM initiatives to target audiences. Consumers are increasingly faced with purchase decisions that require them to choose to buy social cause-related products, services, or ideas (Krishna, 2011), and communication can support their decision-making process to buy cause-related products, services, or ideas (Grolleau et al., 2016). Moreover, communicating information about opportunities for social cause-related purchases not only benefits consumers by making them more informed but also benefits companies by building a sustainable competitive advantage (Foscht et al., 2018). Based on the results of our study, marketers should focus on instilling a sense of social connectedness in young adults and on encouraging collaborative efforts with friends around cause-related purchases. This could be done by helping young adults organize crowdfunding campaigns for a cause, as this allows them to invest time together in supporting the cause. In addition, sports competitions or other games can be organized for groups of friends, where the proceeds from entry fees or tickets are donated. This will help encourage young adults to make a social cause-related purchase. This is especially true in relation to the online environment. Companies can provide online venues for young adults to share experiences of participating in social cause-related activities and to promote views on social media as to why they engage in social cause-related purchases to enable further social connections between them (Kumar et al., 2010). To achieve this, corporate communication should be designed to enable social sharing. In addition, online groups can be organized on various social media or messaging apps in support of a particular cause, where members can invite their friends to participate and support.

Young adults are willing to participate in social activities, and this can be encouraged by involving their peers in such actions. Therefore, in organizing such social activities, policy makers can focus on peers as influencers to motivate young adults. The more they perceive that an activity is enjoyable, the more likely they will be to participate. Similar implications apply to increasing young adult participation in advocacy groups related to social cause-related initiatives. By focusing on advocacy group representatives, they can facilitate the implementation of social cause-related behaviors among group members. For example, they can engage influencers, such as athletes, who are active in social cause initiatives daily to support activities such as donating blood or giving to humanitarian charity (Valente & Pumpuang, 2007). Alternatively, they may identify an opinion leader in a particular interest group, usually the most active person, to spur social cause-related behavior by motivating young adults to help the needy or to collect food for the socially vulnerable. Because young adults predominantly use social media in their communications, advocacy groups and their representatives can use social media to mobilize their members for cause-related activities by emphasizing the group's shared activity.

Finally, in our post-hoc analysis, we identified four segments of young adults in terms of their cause-related behaviors. These descriptions can be of great use to marketers in designing their social cause-related campaigns. The *rationally connected* segment (high emotion regulation, high social connection) is represented by predominantly male young adults with an average income and a bachelor's degree. They are responsible for socially responsible activities in their households and have a significantly higher likelihood of engaging in

socially friendly behavior compared with ones with low emotion regulation. The *sensibly connected* segment (low emotion regulation, high social connection) is predominantly female and has below-average income and a bachelor's degree. Members of this segment are also responsible for socially responsible activities in their households and see a significantly lower opportunity for socially friendly behavior compared with those in the *rationally connected* segment. The *rationally disconnected* segment (high emotion regulation, low social connection) is a segment in which men are in the majority. They have below-average incomes, and most of them have a high-school diploma. They are not responsible for socially responsible activities in their households and have a significantly higher likelihood of socially friendly behavior than the *sensibly disconnected*. In the last segment (low emotion regulation, low social connection), women are in the majority. They have a lower-than-average income and a high-school degree. They are not in charge of socially responsible activities in their households, and they perceive a significantly lower possibility for socially friendly behavior compared with the *rationally disconnected*. This finding highlights the possibility that young adults, rather than being conceptualized as a culture-specific niche market (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006), can be identified with similar characteristics across cultures in terms of their social cause-related purchase intentions. Based on our results, companies can position their cause-related campaigns on an international level. They can promote a particular cause-related behavior, such as raising resources for women's shelters or focusing on the *sensibly connected* or *rationally disconnected* segments. Alternatively, if community support is needed in promoting a particular cause, such as organizing a group of volunteers to cook meals or collect food for food banks, the focus of communication might be on the *rationally connected* or *sensibly connected* segments. This finding is useful for theory development and for practitioners because it improves our understanding of ways to promote cause-related purchase behavior.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This study is not without its limitations, and several are worthy of mention. The first and perhaps most important is that this study captured behavioral intentions (rather than exact behavior) using a self-report questionnaire that focused on general buying situations rather than specific ones. Therefore, with the present dataset, it is not possible to monitor exact behavior and behavioral changes over time. Hence, it would be beneficial for further research if it were possible to observe cause-related buying behavior over time, as this could make a significant contribution to the field. Furthermore, by focusing on young adults, we have focused on a relatively homogeneous group of young adults who are future leaders in terms of consumption and participation in the workforce. Therefore, we have shed light on consumers who are critical to the future of the countries under consideration. Social comparison of young adults with different out-groups (not the ones they categorize to and identify with) as one of the SIT stages was not the focus of this paper. Rather than being conceptualized as a single market, young adults could also be considered as a collection of sub-segments with different levels of awareness, motives, and willingness to engage in cause-related purchases (Bucic et al., 2012) or different sub-segments in terms of self-interest and collective interest in supporting pro-social company actions (Ross & Kapitan, 2018). Finally, following the literature (Cui et al., 2003; Hyllegard et al., 2011) that shows that the type of cause shapes the buyer's response to the cause, we focused our study on social causes. This limits our results, which can only be generalized to environmental CrM with great caution. Further research should aim to replicate the study in relation to environmental causes to provide a more holistic view.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Maja Arslanagic-Kalajdzic: Writing – original draft, Writing –

review & editing, Visualization, Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration. **Selma Kadic-Maglajlic:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Jasmina Dlacic:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, References. **Vesna Zabkar:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial

interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. A bibliometric analysis of the cause-related marketing field

To improve the understanding of the prolific field of cause-related marketing, we conducted a bibliometric analysis of the field. We accessed the SCOPUS repository and searched for the keyword “*cause-related marketing*” in the fields of title, abstract, and keywords of the registered manuscripts. We further narrowed the search to the subject area of *Business*. The performed search resulted in 421 documents. A total of 98 such documents have been published in the five most influential journals, as outlined in Table A.1 below.

Table A1
Most influential journals in the cause-related marketing field.

Journal	Number of articles
<i>Journal of Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing</i>	25
<i>International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing</i>	23
<i>International Marketing Review</i>	19
<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	17
<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	14

Table A2
Most prolific authors in the cause-related marketing field.

Author	Number of articles
Christofi, M.	8
Papasolomou, I.	8
Vrontis, D.	8
Chang, C.T.	7
Baghi, I.	6
Lafferty, B.A.	6
Leonidou, E.	6
Bae, M.	5
Basil, D.Z.	5

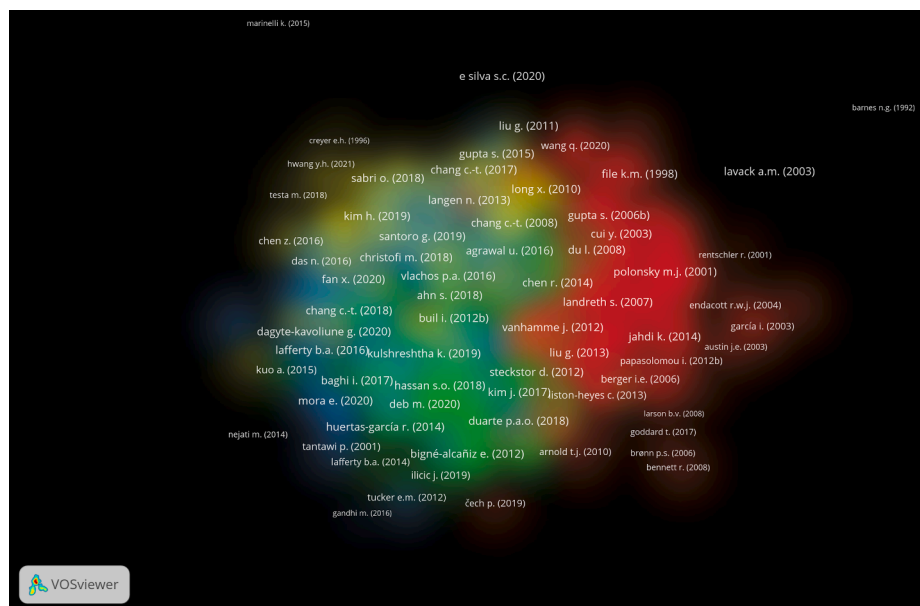


Fig. A1. Representation of the clusters of topics addressed in the cause-related marketing field by cluster density.

Table A3
Clusters of prominent topics in the cause-related marketing field.

Cluster	Number of articles in the cluster	Most influential article in the cluster (Total link strength)	General description
Cluster 1	139	Liu, 2013 (2,024)	Ethical aspects of CrM; Corporate reputation; Consumer reactions
Cluster 2	89	Huertas-García et al., 2017 (2,258)	Fit in CrM: cause-brand fit, product-cause fit
Cluster 3	85	Lafferty, Lueth & McCafferty, 2016 (2,739)	CrM effectiveness, CrM modeling
Cluster 4	65	Chang & Cheng, 2015 (1,914)	Behavioral effects of CrM

There are several prolific authors in the field with over five and up to eight publications related to the field, as illustrated in Table A.2 below. Furthermore, interest in this topic is growing with time, and from 18 publications in 2017, there were 59 publications in 2020 (the number of publications tripled).

We continued the analysis by performing network visualization of the data using VOS viewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010), and to understand the topics that are explored in the field, we conducted a bibliographic coupling of the documents. This process occurs when two works reference one or more common additional works in their bibliographies. This is an indication of a high probability that these works treat a related subject matter. Since some of the items were not connected, a set of 396 items was taken into consideration. The analysis resulted in nine clusters, which is a surprisingly small number of clusters taking into account the total number of analyzed manuscripts (see Fig. A.1).

Of the nine resulting clusters, clusters 5 to 9 had five or fewer manuscripts; hence, they are outliers. Therefore, we narrow in on the core four clusters and their topics, with a total of 378 articles. In every cluster, we identify the most influential article according to its total link strength, which indicates the number of links of an item with other items and the total strength of the links of an item with other items. The clusters are presented in Table A.3.

The first (and the largest) cluster (with a total of 139 articles grouped) tackles the ethical aspects of CrM and the effects of CrM actions on corporate reputation, and evaluates consumer responses to CrM (e.g., Liu, 2013; Vanhamme et al., 2012; Pirsch, Gupta & Grau, 2006; Webb & Mohr, 1998). The second cluster, with its 89 articles, is mainly concerned with an issue of fit in CrM (e.g., Huertas-García et al., 2017; Chang et al., 2018). This issue has been one of the key aspects analyzed by prior studies using contextual elements of specific product categories, brands, causes, and fit between such factors to understand the effects of CrM to its full potential.

In the third cluster, with a total of 85 inter-related articles, topics evolve around CrM effectiveness and CrM modelling through various means, such as a conjoint analysis (e.g., Lafferty et al., 2016; Fan et al., 2020). Finally, the fourth (and the smallest) cluster (with 65 manuscripts) deals with the behavioral effects of CrM (e.g., Chang & Cheng, 2015; Koschate-Fischer et al., 2015; Kim & Johnson, 2012). Our study fits the best with the fourth cluster, aiming to enrich the body of literature focused on understanding the individual-level characteristics of social connection and emotion regulation and its relationship with CrM purchase intentions across countries.

Appendix B. Construct measurement

Construct	Scoring format	Items
Social Connection (Vivek et al., 2014)	7-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)	I love to participate in charity activities with my friends. I enjoy charity activities more when I am with others. Charity activities are more fun when other people around me do it too.
Emotion Regulation (Wong & Law, 2002)	7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = to an extreme extent)	I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally. I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions. I have good control of my own emotions.
Social Cause-Related Purchase Intention (adapted from Hyllegard et al., 2011; Ogle et al., 2014)	7-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)	I would be willing to pay more money for a product if I knew a percentage of the profits from the sale were being donated to a charitable cause; If all other factors (e.g., price, fit, etc.) were equal, I would choose to purchase a brand that provides monetary support to charitable causes over a brand that does not

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