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Student–university relationships and reputation: a study of the links between key factors fostering students' supportive behavioral intentions towards their university

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Abstract Focusing on academic institutions in higher education as the research context, this study examined the relations of key factors affecting students' supportive behavioral intentions toward the university (e.g., giving gifts as alumni, continuing education, and giving referrals regarding the university). Based on the literature from various disciplines, this study proposed four factors are critical influencing such intentions: (1) students' communication behavior with the university, (2) perceived quality of educational experience, (3) evaluations of the relationship with the university, and (4) university reputation. The data in this study were collected using a survey of current undergraduate students ($N = 336$) who were attending a private university in Seoul during Fall 2005. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the proposed model. Regarding overall results, the proposed model can be retained as a valid model based on data-model fits: Eight hypotheses were supported in this study, but not the effect of students' educational experience on university reputation. The findings suggest that to foster students' supportive behavior, universities need to cultivate a good relationship with their students and to obtain favorable reputation held by students, while ensuring active communication behavior of students and the quality of students' educational experience.

Keywords University · Communication · Relationship · Reputation · Educational experience · Behavioral intention · Donation

The importance of relationship management has been increasingly emphasized in several disciplines. For example, a growing number of practitioners and scholars have come to believe that the fundamental goal of public relations is to build and enhance on-going,

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long-term relationships with an organization's key constituencies (e.g., Ledingham and Bruning 2000; Grunig et al. 2002; "Shell: Reputation, Relationships, Results," Hill and Knowlton, n.d.). Bruning and Ledingham (1999) described the emergence of "relationship" as the key concept in public relations as follows: "An increasing number of scholars are adopting the perspective that public relations should be viewed as the management of a relationship between an organization and publics" (p. 157). Accordingly, numerous studies examined the organization–public relationship in various contexts (e.g., Bruning and Ledingham 1999; Grunig and Huang 2000; Ledingham and Bruning 2000). However, only few studies have examined the concept in the context of academic institution in higher education (Hon and Brunner 2001; Jo et al. 2004).

Management scholars have recognized reputation as an organization's critical asset that influences organization–constituency (or public) relationships. However, not many studies have examined the relationship between relational outcomes and reputation, both of which influence public perception of and attitude toward an organization. This study attempts to explore the link between the organization–public relationship and the organization's reputation. It has been noted that there is a link between quality relationships and supportive behavior among organizations and publics (e.g., Caywood 1997; Peppard 2000; Reinchheld 1996). More specifically, this study examines how academic institutions in higher education, such as universities and colleges, manage their relationships with students and how students' perception of the institution's reputation influences their behavioral intention to support the organization.

A relational approach has only recently been applied to this specific field of fundraising. Little has been studied regarding alumni relations and fundraising in higher education in public relations research, which has resulted in minimal development in theory as well as reported experience. Alumni donations are a significant source of revenue across all types of higher educational institutions. However, the motivation and characteristics of people who are more likely to give to their alma mater are not well researched, although most institutions devote considerable time and resources to develop alumni donations (Monks 2003). Lindahl and Winship (1994) showed that past giving behavior is correlated with current and future giving. Identifying individuals who are more likely to give, and building good relationships with them, may have significant life-time giving effects. Considering that previous studies have found that college experience is one of the primary factors that motivate alumni giving, how current students—soon-to-be alumni—perceive their experience may affect their giving behavior in the future.

To overcome this gap, this study attempts to develop a conceptual model for students' supportive behavioral intentions. It combines the growing body of knowledge on relationship and reputation with insights from more traditional educational literature on student experience and theories in behavioral intention and alumni giving. This ensures that the model takes proper account of the specific characteristics of educational experience within a broadened perspective of relationship management.[1]

The paper explores whether relational outcomes between a university and its undergraduate students, and the university's reputation among students, affect their future

[1] Private institutions in higher education in Korea have paid attention to fundraising since the mid-1990s. Despite the point of interest, fundraising, and alumni giving in particular, has received almost no research attention in the country. Given the search for alternative sources of income and the particularities of higher education in Korea, the purpose and motives for alumni donations deserve investigation. Such inquiry might also be of help in studies of the internal efficiency of educational institutions. However, due to the paucity of scholarship on relationship management and fundraising, this study is based on the theoretical foundation from the U.S.

intention to support the school. Are students more likely to donate to their alma mater if they have a better relationship with the university? Alternatively, are students' intentions to support higher when the university is perceived to have a good reputation? To what extent do students' current experiences affect their behavioral intentions to support the institution and the likelihood of giving?

In the subsequent parts of this article, a three-step procedure is used to gain deeper insight into the potential of relationship and communication management within the university context. First, existing information available from previous research efforts in education, fundraising, reputation, and public relations is used to develop a relationship-based model of student behavioral intention of support. Second, the model is tested empirically using structural equation modeling. This empirical part is based on a survey of 336 university students. Finally, the theoretical and empirical results are discussed with regard to managerial implications for providers of educational services. Some conclusions and suggestions for further research are offered as well.

Literature review

Despite the growing interest in relationship and reputation, a review of the relevant literature reveals that there is no generally accepted—let alone empirically confirmed—conceptual model that integrates relationship, reputation, and behavioral intention. However, such a model can be seen as crucial to the development of theory-based, consistent strategies aimed at improving the relationship and reputation that a university has with its students and, as a consequence, its economic success. This study attempts to review relevant literature to develop an integrative model within a university's fundraising context.

Fund raising and alumni giving

Fund raising

According to the National Society of Fund Raising Executives Institute (1986, cited in Kelly 1998, p. 5), fund raising is "the seeking of gifts from various sources as conducted by 501(c)(3) organizations" (p. 40). Kelly saw fund raising as "a subfunction of nonprofit public relations," and defined it as "the management of relationships between a charitable organization and its donor publics" (p. 8). However, some organizations such as educational institutions and hospitals use the term "development" to avoid the negative connotations that fund raising has. Other terms that replace fund raising include institutional advancement, resource development, and philanthropic fund raising.

Donor motivation

As Parsons and Wethington (1996) pointed out, philanthropy is a major social phenomenon in the United States. As the numbers of nonprofit causes and organizations increase, their financial needs outpace resource availability (Prince and File 1994). Researchers and practitioners in the discipline attempted to find new approaches. Among them are donor motivations that have received constant attention as antecedents that influence donor attitude and behavior. Previous studies on philanthropic contributions found demographic, economic, social, and psychological variables influenced philanthropic behavior (Okunade

1996). According to Sundeen and Raskoff (1995), personal values and attitudes account for one's donation behavior; individual donors have different desires, cultural backgrounds, past experiences, and motivations.

Traditionally, two different perspectives have existed to explain donor motivations: altruism and self-interest. Panus (1984) identified 22 motivations of philanthropists through in-depth interviews. Prince and File (1994) segmented donors into seven types based on their motivations: communitarians, devout, investors, socialites, repayers, altruists, and dynasts.[2] Kelly (1998) adopted a mixed motive model of giving based on the assumption that donation involves both self-interest and altruism. In other words, philanthropy is a social exchange in that both donors and recipients give and receive.

Alumni giving

Many private institutions of higher education in the U.S. rely heavily on non-tuition sources of revenue to maintain operations. Alumni giving increased by 75% between 1985 and 1992 (Okunade 1996). In 2000–2001, alumni provided more than $6.8 billion of financial support to colleges and universities. The growing importance of alumni giving in higher education is projected to continue (Bollag 1995).

Previous research shows that people are more likely to give to their alma mater than to others; about 25% of college graduates at some time give to their undergraduate institutions (Hueston 1992; Mixer 1993; Okunade 1996; Wunnava and Lauze 2001). Several studies examined determinants of alumni giving, such as intercollegiate athletic programs (Baade and Sundberg 1996; Grimes and Chressanthis 1994; Rhoads and Gerking 2000) and receipt of financial assistance while at school (Clotfelter 2003; Marr et al. 2005). Mael and Ashfold (1992) found that alumni identification with their alma mater is strongly related to organizational antecedent variables, such as organizational distinctiveness, and personal antecedent variables, such as satisfaction with the school and sentimentality. The level of donations may also provide a good indication of the institution's performance: those who give recognize the role the institution has played in their education (Belfield and Beney 2000).

According to Monks (2003), the most important determinant of alumni giving is the individual's satisfaction with his or her undergraduate experience; those who are satisfied tend to make larger donations. Participation in extracurricular activities, such as student government, intercollegiate athletics, and fraternities, are also correlated with alumni giving. Similarly, individuals who contact faculty members outside of class or have contact with campus staff make higher average donations than those who without these experiences.

Behavioral intentions

Theory of reasoned action (TRA)

Trying to estimate the discrepancy between attitude and behavior, Fishbein and Ajzen (e.g., Fishbein 1967; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) suggested that behavior can be best determined by the intention to engage in the behavior. According to their theory of reasoned action, the individual's intention to perform an action is a combination of attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm.

[2] For example, communitarians want to give something back to their communities for what they have received (p. 18). Investors highly regard tax benefits, whereas re-payers support the institutions from which they have benefited due to loyalty or obligation.

First, attitude toward the behavioral act can be determined by *behavioral beliefs*, which refers to the perceived consequence of the act, and e*valuations of that behavioral outcome*. In other words, a positive attitude toward performing an action is expected if the individual perceives that the consequence from that behavior is positive (Brown 1999). Second, *subjective norm* represents perceptions of if significant others would prefer about the individual performing the behavior. If significant others regard performing the behavior as positive, and the individual is motivated to such an expectation, a positive subjective norm is expected (Brown 1999). Because some behaviors are not entirely voluntary, or volitional, Ajzen (e.g., Ajzen 1985, 1987, 1991) revised the theory of reasoned action (TRA) to the theory of planned action (TPA). Ajzen added the third determinant of behavioral intention, *perceived behavioral control* (i.e., one's perception of how easy or difficult it is to perform the behavior), to account for non-volitional behaviors. Perceived behavioral control is explained by control beliefs, which represents "beliefs about the likelihood that one possesses the resources and opportunities thought necessary to execute the behavior or attain the goal" (Eagley and Chaiken 1993, p. 187).

For this study, students' behavioral intentions toward the university were investigated in three dimensions: (1) their intention to give to the university as alumni, (2) their intention to continue education in the university, and (3) their intention to give referrals to others about the university.

Educational experience of students

Teaching students is a primary mission of higher education institutions. The measurement of student experiences and outcomes has been a significant but challenging task in assessing university quality. As Johnson et al. 2001 maintained, students' educational experience encompasses much more than academic achievement and degree completion. Other important parts of the experience involve students' feelings about their school, such as a sense of belonging and membership. According to Marr et al. (2005), the more positive a student's experience, the more likely he or she is to reward the organization with charitable gifts.

Brooks (2005) identified four categories of most commonly used student-related measures: program characteristics, program effectiveness, student satisfaction, and student outcomes. For the purpose of this study, student satisfaction provides the most useful measure. Education quality, "the ability to meet student expectations about career preparation" (p. 13), involves classroom and co-curricular activities and interactions with faculty and peers. These measures of "engagement" provide a link to educational achievement and learning outcomes and therefore explain educational quality.

Many educational scholars have attempted to measure the relations between students' sense of belonging to the school and their academic performance as well as relationships to the school. Tinto (1997) maintained that students with a strong sense of belonging to their school are more likely to be persistent at school and put more effort into learning. Others show that students' sense of belonging positively influences their educational outcomes (Goodenow 1993), self-concept and teacher–student relations (Hagborg 1998). Terms such as belongingness, relatedness, and acceptance concern students' experiences of support and involvement in school (Osterman 2000).

School membership is the extent of personal belonging, respect, and support students feel in school (Hagborg 1998) and is slowly developed through reciprocal social relations with others in the school (Goodenow 1993). Wehlage (1989; Wehlage et al. 1989) identified four components of school membership: attachment, commitment, involvement, and

belief. Similarly, school connectedness promotes students' academic motivation, engenders a sense of belonging, and increases engagement (McNeely and Falci 2004). For example, students who participate in extracurricular activities and receive higher grades feel more attached to school, which eventually molds their attitudes and intentions (Bean and Eaton 2000; Leppel 2005; McNeely et al.2002; Stage and Hossler 2000).

From a public relations perspective, many note that the quality of stakeholders' experience with an organization influences organization–stakeholder relationships (e.g., Grunig et al. 2002) and organizational reputation (e.g., Fombrun 1996). The researchers consider those findings can be also applicable to the context of university–student relations.

According to Hennig-Thurau et al. 2001, a loyal student might continue to support his or her academic institution even after graduating (1) by providing financial support, such as donations or research projects, (2) through word-of-mouth promotion to other prospective, current, or former students, and (3) by offering cooperative services such as student placements or visiting lectures. Student loyalty is a multiphase concept that may stretch from enrollment through the student's lifetime. Therefore, the term "student loyalty" refers to the loyalty of a student during and after his or her time at the university.

Organization–public relationships

Despite the common use of the term "relationship" by both scholars and practitioners when explaining the value of public relations, "neither scholars nor practitioners have defined the concept carefully or have developed reliable measures of relationships outcomes" (Grunig and Huang 2000, p. 25). Broom (2000) also pointed out the absence of relationship definitions as follows: "Even though the public relations function builds and maintains organizations' relationships with publics, we found few definitions of such relationships in public relations literature" (p. 3). To define organization–public relationships, definitions of "publics," "organization," and "relationships" need to be explicated first.

Defining a public

The term "public" originated from "the Latin phrase *poplicus* or *populus*, meaning the people" (Price 1992; cited in Vasquez and Taylor 2001, p. 140). Grunig and Hunt (1984) defined a public as "a group of people who face a problem, are divided on its solution, and organize to discuss it" (p. 145). People become stakeholders because of interdependence with an organization—or because of "stakes" in the organizational operation (Clarkson 1991; Freeman 1984; Wood 1991). Stakeholders organize into publics because of problems they have with an organization or problems they want an organization to solve (Grunig and Huang 2000; Grunig and Hunt 1984). Publics engage in active communication behavior and organize to solve such problems with an organization (Grunig 1997; Grunig and Grunig 2000; Grunig and Repper 1992).

Defining an organization–public relationship

O'Hair et al. (1995) defined interpersonal relationships as "interdependence of two or more people" (p. 10). Coombs (2000) connected this definition with stakeholder theory: People are *interdependent* with one another when they need others for some reason and,

consequently, they engage in a relationship based on such a linkage. Organizations have a relationship with stakeholders when they have a connection with stakeholders.

Whereas Broom et al. (2000) defined organization–public relationships as processes of relationship formation,[3] and Bruning and Ledingham (1998) defined them as broad consequences,[4] Huang (1997); Grunig and Huang (2000) defined organization–public relationships focusing on relational outcomes. Huang (1997) examined organization–public relationships based on two underlying assumptions: (1) relationships consist of more than one fundamental feature, and (2) four relational features represent the construct of organization–public relationships (i.e., control mutuality,[5] trust,[6] commitment,[7] and satisfaction[8]). Later, along the same line of conceptualization, Huang (1998) defined organization–public relationships as "the degree that the organization and its publics trust one another, agree on that one has rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to one another" (p. 12).

Grunig and Huang (2000) noted one of the critical attributes of organization–public relationship is "communication behaviors" between an organization and its publics. Following Grunig and Huang, Rhee (2004) added communication behaviors and defined an organization–public relationship as "a connection or association between an organization and a public that results from behavioral consequences that an organization or a public has on the other and that necessitates repeated communication" (p. 9).

Communication behavior of publics

Grunig and Huang (2000) conceptualized the three-stage model of organization–public relationships: (1) the *antecedents* that describe the publics with which organizations need relationships, (2) the *strategies* used to cultivate those relationships, and (3) the consequences or *outcomes* of those strategies. As for antecedents of relationship formation, Hon and Grunig (1999); Grunig and Huang (2000) explained why publics form a relationship with organizations. According to them, when publics and an organization have consequences on the other, publics begin to form a relationship with an organization (Grunig and Hunt 1984). Because of such consequences, organizations also need to build good relationships with strategic publics (Grunig and Huang 2000).

[3] After reviewing definitions of relationships in several perspectives, Broom et al. (2000) described relationships between organizations and publics: "Organization–public relationships are represented by the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics" (Broom et al. 2000, p. 18).

[4] Bruning and Ledingham (1999) defined organization–public relationships as the "states which exist between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political, and/or cultural well-being of the other entity" (p. 62).

[5] According to Stafford and Canary (1991), control mutuality is "the degree to which partners agree about which of them should decide relational goals and behavioral routines" (p. 224).

[6] Hon and Grunig (1999) defined trust as "one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party" (p. 19).

[7] From the perspective of relationship marketing, Morgan and Hunt (1994) defined commitment as "an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it; that is, the committed party believes the relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures indefinitely" (p. 23).

[8] Citing Kelley and Thibaut (1978), Stafford and Canary (1991) explained relational satisfaction: "From a social exchange perspective, a satisfying relationship is one in which the distribution of rewards is equitable and the relational rewards outweigh the cost" (p. 225).

In public relations research, scholars have suggested active communication behavior of publics as a key predictor of a good relationship between organizations and publics (e.g., Bruning and Ledingham 1999; Ferguson 1984; Grunig and Huang 2000; Grunig and Hung 2002; Yang and Grunig 2005; Yang 2007a, b). Citing Millar and Rogers (1976, p. 87), from a symbolic interaction perspective, Broom et al. (2000) also viewed communication behaviors of publics as a critical component in the formation of organization–public relationships: "These relationships, whether primarily interpersonal or role specific, are bestowed, sustained, and transformed through communicative behaviors" (p. 7).

The situational theory of publics

The situational theory of publics provides a useful tool to segment a population into publics based on the extent of active and passive communication (Grunig 1997; Grunig and Hunt 1984; Grunig and Repper 1992). Consisting of three independent variables—problem recognition, constraint recognition and level of involvement—and two dependent variables—information seeking and processing—the theory forecasts the differential responses from publics to important issues. These variables are situational in that they explain the cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors that individuals have of specific situations. Information seeking is an active communication behavior, or a deliberate pursuit of information. On the other hand, people who communicate passively do not look for information, but process information that is provided (Grunig 1997; Grunig and Hunt 1984).

The theory segments publics into four categories: active, aware, latent, and non-publics. Publics who seek information become aware publics more easily than those who do not communicate or process information.[9] Regarding the context of this current study, students in the category of latent or non-publics (i.e., "passive" publics) would be more affected by reputational relationships with the university than they experiential relationships they have with the university, often highly influenced by second-hand experience such as word-of-mouth communication with other students or hearsay (Bromley 1993). On the other hand, "active" or "aware" students would be likely to value their first-hand experience and substantial interactions with the university more than reputational relationships with the university (Grunig and Hung 2002). As such, in forming supportive intentions toward a university, the quality of student–university relational outcomes is a key variable to "active" or "aware" students, while university reputation is a key variable to "latent" or "non-public" students.

Organizational reputation

Griffin (2002) and Hutton et al. (2001) have pointed out that public relations professionals have widely embraced "reputation management" to demonstrate the economic viability of the public relations function. Specifically, Kim (2000, 2001) maintained that the accountability of public relations at the organizational level could be demonstrated well by showing the effect of reputation on financial performance of the organization.

Attributes of reputation

In a search for key attributes of reputation, Bromley (1993) reviewed 122 quotations on reputation from Barlett (1980), Benham (1948), Stevenson (1949, 1974), and the Oxford

[9] See Grunig and Hunt (1984) and Grunig (1997) for more information regarding the theory.

Dictionary of Quotations (Oxford University Press 1979). Among the propositions that Bromley extracted, the following attributes are relevant in this study:

1. It is difficult to make and keep up a good reputation or to repair a damaged one, whereas a good reputation is easily lost or damaged.
2. It is immoral deliberately to seek to establish reputation, and reputations that are deliberately cultivated are more vulnerable than those that are not.
3. Popular (widespread) and rapidly acquired reputations are short lived.
4. Reputations are determined not only by the actions of an entity but also by the consequences of those actions, the entity's relationships and qualities, and by many other factors (pp. 9–11).

With regard to the nature of organizational reputation, Bromley's above quotes suggest the following key aspects of organizational reputation related to organization–public relationships: (1) An organization needs to manage long-term quality relationships with publics rather than attempt to manipulate reputation for short-term outputs, and (2) organizational reputation is "superficial" and can be easily damaged by organizational behaviors, whereas organization–public relationships are more endurable than organizational reputation, since cultivating quality relationships requires long-term devotion from both parties.

Defining organizational reputation

Fombrun and Van Riel (1997), in the inaugural issue of the *Corporate Reputation Review*, maintained that reputation has been understudied because of "a problem of definitions" (p. 5). Indeed, depending on different perspectives, the concept of "organizational reputation" has been defined variously, for example, as assessments that multiple stakeholders make about the company's ability to fulfill their expectations (Fombrun and van Riel 2003), a collective system of subjective beliefs among members of a social entity (Bromley 1993, 2000, 2002), and cognitive representations in the minds of multiple publics about an organization's past behaviors and related attributes (Coombs 2000).

Organizational reputation as a "collective" phenomenon

Bromley (2000, 2002) suggested that reputation should be conceptualized as a *collective* phenomenon in society.[10] Bromley (1993) traced the origin of reputation study to person impression theories from the perspective of social psychology, and differentiated a *first*-order individual impression from a *second*-order collective phenomenon in the context of corporate reputation (Bromley 1993, 2000). Along the same line, Grunig and Hung (2002) also conceptualized reputation as a collective phenomenon and defined reputation as "the distribution of cognitive representations that members of a collectivity hold about an organization, representations that may, but do not always, include evaluative components" (p. 20).

[10] By a "collective phenomenon," Bromley (2000) stated: A key concept in the study of the practical aspects of corporate, or personal, reputation is that of 'consensus' (agreement, unanimity, trend of opinion). Reputation is a collective phenomenon, and consensus underpins collective action… Collective reactions, such as a boycott, demonstration, or strike, however, depend on 'consensus,' meaning total or substantial conformity in the distribution of beliefs and agreement on how to react (p. 245).

Primary and secondary reputation

In addition to the distinction between individual representations and collective representations, the extent of direct experience to form reputation needs to be explained. Bromley (1993) defined *primary* reputation as "the totality of opinions circulating within a primary face-to-face group" (reputations based on direct, first-hand acquaintance) (pp. 42–43), whereas *secondary* reputation refers to "those opinions in circulation in an extended social network that are not based on, or closely connected with, direct face-to-face contact with the person concerned" (p. 44). Bromley explained that a primary reputation can be more diffusely spread than a secondary reputation, meaning that "direct, first-hand contact leads to highly individualized impressions, whereas indirect contact based on hearsay leads to stereotyped impressions" (pp. 42–43). Consequently, secondary reputations are relatively "superficial, simple, and stylized" (p. 7) and "conforming to prevailing opinion" (p. 44).

Grunig and Hung (2002) also differentiated primary and secondary reputations based on involvement and personal experience with organizations. According to Grunig and Hung, when publics are involved with an organization, they have *experiential* relationships with the organization and hold *experiential* cognitive representations about the organization. When publics are not involved with an organization and have no *experiential* relationship with an organization, they may still hold *reputational* cognitive representations about the organization based on hearsay (i.e., what they hear from the media and others).

Coombs (2000) also considered that individual experience with an organization affects the nature of organizational reputation. On this point, Coombs said: "… a reputation is based on a stakeholder's experience with an organization. Both reputation and relational history are built from past interactions between the organization and the stakeholder" (p. 76). According to Coombs, a stakeholder holds reputations of organizations based on past interactions with the organization; depending on the intensity of interactions with the organization, reputation can be evaluative or neutral.

The link between relational outcomes and reputation

Scholars from different perspectives, such as business, public relations, and psychology, have emphasized the critical role of quality relational outcomes between an organization and its strategic constituents in the organization obtaining a favorable reputation (e.g., Fombrun 1996; Fombrun and Rindova 2000; Fombrun and van Riel 2003; Grunig and Hung 2002; Knox et al. 2000; Planalp 1987; Rindova and Kotha 2002; Schultz et al. 2000). For example, Fombrun emphasized the role of organization–public relationships as an important precursor of corporate reputations: "To acquire a reputation that is positive, enduring, and resilient requires managers to invest heavily in building and maintaining good relationships with their company's constituents" (p. 57).

The links between relational outcomes, reputation, and supportive behaviors

In terms of loyalty effects, the findings of marketing research suggest that quality relationships between customers and a marketer increase the profits of firms overwhelmingly by fostering supportive customer behavior (e.g., Reinchheld 1996; Peppard 2000). Peppard, for example, advocated relationship management by stating "retained customers [by quality relationships] are inevitably more profitable." Walker Information, a research firm offering a reputation measure, *Corporate Reputation Report*, stresses the importance of customer relationships in terms of customer loyalty: "Customer relationships determine

business success. Companies with loyal and committed customers become market leaders; organizations without them battle to survive" ("Customer Loyalty," 2003, March 11). Recently, Ki and Hon (2007) found organization–public relational outcomes, especially satisfaction, significantly resulted in members' supportive intentions for a not-for-profit organization.

In regards to the effect of organizational reputation, researchers found that favorable organizational reputation leads to stakeholders' supportive behaviors (Fombrun 1996; Fombrun and van Riel 2003). In the business context, favorable corporate reputation results in consumers' loyalty of corporations and their products and brands (Fombrun and van Riel 2003).

Hypotheses and the proposed structural equation model

Previous research offers the following theoretical links between concepts of this study as follows:

(1) Active communication behaviors of students (as stakeholders of a university) influence university–student relationships and university's reputation (e.g., Grunig and Hung 2002; Grunig and Huang 2000; Yang and Grunig 2005; Yang 2007a, b);
(2) The quality of stakeholders' experience with an organization influences organization–stakeholder relationships (e.g., Grunig et al. 2002) and organizational reputation (e.g., Fombrun 1996);
(3) Good organization–stakeholder relationships have positive effects on organizational reputation (Coombs 2000; Fombrun 1996; Knox et al. 2000; Grunig et al. 2002; Yang 2007a, b) and supportive behavioral intentions (Ki et al. 2007; Reinchheld 1996; Peppard 2000);
(4) Favorable organizational reputation leads to stakeholders' supportive behaviors (Fombrun 1996; Fombrun and van Riel 2003).

On the basis of such theoretical linkages, the researchers developed a theoretical model (see Fig. 1). Thus, students' active communication behaviors are expected to *positively* predict the perceived quality of relational outcomes with the university (*H1*), and the academic reputation of the university (*H2*).

H1 The more active communication behaviors students have with their university, the higher quality relational outcomes they will have.

H2 The more active communication behaviors students have with the university, the more favorable reputation they will have of it.

In addition, students' educational experience with the university is expected to *positively* predict the perceived quality of relational outcomes with the university (*H3*) and academic reputation of the university (*H4*).

H3 The higher quality of students' educational experience with their university, the higher quality their relational outcomes with the university will be.

H4 The higher quality of students' educational experience with the university, the more favorable reputation they will have of the university.

In the proposed model, therefore, the effects of students' active communication behaviors and educational experience are *mediated* through relational outcomes and reputation of their supportive behavioral intentions toward the university.

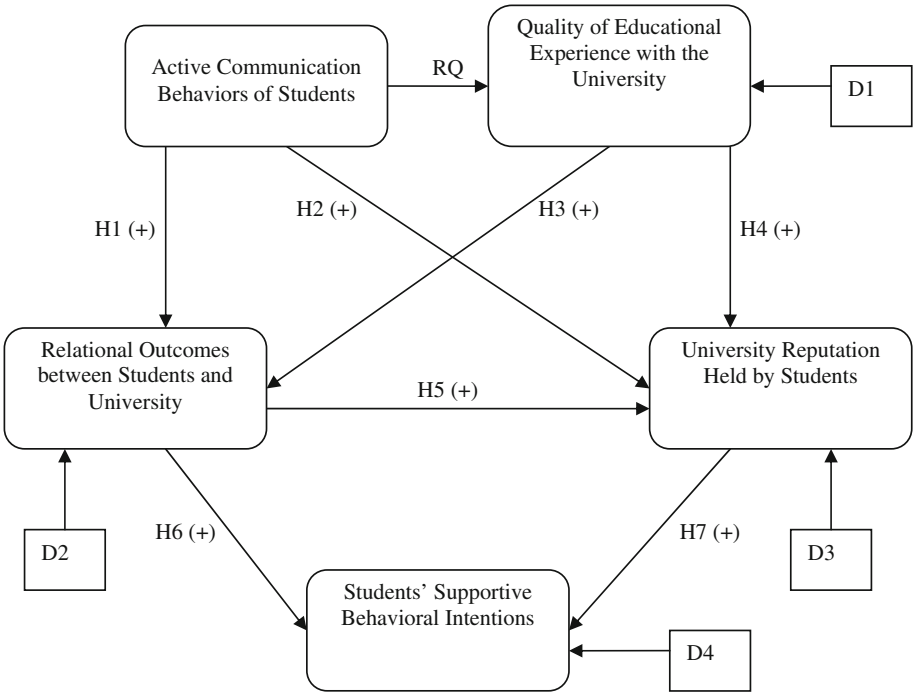

Fig. 1 The proposed structural equation model with hypothesis notation. For the brevity of the model, latent variables' indicators and their error terms are omitted from the figure

The quality of student–university relational outcomes is expected to positively affect students' perceptions of academic reputation of their university (*H5*) and their supportive behavioral intentions toward the university (*H6*).

H5 The more quality relational outcomes with the university, the more favorable reputation of the university.

H6 The more quality relational outcomes with the university, the more supportive behavioral intentions toward the university.

Last, students' perceptions of academic reputation of their university are expected to positively affect their supportive behavioral intentions toward the university (*H7*).

H7 The more favorable the reputation of the university, the more supportive behavioral intentions toward the university.

In addition to these hypotheses, the researchers posit a research question about the effect of active communication behaviors on the quality of educational experience with the university studied. Although there are few theoretical or empirical grounds, the authors believe that students' communication behaviors result in different level of perceived quality of education; this relation is important and relevant, especially in the context of university–student relations where only limited students have active communication behaviors with universities.

Research question To what extent do students' active communication behaviors with the university influence perceived quality of educational experience with the university studied?

Methodology

The study investigated the relationship between five different concepts, relational outcomes, reputation, communication behavior, student education experience, and supportive behavioral intentions. The relationship students have with the university they attend was used as the context for testing the proposed model.

The data in this study are from a survey of current undergraduate students who were attending a private university in Seoul during Fall 2005. A questionnaire was distributed to 370 students and a total of 337 returned questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 91%. Among the returned questionnaires, one was eliminated because the information was considered unusable, which brings the final total of 336. About 50% of the participants were male. The age varied from 18 to 29. Participants were asked to complete a survey concerning their demographics, undergraduate experiences, satisfaction with those experiences, communication behavior with the university, relational outcomes, the reputation that they held regarding the university, and their supportive behavioral intentions toward it.

The questionnaire was first created in English and was later translated into Korean. Because both researchers are bilingual in English and Korean, the first author translated the English version into Korean and the second author checked the validity of the translation. A third person, a communication researcher who is a native Korean, assisted revising the questionnaire into layman's terms.

Data reduction and analysis

First, to measure latent variables of "communication behavior of students" and "student–university relational outcomes," this study used the scales developed in Hon and Grunig (1999); Grunig and Hung (2002). Earlier, Jo et al. (2004) used Hon and Grunig (1999) scale to measure student–university relationships and found reliable results. In this study, to measure communication behavior of publics, modified from Grunig and Hung (2002), five items were used and had the reliability of .65 in Cronbach's Alpha (see Table 1). As for student–university relational outcomes, 15 items (i.e., 4 "control mutuality" items, 3 "commitment" items, 3 "satisfaction" items, and 5 "trust" items) were used in total and had the reliability of .87 in Cronbach's Alpha (Table 1). Composites for those indicators with multiple measurement items (i.e., control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, and trust) were constructed using the mean scores of the measured items (Table 1).

Exploratory factor analysis of each 4 dimension results in a single-dimension solution (with the first eigenvalue >1.0, all others <1.0, and a distinct elbow in the scree plot) that explains 59% of the variance in four items of control mutuality (with alpha of .70), 58% of the variance in three items of commitment (with alpha of .71), 69% of the variance in three items of relational satisfaction (with alpha of .76), and 53% of the variance in five items of relational trust (with alpha of .78). See the detailed wording in each scale item at Appendix.

Next, an unconstrained confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to check construct validity, by fitting a four-factor measurement model to the data of the "student–university relational outcomes" construct alone. This test results in a significant chi-square statistic,

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and reliability

Variables	*M*	*SD*	Reliability[a]
Communication behaviors ($N = 334$)			.65
Information seeking about university information	3.20	.84	
Information seeking about academic reputation	3.73	.92	
Information seeking about university management	3.94	1.00	
Information value	3.04	.81	
Familiarity	2.82	.73	
Education experience ($N = 332$)			.74
School engagement (3 items)	3.51	.60	
Sense of belonging (4 items)	3.10	.82	
Professor support (2 items)	3.14	.75	
Education value (2 items)	3.23	.74	
Student–university relational outcomes ($N = 333$)			.87
Control mutuality (4 items)	2.65	.56	
Commitment (3 items)	2.96	.71	
Satisfaction (3 items)	2.66	.65	
Trust (5 items)	2.66	.55	
University reputation ($N = 335$)			.86
Emotion (2 items)	3.33	.76	
University management (5 items)	2.84	.61	
Perception of media reputation (2 items)	3.02	.74	
Perception of academic reputation (2 items)	3.00	.83	
Supportive behavioral intentions ($N = 334$)			.74
Giving to university as alumni[b]	7.63	1.46	
Continuing education in the university[b]	5.38	1.54	
Giving referral about the university[b]	6.53	1.76	

[a] Cronbach's Alpha

[b] The sum of the measures of attitude and subjective norm about performing that behavior

χ^2 (84) = 243.60, $p < .001$, which is not unusual given this test statistic's sensitivity to the sample size. However, other fit indexes suggest that the four-factor model fits the data well without model modification: Comparative-Fit Index (CFI) = .95, $\chi^2/df = 2.90$, Incremental-Fit Index (IFI) = .93, and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = .05. The four-dimensional measurement model can be retained as a valid model in terms of construct validity. Additionally, all of the standardized factor loadings in the four dimensions exceed 0.40, suggesting sound measurement reliability as well.

Second, the Harris-Fombrun Reputation Quotient (Fombrun et al. 2000) was used to measure university reputation held by students. Seven items were modified from the Harris-Fombrun Reputation Quotient: two "emotion" items (vision, management leadership, social responsibility), and five "university management" items. Four items were added to university reputation measure: two items for "perceived media reputation" and two items for "perceived academic reputation." Therefore, the four dimensions of academic reputation with 11 measurement items. The mean score was used to construct composites for those corresponding dimensions; the reliability of academic reputation was .86 in Cronbach's Alpha (Table 1).

Third, to measure students' education experience, 11 items were used: three "school engagement" items, four "sense of belonging" items, two "professor support" items, and two "education value" items. Those 11 items had the reliability of .74 in Cronbach's alpha (Table 1). As in previous concepts, composites were constructed using the mean scores of the measured items.

Last, Ajzen's (e.g., Ajzen 1991; Hrubes et al. 2001) scales were used to measure students' supportive behavioral intentions toward the university. This study has the three dimensions of students' supportive behavioral intentions: (1) giving to university as alumni, (2) continuing education in the university, and (3) giving referrals about the university. Behavioral intentions in those three dimensions were calculated through the sum of the measures of "attitude" and "subjective norm" toward each behavior of the three dimensions. In this study, all product terms in the three dimensions were "positive"; the reliability was .74 in Cronbach's Alpha (Table 1).

Results

The purpose of this paper was to examine factors affecting students' supportive behavioral intentions and to analyze causal relations among the factors of interest. To analyze the proposed structural equation model (Fig. 1), the statistical program AMOS was used.

Model estimation of the structural model

In term of data-model fits in the structural models, this study found the proposed model can be retained as a valid model.[11] According to Byrne (1994, 2001), Hu and Bentler (1999) and Kline (1998), a structural equation model can be valid when (1) the value of χ^2/df is less than 3, (2) the value of Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is equal to or greater than .95, and (3) the value of RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) is less than .08. According to Fig. 2, the proposed structural equation model yielded the following data-model fits: $\chi^2/df = 2.852$ (as parsimonious fit index), CFI = .988, and RMSEA = .074. Therefore, the proposed model turned out to be a valid model based on those multiple data-model fit indexes.

Overview of hypothesis testing

Eight hypotheses were tested, each of which represented a structural path in the structural equation model (see Fig. 1). According to Table 2, the imposed structural paths performed significantly in the model except for the path from the quality of students' education experience on students' perceptions of university reputation (*H4*; $\beta = .11$, *ns*). Seven among eight hypotheses were supported in this study.

[11] Hu and Bentler (1999) developed joint-cutoff criteria for fit indexes in a structural equation model (SEM), which can be useful to test tenable data-model fit. According to them, if an SEM model has "CFI (i.e., Comparative Fit Index) $\geq$.96 and SRMR (i.e., Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) $\leq$1.0" or "RMSEA (i.e., Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) $\leq$.06 and SRMR $\leq$.10," it can be suggested that the fit between the data and the proposed model is tenable.

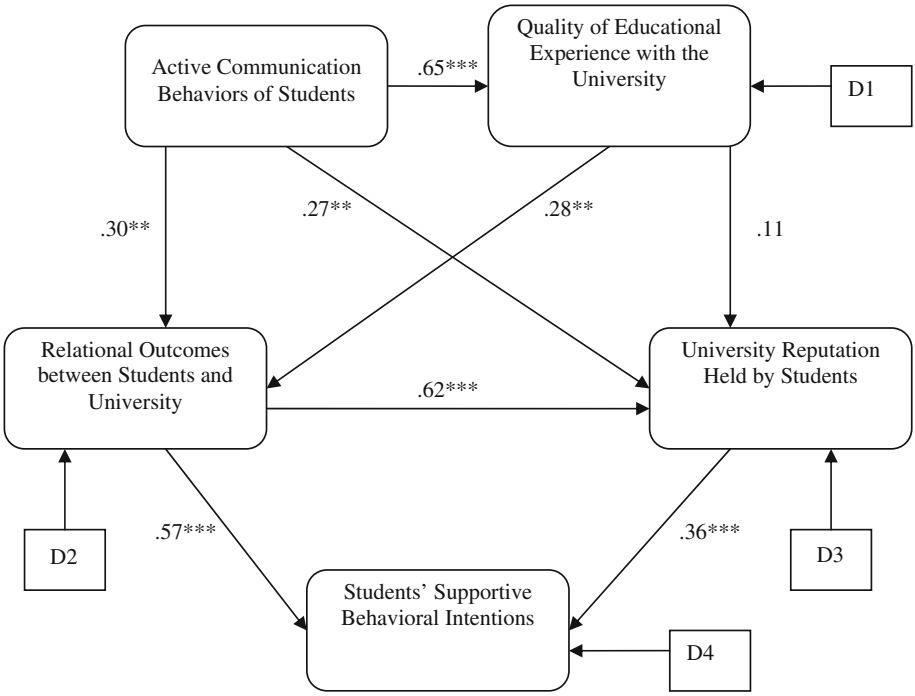

Fig. 2 The results of the proposed structural equation model with hypothesis notation. For the brevity of the model, latent variables' indicators and their error terms are omitted from the figure. $N = 336$, $df = 144$, Chi-square = 410.735, $p < .01$, Chi-square/$df = 2.852$, CFI = .988, NFI = .981, RMSEA = .074 (.066, .083). ** $p < .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

Table 2 Standardized direct effects in the structural equation model

Independent latent variables		Dependent latent variables	H	Standardized regression coefficients
Communication behaviors	→	Education experience	RQ	.65***
Communication behaviors	→	Student–university relational outcomes	H1	.30**
Communication behaviors	→	University reputation	H2	.27**
Education experience	→	Student–university relational outcomes	H3	.28**
Education experience	→	University reputation	H4	.11
Student–university relational outcomes	→	University reputation	H5	.62***
Student–university relational outcomes	→	Supportive behavioral intentions	H6	.57***
University reputation	→	Supportive behavioral intentions	H7	.36***

$N = 336$

** $p < .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

Detailed results of research question and hypothesis testing

RQ (The effect of communication behavior on educational experience)

Table 2 indicates that the effect of students' active communication behavior on the quality of their education experience was positive and significant ($\beta = .65$, $p \leq .001$). This path yields a "large" effect size; it is one of the strongest in the model. Cohen (1988) suggested guidelines about interpreting the effect size of correlations in the social sciences: (1) *small* effects: standardized path coefficients with absolute values less than .10; (2) *medium* effects: coefficient with absolute values around .30; and (3) *large* effects: coefficients with absolute values of .50 or more.

H1 (The effect of communication behavior on relational outcomes)

The results of this study in Table 2 show that students' active communication behavior positively affects their evaluations of relational outcomes with the university by a non-chance amount ($\beta = .30$ at $p < .01$). This path yields a medium effect size based on Cohen's (1988) criteria.

H2 (The effect of communication behavior on university reputation)

As with student–university relational outcomes, the effect of students' active communication behavior on their perceptions of university reputation was positive and significant ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$); the effect size was very similar (.27) to the effect of communication behavior on relational outcomes (.30).

H3 (The effect of educational experience on relational outcomes)

Table 2 indicates that the effect of students' educational experience on relational outcomes with the university was positive and significant ($\beta = .28$, $p < .01$). This path yields a medium effect size.

H4 (The effect of educational experience on university reputation)

Among all structural paths, this is the only insignificant one ($\beta = .11$, *ns*), despite the positive direction of the causal effect as hypothesized. Interestingly, students' educational experience significantly affects relational outcomes with the university (*H4*; $\beta = .28$, $p < .01$), whereas the effect on university reputation is not significant. This might be because the behavioral orientations of those concepts (i.e., "experience" and "relational outcomes") derived significant association between those concepts.

H5 (The effect of relational outcomes on university reputation)

As in the first hypothesis (i.e., the effect of communication behavior on educational experience), this path is one of the strongest in the proposed model ($\beta = .62$ at $p \leq .001$). The effect size is large based on Cohen's (1988) criteria.

H6 (The effect of relational outcomes on supportive behavioral intentions)

Table 2 indicates that the effect of students' relational outcomes with the university positively influences their supportive behavioral intentions by a non-chance amount ($\beta = .57$ at $p \leq .001$). This path has a large effect size.

H7 (The effect of university reputation on supportive behavioral intentions)

Although the effect size of this path is medium, university reputation also has a highly significant relationship with students' supportive behavioral intentions toward the university ($\beta = .36$ at $p \leq .001$).

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to examine factors affecting students' supportive behavioral intentions and to analyze causal relationships among the factors of interest. To analyze the proposed model, a structural equation model was used. The results clearly demonstrate that a close relationship exists between the relational outcomes students have with the university and its reputation. In addition, both relationship and reputation were strong determinants of students' supportive behavioral intention.

In this study, the researchers have introduced a relationship-based model of students' supportive behavioral intentions derived from a comprehensive review of educational, reputation, and public relations literature. The literature shows that four variables in particular are key determinants of students' supportive intentions: (1) the level of active communication behaviors of students, (2) perceived quality of educational experience with the educational institution, (3) perceived quality of relationships with the university, and (4) perceived reputation of the university. Most of the model's structure was confirmed in structural equation modeling using empirical data from a survey of 336 undergraduate students from a Korean university. Across the different data-model fit indexes, the proposed model turned out to perform well to be retained as a valid model. Also, according to the results, the four factors successfully predicted students' supportive behavioral intentions toward the university.

Among eight hypotheses, seven were supported except for the effect of students' educational experience on university reputation. Especially, the following associations were highly significant: (1) students' communication behavior significantly affects perceived quality of their educational experience, (2) students' evaluation of relational outcomes with the university significantly influences perceived university reputation and their intentions of supportive behavior toward the university, and (3) students' perceptions of the university's reputation highly influences their intentions of supportive behavior toward the university.

Additionally, despite the medium effect size, the following paths were also significant: (1) students' active communication behavior with the university significantly affects their evaluations of relational outcomes with the university and perceived university reputation, and (2) students' perceptions of their education experience significantly influences their evaluations of relational outcomes with the university.

These results offer valuable insights for the management of higher education institutions. Overall, the findings suggest that to foster students' supportive behaviors universities need to cultivate a good relationship with their students and to obtain a favorable

reputation, while ensuring active communication behavior of students and the quality of the educational experience. More specifically, two alternative strategic approaches can be taken to increase the level of students' intention to support the organization: active communication-based and relationship-based management. According to this research, active communication is likely to be the most promising factor. An organization that wants to develop such a communication-based strategy must therefore increase communication with students. However, it also needs to know which aspects of communication are most important.

A relationship-cultivating strategy that involves active student participation and communication would therefore seem to be most appropriate. Students' willingness to support their alma mater depends on their satisfaction with their education, including relationships, reputation, communication, and quality of educational experience. This makes a good case for the development of active communication programs with student publics.

In interpreting these results, however, it should be noted that the model is based on an integrative approach. Supportive behavioral intention should not be seen in isolation; instead, cultivating relationships with students, along with managing its reputation, need to be considered together to increase students' supportive intentions and eventually their supportive behavior. With regard to the quality of students' educational experience, the results demonstrate that the experience affects relational outcomes rather than directly influencing supportive behavior intentions. In other words, students were willing to support their university when they perceived the relationship was positive, which was based on the quality of the experience. Therefore, it is clear that students' experiences affect their present as well as future willingness to support the organization. The quality of experience has little influence on the university reputation, which also has minimal effect on relationships. Rather, positive relationships and active communication help maintain a good reputation, which motivates students' supportive behavioral intentions. This finding implies that direct experience is more influential than reputation. Consequently, academic institutions need to satisfy current student needs instead of emphasizing and investing in reputation.

The results also indicate that students' active communication behavior influences the quality of the educational experience, perceived relational outcomes, and perceived university reputation. The communication strategy for higher education institutions should take into account the special importance of these variables, in order to build good relationships with alumni and receive support from them in the future.

As the theory suggests, active communication behavior is not something an organization can generate; it is based on information seeking, which is the result of high problem recognition, low constraint recognition, and high level of involvement. To increase students' active communication, the university needs to foster students' participation and involvement through two-way communication and a free flow of information. One-way communication campaigns that disseminate university-generated information only influence information processing, which has little influence on students (Grunig 1997).

The common practice of persuading the entire alumni population for donations sometime after they graduate, or investing a great deal of resources to maintain good reputation through media or external ranking programs, may be an inefficient use of scarce development office resources. The single biggest determinant of the supportive intention among current students is good relational outcomes based on active communication and satisfaction with their experience. In an attempt to increase alumni/ae support, such as donations or referrals, institutions should invest in their students during their four years in college and meet their expectations. This information would benefit universities'

development offices as they focus on those who are most likely to make donations to their undergraduate institution and use their resources more effectively. Development is not something that begins after students graduate, but the thing that educational institutions get out of what they have offered while they were at school.

This study has some limitations in that the data are from a single university, limiting the extent to which one may safely generalize the results. The findings may reflect the specific situation of this particular institution. If these conclusions are to be applied to other educational establishments, the potential influence of other factors characterizing higher education institutions first needs to be examined. These characteristics may affect both the strength of the relationships between the dimensions of relationships outcomes and their impact on student supportive behavioral intention. Such characteristics include: ownership of the institution, communication channels and structure, the role that tuition fees play in financing the institution, and the institution's organizational structure and culture. Future research efforts should be directed toward using multiple institutions. In addition, it did not employ random sampling. However, considering that the university hardly uses customized communication based on segmentation, it can be assumed that the amount of communication and quality of educational experience may remain similar among campuses.

Although previous research shows that alumni income is a major factor in determining contributions (Clotfelter 2003; Monks 2003); the study did not include this factor because it focused on current students and their future intention, not actual supporting behavior. Therefore, it needs to be pointed out that this study does not contradict the findings of previous studies that individuals who have supportive intentions based on their positive experience may not be able to do if they are economically or physically constrained (Clotfelter 2003).

The scope of the research should also be expanded to include educational institutions outside South Korea to test the overall validity of the reported results in other countries, for example, the United States. The future research should also apply the same model to alumni publics to examine their supportive behavior, especially alumni giving.

Finally, studies of international comparisons may be of interest. For instance, per-unit alumni gifts are higher in the U.S. than in the U.K. (Belfield and Beney 2000). In South Korea, the contribution of alumni giving in the share of total support for universities is much smaller than the U.S. (Bae 2006).[12] Researchers point out that the discrepancy may reflect the dimensions of giving that differ from culture to culture (Kim and Kim 2005; Sergeant 1999; Tokumura 2001). Philanthropy is structured by the societies where it resides, religions, and cultural practices (Ilchman et al. 1998; Sundeen et al. 2007); culture is valuable for providing a foundation or framework to a practice and tradition of giving, which eventually results in different attitudes toward giving. Therefore, future studies that attempt to examine alumni giving activities across countries need to consider cultural elements as a vital factor.

[12] According to the Korea Institute of Public Finance (2007), the average amount of individual donation in South Korea is smaller than that of other countries because of the following reasons: (1) wealth is often passed on family and relatives; (2) religious organizations receive most of philanthropic donations (U.S. 35.8%, U.K. 11%, South Korea 80%), whereas other types of non-profit organizations barely receive individual donations; and (3) many people believe that the transparency of the organizations that receive donations is questionable. Studies also show that more than 90% of U.S. adults donate to charities regularly, whereas only 10% of Koreans do.

Appendix: "Student–university relational outcomes" scale items

Control mutuality

This university and students are attentive to what each other say.
This university believes students' opinions are legitimate.
In dealing with students, this university has a tendency to throw its weight around (Reversed).
This university really listens to what students have to say.

Commitment

I feel that this university is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to students.
There is a long-lasting bond between this university and students.
Compared to other organizations, I value my relationship with this university more.

Relational satisfaction

I am happy with this university.
Both the university and students benefit from the relationship.
Most students are happy in interactions with this university.

Relational trust

This university treats students fairly.
Whenever this university makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about students.
This university can be relied on to keep its promise.
I believe that this university takes students' opinions into account when making decisions.
This university has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.

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