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Toward the Model of University Image: The Influence of Brand Personality, External Prestige, and Reputation

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Although the concepts of image and reputation have been increasingly emphasized in the fields of public relations and marketing, the association of these 2 concepts has not been empirically studied within the public relations domain. Furthermore, although significant research into corporate image has been established, relatively less image research has been conducted on service-oriented organizations such as universities. The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of institutional image and image-related constructs on students' supportive attitude, which represents the student's commitment to and identification with the organization. After identifying the components that construct corporate image, the study examines the relationships among these constructs under the concept of corporate image. It also attempts to analyze the impact of this image in order to understand its influence on student recruitment, and to describe the strategic implications for university communication management. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze data obtained from a survey of 1,642 university students. The result of statistical analysis is provided with a proposed model of university image.

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The concepts of image and reputation have been increasingly emphasized in the fields of public relations and marketing. A good number of studies have shown that corporate image has considerable influence, as it attracts both present and potential publics, enhances customer's buying intentions and satisfaction, develops a loyalty relationship, and increases sales (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Barich & Kotler, 1991; Dick & Basu, 1994; Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Palacio, Meneses, & Perez, 2002; Raj, 1985). Similarly, researchers maintain that a favorable corporate reputation gives an organization a competitive advantage by positively stimulating customers and increasing satisfaction and loyalty (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Consequently, organizations engage in a wide variety of actions for influencing external constituencies' assessment of the organization (Andreassen, 1994; Chun, 2005; Fombrun, 1996). However, the association of image and reputation has not been empirically studied within the public relations domain.

Although significant research into corporate image has been established, relatively less image research has been conducted on service-oriented organizations such as universities. However, previous studies show that the significance of institutional image can be extended to the higher education context. The image of universities is a new topic that is receiving greater attention as universities recognize the importance of attracting students and having distinct images in the competitive market (Bok, 1992; Parameswaran & Glowacka, 1995; Theus, 1993).¹ As a result of increased competition, universities have been pushed to brand themselves as having a set of unique and desirable attributes that appeal to potential students. Many universities have increased their investments in an effort to strengthen the image of "prestige" or "quality" (Ghosh, Whippie, & Bryan, 2001; Kennedy & Walker, 1981; McPherson & Schapiro, 1998). Furthermore, the university that seeks to create and manage desirable images needs to understand the importance of multiple organizational, situational, personal, and business factors in a university's images (Kazoleas, Kim, & Moffitt, 2001).

As Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) pointed out, understanding the role of institutional image and reputation would allow for a more effective use of

¹Kotler and Fox's (1995) decision model suggests that the students' college selection decision is a complex process that involves factors such as academic reputation, excellent teachers, the size of student population, enter-student test scores, quality of faculty, friendliness, expenditures per student, size of operating budget, and cost, to name a few (Canale & Dunla, 1996; Hoverstad, Lamb, & Miller, 1985; Theus, 1993). Besides cost, a critical factor in students' college selection (Quigley, Bingham, Murray, & Notarantonio, 1999), scholars have found that students' evaluation of the institution—e.g., institutional image and reputation—have great impact on the selection process (Belanger, Mount, & Wilson, 2002).

communication strategy, and, consequently, enhance the institution's position. Analyzing the factors that influence publics' perceived image of an organization is challenging in that their abstraction level may be high, and, consequently, they are complex to conceptualize and difficult to measure.

The examination of image criteria used to evaluate universities is an important and timely effort, as educational institutions are becoming increasingly competitive in recruiting students and may occasionally be in need of constructing and communicating positive images to key constituents (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; Ivy, 2001; Kotler & Fox, 1995); at the same time, they are increasingly criticized for their use of resources (Phair, 1992; Theus, 1993). Although students' supportive attitudes—such as attachment and loyalty—have been a popular subject in educational research, few studies in communication have examined this phenomenon (Hennig-Thurau, Langer, & Hansen, 2001; Sung & Cho, 2006). To overcome this gap, this study attempts to develop a conceptual model for students' supportive attitude by combining the growing body of knowledge on image and reputation with insights from literature on supportive attitudes, e.g., commitment, identification, and sense of belonging.

Furthermore, although a few studies have attempted to create a scale to measure university image, a close examination of the studies shows that their measures often lack consistency or conceptual structure; those measures consist of a variety of variables, such as brand personality, reputation, loyalty, satisfaction, physical environment, or education quality, to name a few (Arpan et al., 2003; Belanger et al., 2002; Kazoleas et al., 2001; Nguyen & LeBalanc, 2001; Palacio et al., 2002; Vaughn, Pitlik, & Hansotia, 1978). That is, the studies have no consensus on the items used in measuring university image; in some cases, the measures are even unclear about what they attempt to measure. Few studies have used a comprehensive measure that encompasses a variety of constructs to evaluate how the organization is perceived.

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of institutional image and image-related constructs on student supportive attitude, which will represent the student's commitment to and identification with the organization (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001). The study focuses on identifying the component constructs of corporate image and examines the relationships among those constructs. Typically, image is considered to be more influential and significant for consumer attitude and perception when consumers have had little direct experience with the organization or its services. From this perspective, the study explores how image constructs influence the attitude of university freshmen, who have limited direct experience with the institution.

In the subsequent parts of this article, a three-step procedure is used to gain deeper insights into the potential of image and communication

management in the university context. First, the existing information available from previous research efforts in the fields of education, marketing, and public relations are used to develop a model of students' supportive attitudes. Second, the model is tested empirically using structural equation modeling. The empirical part is based on a survey of 1,642 university students. Finally, the theoretical and empirical results are discussed with regard to the possible managerial implications for providers of educational services. Some conclusions and suggestions for further research are offered as well.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The model put forth in this study attempts to integrate the knowledge gained from research on student supportive attitudes, image, reputation, and external prestige.

Image

It is now a well-established claim that a good corporate image has positive influence on a company. Research findings in a variety of fields—marketing, advertising, management, and public relations—have shown that companies with a good corporate image are likely to have a good record of sales and market share (Shapiro, 1982), a loyal customer relationship (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998), a positive perception of quality (de Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000), and enhanced consumer attachment to the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

According to Dichter (1985), *image* refers to a global or overall impression, or “the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others” (p. 75). Researchers typically define image as the sum of beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, ideas, relevant behaviors, or impressions that a person holds regarding an object, person, or organization (Kotler & Andreasen, 1996). Image is a dynamic and complex entity, and specific groups of audience members can have varying images for one institution. Hence, organizations need to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their image for each target group. Although organizations try to convey a desirable image to the public, they may not be successful because images are the result of the choices, actions, and social interactions of involved stakeholders (Barich & Kotler, 1991).

The concept *image* has been accompanied with confusion because some scholars and practitioners interchangeably use the term with *corporate identity* and *reputation* (Abratt, 1989). For example, Dowling (1993)

explained corporate reputation as synonymous for corporate image, while Barich and Kotler (1991) saw it as one dimension of corporate image. Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) regarded corporate reputation as representation outside members' perception of corporate image. Davies, Chun, da Silva, and Roper (2004) differentiated reputation and image by defining reputation as "something that is dependent upon actual experience of the organization" (p. 126), whereas image was seen as an opinion that is independent of actual experience.

Image construct and measure. There are numerous ways by which to measure or decipher the image of organizations, products, and services. According to Leister and MacLachlan (1975), images must be measured by several factors at once to obtain any meaningful information. LeBlanc and Nguyen (1995) discussed the difficulty of measuring corporate image in service industries. Unlike goods, it is difficult to evaluate services image because of the lack of objective and measurable attributes.

University image. Until recently, not much research has been done on the concept of corporate image in relation to universities, whereas a good number of marketing studies have been devoted to the topic. Of the few published studies on university image, Kazoleas et al.'s (2001) analysis of the organizational, personal, and environmental factors in the processing of the public's perception on the university image shows that receiver-oriented and audience-specific corporate image may vary. Perna (2005) emphasized the significance of building positive emotions in achieving university enrollment goals and recommended increasing a positive emotional experience through an "enrollment funnel" (p. 36) to create emotional attachment and loyalty; students search for educational services based on diverse emotional needs, such as love, power, safety and belonging, just as consumers do. Institutions can build positive emotional attachment if they make prospective students feel valued and develop connection with them.

In educational services management, concepts such as image and reputation are extensively used as positioning instruments to influence students' choice of a higher education institution (Milo, Edson, & Mceuen, 1989; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Weissman, 1990). According to Treadwell and Harrison (1994), image is a strategic managerial issue that affects the institution's ability to recruit desired faculty members, to attract philanthropic donations, and to draw and retain motivated students. Students' preentry images of institutions are usually the result of interaction and contact with recruiters, organizational literature, and other sources.

Personification and Brand Personality

Recently, a few scales have been developed based on the personification metaphor for assessing how a corporation is evaluated. The device of associating a company with a person is a widely-used method in consumer behavior, as it helps audiences understand the target concept using an idea that they are familiar with (Davies et al., 2004; Markham, 1972; Morgan, 1983). Aaker's (1997) *brand personality* scale is often used to assess brand perceptions. According to him, brand personality is "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p. 347), which is developed based on consumers' direct and indirect experiences with the brand. Brand personality may be created from nonproduct-related factors—e.g., past experience, marketing communication, word of mouth—as well as product-related factors—e.g., product category, price, and the physical attributes. Similarly, using the personification approach, Davies et al. (2004) developed the *corporate character* and measured a firm's reputation from both internal (employees) and external (customers) perspectives.

Perceived External Prestige

Fifty years ago, March and Simon (1958) maintained that individuals are likely to become attached to organizations that they believe are held in high esteem by people outside the organization. According to Blau (1964), "an individual's prestige depends largely upon . . . the prestige of those who accept him and socialize with him as an equal" (p. 133). Recent research has highlighted that an organization with better external image tend to foster individuals' sense of organizational membership (Smidts, Pruyn, & Van Riel, 2001).

When evaluating an organization's prestige, people who are outside consider different aspects of the organization. On the other hand, insiders develop their own view about the organization and its values, and assess how outsiders view their organization (Carmeli, 2005). An individual's beliefs about how outsiders view the organization is referred to as construed external image (Dutton et al., 1994) or perceived external prestige (PEP; Smidts et al., 2001).

Perceived external prestige is generally treated as an individual-level variable, in that it concerns individuals' interpretations and assessments of companies' prestige, based on their own exposure to information about the organizations. Thus, it is possible that members of the same organization have different perceptions of its external prestige. Among several attempts to assess the quality of programs in higher education, rankings and ratings generated by third parties or agencies are often used to attract prospective students.

From Corporate Reputation to University Reputation

The concept of organizational reputation has been defined as (a) assessments that multiple stakeholders make about the company's ability to fulfill its expectations over time (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2003), (b) a collective system of subjective beliefs among members of a social group (Bromley, 1993, 2000, 2002), (c) collective beliefs that exist in the organizational field about a firm's identity and prominence (Rao, 1994), (d) media visibility and favorability gained by a firm (Deephouse, 2000), and (e) collective representations shared in the minds of multiple publics about an organization over time (J. E. Grunig & Hung, 2002; Yang & J. E. Grunig, 2005; Yang, 2007). Therefore, the similarity of those definitions is that the reputation of an organization refers to public perceptions of the organization shared by its multiple constituents over time.

Supportive Attitude Toward the University

Scholars in various fields have studied individual's supportive attitude toward an organization, which may eventually lead to supportive behavior. Student loyalty is critical for higher education institutions, in that loyal students tend to be motivated and actively participate in classes. For example, Adee (1997) maintained that consumer satisfaction and service quality positively affect consumer loyalty and repetitive purchasing behavior in higher education institutions. In addition, after graduating, students may continue to support their schools financially or through other forms of cooperation (Henning-Thurau et al., 2001).

Identification. In psychology, the relationship between an individual and an organization and one's attitude towards an organization has been conceptualized both in terms of identification and in terms of affective commitment. Ashforth and Mael (1989) argued that organizational identification is a perception of oneness with an organization, which leads to a person's support for institutions. According to the theory, the cognitive component of identification reflects the perceived amount of interests that an individual and an organization share. The affective component, such as pride, is important in the creation of a positive image of one's own organization, or achieving a *positive social identity*. van Riel and Balmer (1997) argued that one's organizational identification is related to his or her perceived organizational prestige, job satisfaction, goals and values, and organizational culture. Organizational identification, accordingly, is measured by items such as a feeling of belonging, positive organizational membership, organizational support, a feeling of acceptance, and security, to name a few (p. 347).

Commitment. Organizational commitment is defined as an affective attachment to the organization (Buchanan, 1974; de Ridder, 2004; Sheldon, 1971) or strong belief in the organizational values and a desire to maintain organizational membership (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boultian, 1974). It is associated with satisfaction, and is often used to predict turnover and absenteeism (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). According to Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), corporate commitment is dependent on the corporate image and reputation, and the consumers' perceptions and beliefs about relevant company characteristics.

Trust. de Ridder (2004) saw commitment and trust as two concepts that generate a positive attitude among employees. Trust is the basis for interpersonal relationships and stability in social institutions. Trust is important in developing and maintaining long-term relationships (Ghosh et al., 2001). Certainly, educational institutions can benefit by building and maintaining trust. Prospective students are more likely to enroll or decide to attend a university when they trust that institution. Increased trust is likely to lead to positive experiences and evaluations, which consequently help increase quality perceptions, generate positive word-of-mouth effects, and reduce sensitivity to cost and tuition changes.

School membership. According to the socio-cultural perspective of the educational process, students need to feel that they are connected to others or have a sense of community in order to maximize their learning, motivation, and engagement (Booker, 2006; Goodenow, 1993; Hagborg, 1998; Tinto, 1997). Wahlage (1989) identified four components of school membership: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. In their study of student loyalty, Hennig-Thurau et al., (2001) found that a loyal student might continue to support his or her academic institution even after graduating (a) by providing financial support, such as donations or research projects; (b) through word-of-mouth promotion to other prospective, current, or former students, and (c) 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.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the review of literature, the following hypotheses are posited:

H1: Favorable university personality is positively associated with students' supportive attitudes toward the university.

- H2: External prestige of a university is positively associated with students' supportive attitudes toward the university.
- H3: Favorable university reputation is positively associated with students' supportive attitudes toward the university.

METHOD

The data analyzed in this study were generated from a paper-and-pencil census survey conducted at a large-sized private university in South Korea. The data were obtained from the entire freshman class of the university.

Participants

The population consisted of the entire freshman class of 2006 ($N = 2,800$).² Surveys were distributed to all the freshman students from March 2 to 30, 2006. The university's admission office and student affairs office assisted in sending the questionnaires to each department office; department administrators distributed the questionnaire to the students in person during their orientation. A total of 1,678 questionnaires were returned, for a 60% return rate. Among the returned questionnaires, 36 were eliminated because the information was considered unusable, which brought a final total of 1,642. Respondents consisted of 65% women and 55% men. The ages varied from 18 to 35, with an average age of 19.

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that included items about demographics, perceptions about personality traits of the university, the reputation of the university, perceived external prestige, and whether they had a supportive attitude toward the university.

Background of the Higher Education Institution Studied

The university is located in Seoul, South Korea and has more than 25,000 students on the campus. It is one of the largest universities in the country, with more than 200,000 alumni and 750 full-time faculty professors. Established in the late 1800s, the university is considered to be one of the top 10 universities in South Korea and has relatively selective admission criteria. The institution consists of two campuses; the main campus has

²Because this study attempted to use a census survey, it did not employ any randomization process for sampling.

an entrance quota of 2,746, and the second campus has 2,240. In this study, only the students from the main campus were included.

Measurement Instrument

Four theoretical constructs were measured to test the proposed model. Among them, three were independent variables: university personality, external prestige, and university reputation. The dependent variable was students' supportive attitudes. A questionnaire was designed using 5-point Likert scales to measure the independent and dependent variables. The questionnaire was originally written in English and then translated into the Korean language. One communication researcher, who is a native Korean, assisted in revising the questionnaire into simple language.

Independent measures. The variable of university personality was measured using the following four items: This university is (a) friendly, (b) stable, (c) practical, and (d) warm. The items were selected from previous studies, such as Chatman and Jehn (1994), Davies et al. (2004), and Sung and Tinkham (2005). Cronbach's alpha of the items was .77 ($n = 1,632$; four items).

Second, the variable of external prestige was measured using the following four items: (a) This university is looked upon as a prestigious school in society overall; (b) I think my acquaintances think highly of this university; (c) this university successfully retains a prestigious place in various university ranking systems; and (d) media coverage about this university is very positive. The items were adopted from Mael and Ashforth's (1992) organizational prestige scale. Cronbach's alpha was .84 ($n = 1,637$; four items).

Third, modifying some of Fombrun and Gardberg's (2000) reputation quotient measures, university reputation was measured using the following five items: (a) This university puts student care as the top priority; (b) this university looks like a university with strong prospects for future growth; (c) this university is well-managed; (d) this university is socially responsible; and (e) this university is financially sound. Cronbach's alpha was .86 ($n = 1,617$; five items).

Dependent measure. The dependent variable is students' supportive attitudes, which was measured by the following four items: (a) I feel strong sense of belonging to this university, (b) I feel proud to become a student of this university, (c) I trust this university, and (d) I am highly interested in this university. The items were modified from previous studies on organizational commitment and identification by Porter et al. (1974). Cronbach's alpha was .88 ($n = 1,637$; four items).

Exploratory factor analysis and discriminant validity of independent factors. After measuring reliabilities of the four variables, we examined the extent of discriminant validity of the three independent variables (i.e., university personality, external prestige, and university reputation) using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation. Applying Kaiser's rule (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), we extracted any component with an eigenvalue greater than or equal to 1. Three components were extracted for the three variables. Furthermore, each of the extracted components clearly represents each of its associated variable: The first factor is university reputation (eigenvalue = 2.97; 22.83% variance explained); the second is external prestige (eigenvalue = 2.85; 21.94% variance explained); and the third is university personality (eigenvalue = 2.33; 17.92% variance explained).

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, structural equation modeling was used to empirically test theoretically derived causal paths in the proposed model. To analyze the proposed structural equation model, AMOS 6.0 was used and parameters were estimated by maximum likelihood method.

Measurement goodness fit: results of confirmatory factor analysis. We conducted initial confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by imposing a model where all factors were allowed to covary. Because the initial measurement model fitted satisfactorily, we did not revise the model at all with model modification methods.

As for the data-model fit criteria, according to Byrne (1994, 2001), Hu and Bentler (1999), and Kline (1998), a structural equation model can be valid when the value of χ^2/df (as a parsimonious fit index) is less than 3, the value of comparative fit index (CFI as an incremental fit index) is equal to or greater than .90—ideally, equal to or greater than .95, and the value of root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA as a parsimonious fit index) is less than .08.

Most of these criteria were satisfied with the data except for χ^2/df (9.35). This is because the χ^2 statistic is often very sensitive to a large sample size (e.g., Byrne, 1994; Kline, 1998), which is the case of this current study ($N = 1,604$ with 1056.45 as Chi-square value). Other than this, the proposed CFA model can be retained as a valid measurement model without any model modification at all: CFI = .93 and RMSEA = .07. The results of the CFA model demonstrate good measurement reliability and validity of the variables. Additionally, all of the four latent variables are significantly correlated with each other (all correlation coefficients significant at $p < .001$), which ranges from $r = .47$ between university reputation and external

prestige, as the lowest correlation, and $r = .74$ between student supportive attitudes and external prestige, as the highest correlation.

Goodness fit of structural equation model. On the basis of the research hypotheses, we imposed structural relations between the four variables. The data-model fit indexes remain the same as the CFA model because degrees of freedom of the model are the same ($df = 113$), without any model modification from the measurement model. The only difference is that, instead of making all variables covaried, we imposed supportive attitudes as an endogenous variable that is predicted by the three exogenous variables.

RESULTS

Model Specification

The purpose of this study was to examine how students' supportive attitudes toward a university were predicted by the proposed independent factors (i.e., university personality, external prestige of the university, and university reputation). To this end, grounded in previous research, three research hypotheses were tested, each of which represented a structural path in the structural equation model (see Figure 1). The proposed structural model can be expressed as the following structural equation (where β is the standardized parameter estimate for each structural path, or research hypothesis, and D is the residual of students' supportive attitudes): Students' supportive attitudes toward the university (with four indicators) = $\beta_1 \times (\text{University personality with four indicators}) + \beta_2 \times (\text{External prestige with four indicators}) + \beta_3 \times (\text{University reputation with five indicators}) + D$. Figure 1 is the visual output of results in this structural equation analysis with standardized path coefficients between latent variables and between latent variables and their indicators. In Figure 1, ovals are latent variables as hypothetical construct, whereas rectangles are observed variables measured by the researchers. This model is recursive (i.e., one-sided direction between exogenous and endogenous variables) and three endogenous latent variables are covaried.

Summary of Hypotheses Testing

According to Table 1, all of the proposed research hypotheses were supported by the data at $p < .001$ with expected direction of hypotheses as grounded in the literature. All of the proposed exogenous variables strongly and positively affected student supportive attitudes toward the

university studied. First, the research hypothesis regarding the effect of university personality was supported by the data: $B = .41$, $SE B = .05$, and $Beta = .31$ (at $p < .001$). Second, higher external prestige resulted in students' stronger supportive attitudes toward the university: $B = .73$, $SE B = .05$, and $Beta = .49$ (at $p < .001$). Finally, the more favorable the university reputation, the stronger the supportive attitudes toward the university as well: $B = .15$, $SE B = .03$, and $Beta = .12$ (at $p < .001$).

As Figure 1 and Table 1 indicate, this study found that all of the three independent factors strongly affected students' supportive attitudes toward the university studied, yet all three factors (i.e., university personality,

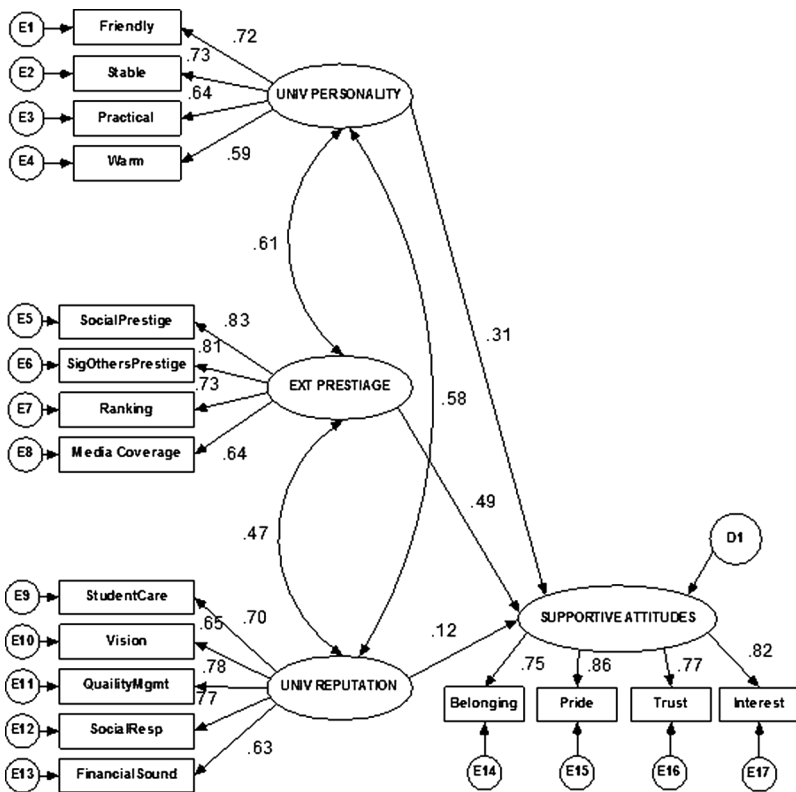


FIGURE 1 The results of the proposed structural model. $N = 1,607$, $df = 113$, $\chi^2 = 1056.45$, the number of parameters to be estimated = 57, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 9.35$, CFI (comparative fit index) = .93; RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) = .07 (.07, .08). R^2 of supportive attitudes was .63. All paths are statistically significant at $p < .001$. Ovals are latent variables as hypothetical construct, whereas rectangles are observed variables measured by the researchers. This model is recursive and three endogenous (i.e., independent) latent variables are covaried.

TABLE 1
 Summary of Direct Effects in Structural Equation Analysis for Variables
 Predicting Students' Supportive Attitudes in University-Student
 Relations ($N=1,607$)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>Beta</i>
University personality	.41	.05	.31
External prestige	.73	.05	.49
University reputation	.15	.03	.12

Note: R^2 of "Supportive Attitudes" was .63. $N=1607$, $df=113$, $\chi^2=1,056.45$, the number of parameters to be estimated = 57, $p < .001$, $v/df=9.35$, Comparative fit index = .93; Root mean square error of approximation = .07 (.07, .08). * $p < .001$. All Beta coefficients are statistically significant at $p < .001$.

university reputation, and external prestige) remain discriminant validities with each other. Among them, the degree of external prestige predicted supportive attitudes most strongly. R^2 of supportive attitudes was .63, suggesting that the proposed three factors turned out to be very important determinants of the survey respondents' supportive attitudes toward the university. Implications of such findings will be discussed in next section.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this investigation was to understand the relationship between perceived organizational personality, reputation, and external prestige of a university on students' supportive attitude toward the institution. This study suggested a model of university image and its relationship with student supportive attitudes based on a review of educational, marketing, and public relations literature. The model's structure was confirmed through structural equation modeling using survey data from 1,642 freshmen at a large university in South Korea. The findings indicated a significant relationship between students' evaluative perceptions of the university and their supportive attitudes toward the institution. All the constructs of university image—personality, reputation, and external prestige—had positive influences on students' supportive attitudes toward the university.

The study reveals that one variable, in particular, was a key determinant of the supportive attitude of freshmen: the perception of how others view the university they belong to. The other two variables, university's personality traits and reputation, also had significant influences, although not as strong

as that of external prestige. The impact of perceived external prestige was around four times that of university reputation.

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling showed that the three constructs of image—personality traits, perceived external prestige, and reputation—were related, but are different dimensions of how the institution is perceived. In other words, although some researchers use these three concepts interchangeably, participants in the study had distinct perceptions of them. This finding may correspond to how Carmeli (2005) defined organization prestige and reputation. According to him, organizational reputation is defined as outsiders' perceptions about an organization's current performance and future behaviors, whereas perceived external prestige is insiders' assessment of the organization based on how outsiders view the organization they belong to.

Our findings show that three strategic approaches can be drawn to foster students' supportive attitudes. First, it is noteworthy that, unlike other previous studies, the result of this study showed that reputation has a relatively weak impact on the supportive attitude—quite weak compared to the other concepts. Therefore, it is inferred that students value how the institution is perceived by others more than their own perception—perceived personality and reputation. This indicates that universities' effort to directly communicate with and persuade perspective students may not be as effective as they are believed to be.

Second, as mentioned earlier, perceived external prestige has the strongest impact on students' positive attitudes. The management of the university may enhance its perceived external prestige. As Smidts et al. (2001) maintained, perceived external prestige can be improved by investing in the visibility and reputation of a corporate brand through external communication. For example, a communication campaign may be directed toward enhancing perceived external prestige. Such a communication strategy would require an analysis of the precursor factors that explain the variable in individual ratings on perceived external prestige. On the basis of such antecedents, a more specific communication approach could be selected. Perceived external prestige is not simply influenced by organization-controlled communication. Rather, it is more affected by information sources outside the organization.

The third strategy is to come up with a communication that would frame the university with favorable personalities. A supportive attitude can also be achieved through enhancing the level of liking. The most salient characteristics, or personality, that determines students' supportive attitude are friendly and stable. The university may conduct further studies to explore the personalities that students most prefer, and develop communication programs to generate and enhance such characteristics.

The corpus of knowledge on image is beginning to reach maturity. Scholars in various disciplines are showing a renewed interest in the area. The multidisciplinary character of the area has long been recognized by academicians and consultancies in a variety of fields. This approach will also be usefully applied by public relations scholars to provide knowledge that is based on a more intense dialogue and greater cross-disciplinary research. We constructed the conceptual model based on the body of knowledge borrowed from marketing, psychology, organization studies, and education and confirmed the relationship among the constructs. The findings of this study show that public relations has the potential to make an important contribution in this respect. Although very few studies explicitly discussed the role of communication in building those constructs in individuals' perception, it is clear that how an organization communicates with its internal, as well as external, constituencies influences on their assessment, and consequently, their attitude toward the organization (Carmeli, 2005). Furthermore, organizations may create communication strategies to enhance the positive attitudes of constituencies—loyalty, affective commitment, and attachment—based on the analysis of their perceived reputation, external prestige, and personality traits (Fuller et al., 2006; Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

The multidimensional nature of image calls for management and researchers alike to adopt a broad analysis perspective that will enable them to process the large number of elements that make up the students' perceived image of university. Students' are one of the most critical constituencies of a university because teaching students is a primary mission of higher education institutions. Their support for the university is particularly important.

The study is limited in that it concerns students from one university. Therefore, the findings may reflect the specific situation of this particular school. Future research efforts should be directed toward using multiple institutions. If these conclusions are to be applied to educational establishments outside Korea, the potential influence of other factors characterizing higher education institutions first needs to be examined. These characteristics, e.g., the institution's organizational structure and culture, may affect both the strength of the relationships between the constructs. Studies with other universities as the target stimuli would be valuable in broadening the scope of the proposed model's application. The scope of the research should also be expanded to include educational institutions outside South Korea. This work would provide additional evidence for the reliability and validity of the study.

Future research is likely to benefit from an interdisciplinary approach. We predict that, in time, there will be a large and distinctive body of knowledge on corporate image with a realization by both academics and

practitioners that a favorable corporate image is one of an organization's most important assets and, therefore, is worthy of attention.

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