

 INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC RESEARCH JOURNAL INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC RESEARCH JOURNAL of <b>BUSINESS AND TECHNOLOGY</b> www.iarjournal.com IARJ - BT	 INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC RESEARCH JOURNAL ISSN :2289-8433
	<b>International Academic Research Journal of Business and Technology</b> <hr/> Journal homepage : <a href="http://www.iarjournal.com">www.iarjournal.com</a>

## Understanding and Conceptualizing Alumni Citizenship Behavior: Initial Study

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### Article Information

#### Keywords

Alumni citizenship behavior, relationship marketing, customer helping behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, social exchange theory

### Abstract

The study on examining alumni behavior towards their alma mater had gained considerable attention from both scholars and practitioners. However, previous studies specifically directed to understand alumni willingness to donate and giving behavior. Study that attempt to understand how alumni contribute and what are relevant alumni behaviors that possibly affect overall university performance rather limited. Hence, guided with Social Exchange Theory and Organizational Citizenship Behavior conception, this study attempts to identify what are the relevant alumni supportive behaviors which is termed as alumni citizenship behavior. Based on focus group interview, few themes that possible explain alumni citizenship behaviors were observed; namely donors and giving, university loyalty, university engagement, coaching and mentoring and university recommendation. Implication and recommendation for future research also were discussed in this article.

### INTRODUCTION

In the context of marketing, long term relationship between organization and consumer lies in the domain of relationship marketing. The key ingredients for relationship marketing are trust and commitment (Gounaris, 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The strong bond between organization and consumers stimulate their consumers to involve in voluntary behavior. In the context of consumer perspectives, such voluntary behavior is refers to customer citizenship behavior that benefit both service provide and other customers (Balaji, 2014). In the modern business and economics practices, it is expected that relationship marketing could bonded between university and their alumni. However, past studies in relationship marketing, systematically skewed on student satisfaction and loyalty (Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen, 2001; Helen & Ho, 2011; Rojas-Méndez & Vasquez-Parraga, 2015) and lack of focus in understanding their alumni behaviors.

Studies on university's alumni in Malaysia relatively lack as compared to Western's country. This is due to the reason of low awareness of the importance of alumni to university's development (Abdul Rejab, 2015). Another typical perception is that alumni is always strongly associate with donors or giving behavior per se. However, in reality, alumni activities not solely associated with donors but lies in building long term relationship between alumni and alma maters. As highlighted by Nordin (2014) during his speech in *'Hi tea for Johor Chapter Alumni's of Universiti Sains Malaysia'*, university's success not only depends on quality of the existing students but also directly influenced by contribution of their alumni. Weerts, Cabrera and Sanford

(2010) indicate that, alumni could maintain their long term relationship and reciprocate by involves in various activities of universities not limited to donor and giving per se. For instance, alumni can be a political advocacy, hosting and volunteering alma mater's event, participating in alma mater's special events, recruiting potential students, mentoring new alumni (career mentoring and provide networking opportunities) (Weerts, et al., 2010).

Surprisingly, very limited study had been explored in understanding alumni voluntary behavior that goes beyond donor and giving (Weerts et al., 2010; Weerts & Ronca, 2007). Despite the growing number of literatures pertaining alumni attitude and behavior towards their alma mater, little is known on other alumni behaviors that goes beyond donor and gift (Weerts et al., 2010). Previous studies on alumni behavior relates to willingness to give and donor (such as Gottfried, 2008; Hoyt, 2004; McAlexander, Keonig & DuFault, 2014; Hunter, Jones & Boger, 1999; Thomas & Smart, 2005). Beside, few researchers attempt to understand non-donors characteristics and behavior among alumni (such as McDearmon & Shirley, 2009; Wastyn, 2009). Recent study among Malaysian alumni also specifically zoomed in donor and giving behavior (Muhammad et al., 2014). Initially, this study attempts to determine how Malaysian alumni behave towards their alma mater. Grounded based on Social Exchange Theory, this study try to propose possible alumni citizenship behaviors that goes beyond giving and donor.

In line with latest higher education "The 10 Shift" transformation plan, understanding of alumni citizenship behaviors could benefits various stakeholders, especially the university and the government. This study could benefits university leaders to evaluate whether current practices and strategies to encourage alumni support are adequate or vice versa. For instance, the shed light on educational experience, university-community networking and university reputation would not only strengthening the bond between alma mater and alumni, but also evidence for university readiness to embed philanthropy of volunteerism especially in Malaysia context.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Alumni Citizenship Behavior*

Social exchange theory basic premise is based on 'give and take' in the relationship between both parties. In the context of university and alumni, alumni would perceived as they had received something before reciprocate to give something back in return. For instance, excellent quality academic experience, mentoring, favorable faculty/student ratio, strong academic reputation, frequent contact from alma mater and graduation rate among the strong determinant for alumni support especially donor and gift giving behavior (Weerts & Ronca, 2007; Clotfelter, 2003; Monks, 2003; Gunsalus, 2004). Little is understand other supportive behavior among the alumni (Weerts et al., 2010).

Such exchange and reciprocal has been discussed widely in the context of organizational behavior which commonly associate with extra-role behavior, prosocial behavior, discretionary behavior, voluntary behavior and organizational citizenship behavior (Organ, 1988). The most commonly cited work of reciprocal and exchange behavior is based on Organ's (1988) conceptualization of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).

However, the study on OCB is directed to understand how employees' behavior could contribute to overall organizational performance. Literature has consistently suggested that organizational effectiveness is enhanced when individual employee volunteer and go beyond their role requirements to perform activities that benefit the organization or colleagues. (Podsakoff, Ahearne, & MacKenzie, 1997; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994).

Therefore, just like OCB, alumni citizenship behavior (ACB) can be defined as behaviors that are discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promote the effective functioning of the university. The concept of citizenship behavior is based on the principle of reciprocity i.e. alumni tend to reciprocate a high-quality relationship with their university and other alumni by engaging in behaviors valuable to the university.

The following Table I, summarized the original OCB's dimension as highlighted by Podsakoff, MacKeinzie, Paine, and Bachrach (2000)

TABLE I  
OCB DIMENSIONS

No.	OCB Dimensions
1.	Helping behavior (voluntarily helping others with, or preventing the occurrence of, work related problems)
2.	Organizational compliance (meticulous adherence to the organization's rules, regulations, and procedures, even when no one observes or monitors it)
3.	Individual initiative (engagement in task-related behavior at a level that it reaches a voluntary stage)
4.	Sportsmanship (willingness to tolerate the inevitable inconvenience and imposition of work without complaining)
5.	Organizational loyalty (promoting the organization to the outsiders)
6.	Self-development (voluntary improvement of knowledge, skills and abilities)
7.	Civic virtue (macro-level interest in the organization as a whole and active participation in its governance, in monitoring its environment and in looking for its best interests)

Source : Podsakoff et al. (2000)

#### *Possible Alumni Citizenship Behavior Dimensions*

Previous studies on alumni systematically directed to donor and giving behavior. As such, little is understood on other alumni behaviors specifically in Malaysia context. Review of literatures indicates few themes and conceptualization of citizenship behaviors among alumni emerged. Among others; donor and giving (Muhammad et al., 2015; Yang, 2014), McAlexander et al., 2014; McDearmon & Shirley, 2009; Toker & Kankaton, 2008; Sargeant et al., 2007; Thomas & Smart, 2005, Hoyt, 2004; Hunter et al., 1999 and Tom & Elmer, 1994), alumni behavior support (Aini, 2014; Mael & Ashforth, 1992), volunteer behavior (Weerts et al., 2010; Weerts & Ronca, 2007), customer helping behavior (Johnson & Rapp, 2010), brand community integration (McAlexander et al., 2006) and service behavior (Fenzel & Maryland, 2005).

In short, few scholars underlined the alumni behavior that goes beyond giving and donor such as Aini (2014), Weerts et al. (2010) and Heckman & Guskey (1998). However, these scholars did not suggest any specific alumni supportive behaviors. In conclusion, they employed unidimensional construct. Hence, this study attempts to develop a new conceptualization on alumni supportive behavior using multidimensional construct that is consistent with OCB conception.

#### *Previous Researches on Alumni Behavior*

Weerts and Ronca (2007) attempt to profile the alumni behavior into four broad continuum namely; 1) inactive, 2) volunteer, 3) donor and 4) supporter. Inactive refers to alumni with no record of donor and volunteer while volunteer is defined as alumni that support alma mater in one or more activities of institution. Donor associate with financial support only and supporter is conceptualized as alumni that support financial and volunteer in various activities held by the institution. Their findings suggested that life stage (age, employment status), inclination to give and volunteer and connection to campus (social, cultural, recreational) plays a significant role in defining inactive and active alumni. Contrary to expectation, social exchange theory dimension (academic and social experience) is insignificant.

Aini (2014) conceptualized alumni behavior as alumni behavior support adapted from organizational identification and support for the organization. The author attempt to conceptualize the alumni behavior support into promotion to the institution and donor. Six determinants namely organizational distinctive, organizational prestige, competitiveness, satisfaction, sentimentality and student's organizational involvement were proposed to influence alumni behavior support. Study among 234 alumni of State University in Indonesia suggested that organizational distinctiveness, sentimentality and student's organizational involvement and organizational identification were identified as a significantly affect alumni support for the institution. Toker and Kankotan (2008) also significantly highlight that alumni with strong organizational identification had strong intensity in involving in donor behavior. In the same vein, Sargeant et al. (2007) try to chart the brand personality into giving behavior. A qualitative study among 90 respondents from visual impairment, children and animal welfare charity partners in United Kingdom revealed four charity brand personality namely; emotional engagement, service, voice and tradition had significantly explained individual giving behavior.

Earlier study of McAlexander et al. (2006) proposed to test the relevancy of brand community model and construct in higher education specifically among alumni. The authors attempt to investigate whether alumni's experiences create significant relationships with the product (their education), the brand (university's name, logos, mascots, etc), the institution (faculty and staff) and other alumni and how such relationship further affect their behavior (volunteerism and donor). A study among 1673 alumni from university of Western United State revealed that brand community also relevant in higher education. Integration in brand community could leverage into favorable alumni behavior such as donations, college referrals, engagement in alumni groups and participating in continuing education (McAlexander et al., 2006). McAlexander et al. (2014) further asserted that capacity and affinity were the main predictors for intention to donate. The study among 7460 United State university's alumni further indicate that affinity, rather than wealth (capacity to give) was the superior predictor of intention to donate. In addition, study by Hoyt (2004) among 383 alumni (donors and non-donors) also indicated capacity to give significantly influence intention to give thus lead to donor status.

Yang (2014) extend the literature in alumni donor behavior by linking the conformity and reciprocity among 70 alumni of Ohio Wesley University. It is proposed that conformity is refers to 'one does not require that one always contributes to the public good, but rather that one must do so if everyone else in one's reference group does' (Yang, 2014; 2) while reciprocity is observed when people is reward kind actions and be kind to other and vice versa (Falk & Fischbacher, 2006). The findings of Yang (2014) statistically failed to prove a significant relationship between conformity and reciprocity due to the small sample size and homogenous sample. The author suggested future research that covers larger sample as well as establishing new index of conformity and reciprocity of alumni behavior.

## METHODOLOGY

This study expands on those exploratory quantitative work done by earlier researchers to understand possible alumni citizenship behaviors (Wastyn, 2009). As an initial study, this study employed focus group interview comprised of five alumni from one of the management university in northern part of Malaysia. The sampling procedure employed a simple random from the list of graduate from 2000 for whom current contact information available. Focus group interviews initially follows a structured five major questions, but unfortunately turn away from the planned questions to enable participants initiated topics. All the interview sessions were recorded via audio recording devices, and then transcribed. Respondents' name was set as anonymous to avoid any conflict. Profile of the participants as in Table II:

TABLE II  
PROFILE OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Respondents	Profile
Mr. A	Male, 30 years old, Malay, Regional Manager Maybank, President of Student Marketing Club during college.
Mr. B	Male, 41 years old, Malay, Head Credit Management BSN, active member of student club during college.
Ms. C	Female, 28 years old, Chinese, Executive Cold Storage, excellent in academic during college.
Ms. D	Female, 39 years old, Malay, HR Head Hotel X, excellent in academic during college.
Mr. E	Male, 28 years old, Malay, Financial Planner AIA, active in sports and club during college.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Alumni Citizenship Behavior*

Participants in this study shared a similar and good experiences during their study. They had a positive feelings and highly committed towards their alma mater. Majority falls into Gen-Y alumni which considered more advanced with gadget and information technology development, a team player and enthusiast on information sharing (Anderson & Rainie, 2010). The personal narratives of these alumni towards citizenship behaviors fall into five major themes namely; donors and giving, university loyalty, university engagement, coaching and monitoring and university recommendation.

### *Donors and Giving*

Previous research by Wastyn (2009) highlighted that the main reason why alumni didn't involve in donor behavior mainly because their 'neediness' perception towards their alma mater. This assumption leads to further examination on alumni donors and giving behavior. When participant where asked on their readiness to donate or giving, mixed answer were gathered:

*"I'm not really sure, but if I've the capability I won't avoid to support the university." (Ms.C, 12 December 2015)*

*"I think university already have enough monetary budget supported by the government" (Mr. E, 12 December 2015).*

Consistent with Wastyn (2009) findings, participants perceived that university is not needy financially as gained official budget yearly by the federal government. Participants also explained that their family required more financial support to survive especially related to higher cost of living.

*"Personally, I consider myself not in a stable condition, hmm...financially, too many commitment lo....so I would say that I could not contribute monetarily" (Ms. C, 12 December 2015)*

Though alumni ready to donate and giving back monetarily to their university, it is important to note that, they prefer to be based on voluntarily basis. This is highlighted by one of the participant:

*"Ya, I'm ready for that, why not..but I don't what university decide the deduction amount. I will volunteer to put what I have..may be on monthly basis....not huge money, but consistent." (Mr. A, 12 Disember 2015)*

Further investigation were addressed by asking participants on their non-monetary contribution or support to their alumni. Interestingly, the findings suggest few possible citizenship behaviors that stand beyond donors and giving.

#### *University loyalty*

When participants were asked on their willingness to come back to their university as a student, the following answer were recorded:

*"Oh, sorry, I'm currently pursuing my Master at other university. Not because not loyal..it's quite far for me now" (Ms. C, 12 Disember 2015).*

*"Ya, will consider it, may be next few year after stable. And perhaps they can offer me with suitable program, master level" (Ms. D, 12 Disember 2015)*

*"Depends on what university offer, I think 80% yes" (Mr. A, 12 Disember 2015)*

*"hmmm.....may be I will seek new experience from other university. For variety..not because I don't like my former university" (Mr. B, 12 December 2015)*

*"Sure, 100%! , haha" (Mr. E, 12 December 2015)*

Based on the findings, it is indicate that, element of loyalty exist among the alumni. This is in line with the OCB's dimension of organizational loyalty. Oliver (1999) suggests that loyalty exist when people tend to repeat their purchase specifically in the case of higher education when people intend to further their study in the same institution. However, based on the findings, it is crucial for university management to consider new and variety program offered to their potential students. Among other things, university also need to expand their market by offering their academic program at new branches which is close to potential students especially for post-graduate programs.

#### *University Engagement*

Mael and Ashforth (1992) through Social Identity Theory suggested alumni identification with their alma mater will engage with favorable behavior such as commit to donor, advising, mentoring and participating in alumni and institutional function. Sargeant et al. (2008) also suggest specific personality also will determine giving behavior. Hence, in depth interview was conducted to understand alumni readiness to participate and engaged with their university.

*"For me, no harm helping my alma mater. I become what I am today because my alma mater provide me with good preparation to become a goooooood manager..seriously, we have trained towards business working environment during our college, why not giving back" (Mr. B, 12 December 2015).*

*"Ya..ya..true, me too, I was one of the reviewer when my faculty conducted their review...academic...something like that. Based on our experience and match with what industry need, we suggest few amendment on subjects, that maybe no more relevant, such as learning Microsoft Words, Excel, Powerpoint....that one aa...I told you so boring" (Mr. A, 12 December 2015).*

*“Ya..maybe by attending all events invited by the university such as this focus group” (Ms. D, 12 December, 2015).*

*“I’m one of the bikers’ club members, last few months we had an event at campus, we had a charity donation by the club to student activities.” (Mr. B, 12 December 2015)*

Based on the findings, it is suggest that, alumni that have strong emotional engagement with the university image and brand would engage more in the university image. Thus, the results concur with the findings of Sargeant et al. (2008); Mael and Ashforth (1992) and Heckman and Guskey (1998).

#### *Coaching and Mentoring*

Based on the OCB theory, participants were asked their individual initiative to helping other. Findings suggest that alumni also voluntarily offer themselves to be a mentor and coach for the student as their contribution back to their institution. This is consistent with Potsakoff et al. (2000) helping behavior and individual initiative dimensions of OCB and Weerts and Ronca (2007) profiles between inactive, supporters, donor versus volunteer. The findings are as follows:

*“In my case, this is not the first time joining such event conducted by university. Last year I was called by faculty to deliver speech for new students.. I glad to share my experience and helping my former faculty” (Mr. B, 12 December 2015)*

*“Yes, I can provide coaching for student if they like to join in insurances industry...it is free”. (Mr. E, 12 December 2015)*

*“My friend of mine have her own business, basuh-basuh...ya...ya..detergent..they recruit new agent among fresh graduate of this university..I think this one also could consider helping university.” (Ms. C, 12 December 2015)*

*“I put my priority to my alma mater application. Not for work la..not bias one. Especially for internship placement. Currently I’ve three interns from my former university at my office. I proud to work with my junior in one team” (Ms. D, 12 December 2015)*

Weerts and Ronca (2007) also suggest that, alumni that voluntarily support the university had a positive emotional bond and had formed deeper connections with their alma mater and this significantly arouse their understanding and responsibility towards supporting their alma mater.

#### *University Recommendation*

Further, participants were asked what else in their opinion really help their alma mater. Interestingly, majority of the alumni said they help to promote their alma mater to others. As a result of highly satisfied and highly committed alumni, most of the participants indirectly promote their university by numerous ways. The findings;

*“I still have my alma mater t-shirt with logo, I still wear it....haha..need to look for new one lah..no more fit..” (Ms. C, 12 December 2015)*

McAlexander et al. (2006) suggest that, alumni that have strong sense of community would support the brand by wear the university logo, and attempts to promote to other (Heckman & Guskey, 1998).

*“At office, colleagues also seek our opinion for higher education for their kids. Of course, I will suggest my university..mana boleh yang lain” (Ms. D, 12 December, 2015)*

Heckman and Guskey (1998) also consistently found that most common supportive behavior among alumni either at past and future was recommendation their alma mater to the others. Hence, the current result is supported whereby, alumni where at highly supportive the alma maters by promoting the university to others. One of the participation extends his view;

*“I’m finance product promoter, I’m also my alma mater promoter...people always asked me, graduate? I said, yes, I’ve degree...from this university..so, why shy become a salesman.? You can excellent in your area as long as you have learn everything you need to know to deal with your customer during college, Alhamdulillah, I’ve gained that during my time...and I will strongly suggest my alma mater to others”*

This finding support the conceptualization of new dimension of customer helping behavior by Johnson and Rapp (2010) such as expanding behavior, specifically relates to customer willingness to recommend the organization to others and spreading positive word of mouth. Hence, this study also concurs with the Podsakoff et al. (2000) organizational loyalty dimension.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study contributes to extend the existing knowledge on alumni supportive behavior. Even though study on understand alumni behaviors towards their alma mater had gained considerable attention, but lack of study that attempted to examine what are relevant alumni behaviors that goes beyond donors and giving. Based on the focus group study, five major alumni behaviors that is conceptualized as alumni citizenship behavior were identified; donors and giving, university loyalty, university engagement, coaching and mentoring and university recommendation. These behaviors is useful to university's management to strengthen their strategy related to alumni. Based on the study, it is observed that only committed alumni would contribute back to the university. Alumni that previously active during the college tends to be exhibit more favorable citizenship behavior as compared to those academic-achiever. Hence, alumni profiles need to be recorded as there is tendency of existence of specific pattern between those highly-engaged alumni versus inactive alumni. Ability to profile alumni characteristics would enable university's management to tailor effective programs that could enhance alumni contribution to their alma mater. This is hold true, whereby participant also addressed the urgency of university to be more aggressive in promoting the alumni activities. Alumni state that they were not aware enough on their alma mater activities involving alumni. University's management should consider more platform to alumni to 'interact' with their alma mater.

Interestingly, most of the identified themes were similar to those found in OCB. As this study limit in term of number of participant, further study could not be undertaken. Future research should validate these theme and attempt to examine underlying factors that leads to alumni citizenship behavior.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article is based on Fundamental Research Grant Scheme funded by Ministry of Higher Education [S/O Code: 13242(2015)].

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