# Predictors of Organization-Public Relationship Attributes on University's Image of a Malaysian Private University

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**Abstract**
Relationship studies have emerged tremendously as an important field of study in communication science, particularly in the field of Public Relations. However, the influence of Organization-Public Relationship (OPR) attributes in the education industry remains understudied. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between OPR attributes and image in a Malaysian private university. A quantitative (survey) method was employed using convenient sampling in which 117 valid responses were collected. The data were then analyzed using Pearson-Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression analysis through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Based on the findings, OPR attributes, namely trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, and openness yielded positive and moderate relationships with the university's image, whereas commitment generates a positive and high relationship with the university's image. In addition, multiple regression analysis showed that commitment and satisfaction were the significant two predictors that can help to increase the university's image. The study contributes to the Public Relations scholarship by incorporating Openness as another important attribute to expand the original OPR model by testing it empirically in the

Malaysian private higher education context. The university's management will benefit from this study as OPR helps to shape the favorable image and perception of the institutions which serves as a marketing and branding tool in relationship management to attract potential students and retain the current ones.

**Introduction**

Relationship studies are the core of communication science (Zaharna, 2016), especially in the domain of public relations (Lee & Kim, 2021). Contemporary communication studies, it has gauged an interest of academics that look into public relations as part of the management functions in an education setting (Anggreni, 2018; Rawat, 2019). In Malaysia, the private higher education institutions (PHEIs) were the largest contributor to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with RM31.5 billion to the Malaysian economy in 2018, and it has been projected to increase by RM65 billion in 2025 and RM84 billion by 2030 (Rajaendram, 2020), and this has been supported by Chin (2019), that the Malaysia Education Blueprint for Higher Education (2015-2025) aims to attract 250,000 international students by the year 2025. This has shown that Malaysia represents a big percentage of the total demand for higher education globally.

To date, there are currently 47 private universities, 34 university colleges, and 10 foreign university branch campuses operating in Malaysia (StudyMalaysia, 2020). This has caused tight competition in the private higher education sector (Panda et al., 2018). This has supported the notion of Ramos-Monge et al (2017) that many PHEIs are likely to adopt the business approach to survive in the turbulent change of the industry due to the challenging business environment, where universities are the contemporary business entities (Chang et al., 2018).

In addition, due to the nature of PHEIs as the servicing industry where the students (customers) are the main stakeholder of the institutions, they are becoming more demanding, sophisticated, and they have a high expectation of the quality of the university (Degtjarjova et al., 2018; Manzuma-Ndaaba et al., 2018). Thus, this has caused the environments of the universities to become more complex (Khanyile, 2018), and universities are also like other corporations and they are not excluded from risks and crises (Moerschell & Novak, 2020), where all these challenges would jeopardize the image and reputation of the institutions if not well handle. Therefore, stakeholder management and the university's image are the dominant factors to maintain and attract the stakeholder, and also to ensure the sustainability of the institutions (Khanyile, 2018; Manzoor et al., 2020). For students, the image of an educational institution is important as it leads the public in trusting the university as a place to further their studies (Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabando et al., 2018; Perez & Torres, 2017).

To help the institution in delivering good services to the stakeholders, Anggreni (2018) stated that higher education institutions need public relations as an integral part of the management team to achieve strategic goals and organizational accountability. Thus, the practice of public relations is important in an organization. Promotion and communication representatives are mostly represented by public relations and this includes upholding an organization's image in the eyes of the public (Olariu, 2017).

Public Relations is a prominent communication function in organizations, thus, openness and transparency of the communication between organizations and their stakeholders become very crucial to manage (Muntaha et al., 2019). Although Hon and Grunig (1999), have come up with the six dimensions of the Organization-Public Relationship (OPR), which are trust, commitment, satisfaction, control mutuality, exchange relationship, and communal relationship. However, Grunig et al (1992) suggested that the quality of OPRs might be measured through these dimensions of reciprocity, trust, mutual legitimacy, openness, mutual satisfaction, and mutual understanding. Hence the initial list of 17 dimensions (Ledingham et al., 1997) conducted a relationship review and identified 17 dimensions originally) was then reduced to five (trust, openness, involvement, commitment, and investment. and operationalized through research with key publics (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

Hon and Gruning's (1999) dimensions, did not have openness or open communication as highlighted by Ledingham and Bruning's (1998) OPR dimensions. Thus, based on the integration of the prominent OPR attributes as mentioned in the past studies, the current study included openness as an attribute of the OPR. This has further supported the notion of various scholars on openness and transparency as part of the strategic communication process to achieve organizational outcomes (Albu & Flyverbom, 2019; Hopp & Fisher, 2021; Köhler & Zerfass, 2019).

Recently Ferguson (2018) argues that theory development in the field of Public Relations will not be much in the future, although there may be activities and research done in the field of Public Relations. Thus, the applicability of other social sciences theories should also be utilized to explain the discipline of relationship management. This has further supported the notion of Valentini and Lee (2019) that the theoretical landscape of Public Relations has expanded. It incorporates a wide range of multi-faceted analyses and theories as the field is multidisciplinary and rooted in various social sciences fields. Based on the above notion, therefore, the current study looks from the social psychological perspective in relationship management by applying the Social Exchange Theory which was developed by Homans (1961) to explain the relationship between an organization (university) and its stakeholder (students) through the OPR as a form of exchange.

Although there are many studies have been done regarding OPR, for instance in the hospital/ health industry (Seltzer et al., 2012), banking (Ki, 2013; Suciyati, 2013), food and beverages (Ahmed & Khan, 2019), transportation (Selin, 2017), political context (Browning & Sweetser, 2020), and some studies that look into the OPR dimensions and image of a university (see Mohammed, 2014; Mohammed & Sharipudin, 2017), but they are focused on public universities, hence, studies on the PHEI setting were scantily found.

Other than that, Manzoor et al (2020) also stated that research on the image in organizations such as universities requires further exploration and research. Research on image and students' experiences in universities is important because they have direct experiences with their universities (Ramdan et al., 2021). Hence, their perceptions are crucial in determining the success and the survival of an educational institution.

Based on the gaps highlighted, therefore, this research aims to ascertain the relationship between OPR attributes (trust, control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction,

openness) and university image. In addition, the study also aims to find the best contributing factors of OPR and the university's image of a private university in Malaysia.

**Literature Review**
*Theoretical Foundations*
Social exchange theory (SET) is used in this study to explain the relationship between OPR and the university's image. The theory posits a reciprocal relationship between two parties established through an analysis of cost and benefit (Gergen, 1969). Homans (1961) explained that when individuals receive more benefits than the risks, they are more likely to retain the relationship, and in return when individuals outweigh the risks over benefits, they will abandon the relationship. Hence, by applying SET in this research, students/ customers who have benefited from the university will perceive the institution in a positive light; thus, contributing positively to the image. On contrary, when a university (organization) fails to meet the benefits and expectations of students (customers), a negative perception will be formed; affecting the image of the institution. When students (customers) benefit positively from the university through relationship management, they tend to exchange the feel-good feelings and satisfaction obtained for a favorable image which in the long run, will lead to an improved reputation of the institution.

***Definitions of Organization-Public Relationship (OPR)***
Public relations is defined as "a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 2). Hence, the focus on relationships between an organization and its public is key in the study of public relations i.e. Organization-public relationship (OPR). Jackson and Center (1995) state that the desired outcomes of public relations should be enhanced OPR.

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) define OPR as "the state that exists 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).

Hon and Grunig (1999) develop dimensions of OPR that included trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, and commitment. The dimensions of trust, commitment, satisfaction, open communication, control mutuality, and other relational outcomes have been the nexus variables for the study of OPR (Bruning et al., 2008; Huang, 2001; Kim, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning 1998; Vlahović et al., 2020; Waters, 2008; Yang & Grunig, 2005). The common aspects of defining OPR have always been either the process of forming relationships or the outcomes of those relationships formed (see Bowen et al., 2016; Browning et al., 2020; Muhammad, 2014). Huang and Zhang (2013) found two research clusters of OPR: The first one was on the relational outcomes and the other was focused on explicating the definitive aspects of OPR from the public's attitude towards an organization. Hence, shifting the focal point from the organization to the public.

***Organization-Public Relationship Dimension***
Hon & Grunig (1999) and Jo (2006) have supported the claim by stating that the primary indicator in relationship management is trust. Hence, it is a strong conviction that the public perceived an institution as trustworthy, truthful, and stands by its words when its promise is

being fulfilled (Ki, 2006). According to Hon and Grunig (1999), control mutuality is the degree to which parties consent on who has the legitimate authority to influence one another. Satisfaction is in which the rewards outweigh the costs (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Ki (2006) then described satisfaction as determined by the degree to which the benefits of relationships surpass the expectations of all parties and generate more benefits than costs from a satisfying relationship. Commitment refers to the degree to which trust that it is worth investing to preserve and facilitate the relationship (Hon and Grunig, 1999). This implies that the party involved believes that the relationship is worth working on to ensure it endures indefinitely. Shen (2011) defined openness as the behavioral attempts by an organization to share information about the organization and clarify the state of its interactions with stakeholders.

### Corporate Image

Corporate image is grounded in the external environment, comprising a set of beliefs and feelings of the public towards an organization (Dowling, 2006; Schultz et al., 1997; Simoes & Dibb, 2008; Walker, 2010) which can either mirror or distort the organization's identity (Fombrun, 1996) which can be threatened during the crisis (Sawalha, 2019). An organization's image varies depending on the public's experiences, beliefs, emotions, knowledge, relations, and the impressions they have of an organization (Vella & Melewar, 2008). It is important not to lose the good image of an organization where Aghaz et al (2015) pointed out that a well-known university is most likely to lose its status if organizational images are not well maintained. Moreover, Alves and Raposo (2010) mention that universities ought to evaluate their images among the target audience to determine how their images can improve the university to achieve the desired image.

Wilkins and Huisman (2013) also state that corporate image is what the stakeholders focus on and its evaluation when purchasing includes services, expensive products, or requiring long-term engagement. Hence, maintaining a long-term relationship with the stakeholders is crucial to retaining the business of the organization. Therefore, effective public relations is needed to manage good relationships as it shows its impact on building a good image, identity, and reputation of the organization as well as solving issues between the organization and its key public.

### Relationship between Organization-Public Relationship (OPR) attributes and its Outcomes

Ki (2013) investigates the OPR indicators, namely control mutuality, satisfaction, trust, and commitment to the behavior and attitudes of consumers in the retail banking industry. The results show that all four attributes contribute significantly to predicting the consumers' attitudes in the banks understudied. Similarly, the findings of Zeqiri (2020) urge to focus more on mutual trust and satisfaction to build a positive government-community relationship in the Republic of North Macedonia, which also supports the notion of Bowen et al., (2016) that ethics is an important precursor in building trust in the OPR's and excellence theory in public relations.

Mohammed (2014) investigates the influence of OPR practices and a university's performance in one of the Malaysian public universities. The OPR dimensions were trust, commitment, community involvement, control mutuality, and satisfaction. The findings reveal that commitment and satisfaction have a moderately significant relationship with the university's performance, whereas trust, community involvement, and control mutuality have

a weak relationship with the university's effectiveness, and all the predictors significantly contributed 31.1% to the university's effectiveness.

In addition, Mohammed and Sharipudin (2017), find significant relationships between OPR practices and organizational reputation in a study involving Malaysian public universities. The study indicated that trust, involvement, commitment, and satisfaction were shown to be the strongest contributing factors of OPR which are similar to the findings of Kim and Park (2017), who found that OPR, namely commitment, control mutuality, and trust positively influenced external reputation in Korean small and medium-sized IT corporations.

The link between good relationships and organizational reputation has been researched by scholars such as (Fombrun, 1996; Carroll & Combs 2003; Kiousis et al., 2007) who posited that quality relationships are the key precursor of favorable reputation. The common aspects in defining OPR have always been either the process of relationship formation or the outcomes of those relationships formed (Yang & Grunig, 2005). According to Ki and Hon (2007), Communal relationships are significant for an organization in contributing to society and being socially responsible. Exchange relationships are more reciprocal where one party gives benefits to the other because of a past deed or anticipation of a future deed. Ki and Hon (2007) suggested that perceptions of communal and exchange relationships could be better suited for junior and senior students as of the time continuum of established relationships as compared to new ones with freshmen or sophomores. However, it is the quality of the relational outcomes between an organization and its public that is associated positively with a favorable reputation. Moreover, Lee and Choi (2009) found that OPR attributes such as (social service, exchange relationship, trust, communal relationship, and familiarity were the predictors of corporate image in Korean corporations.

According to Al-salhi et al (2021), relationship cultivation strategies have been used by organizations to influence the quality of relational outcomes and their study found that the level of trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction in university-student relations can affect reputation. Hence, they reinforced the importance of relationship management as a factor that creates values and can increase the effectiveness of an organization in various circumstances. Similarly, Oparaugo (2021), stated that public relations are a strategic tool in building and sustenance of corporate image.

Song and Liew (2017) examined satisfaction, trust, control mutuality, and open communication as the determinants of relationship quality in the Malaysian telecommunication industry. The results revealed that trust has the strongest positive impact on relationship quality, followed by satisfaction, however, control mutuality and open communication were not influencing the relationship quality. Ramli and Samat (2018) intended to examine the factors namely attitudes, trust, skills, and control mutuality as the contributing factors to the effectiveness of public relations practices. The findings showed that all four factors positively influenced the effectiveness of public relations practices, however, only attitude and skills are the predictors. This has aligned with the study of Osobajo and Moore (2017), where their findings showed activity links, resources ties, actor bond, mutual benefit, communication, control mutuality, mutual goal, and culture are the main antecedents of relationship quality, while trust, satisfaction, and commitment are the essential outcomes of relationship quality.

In addition, Kim (2018) tests the internal public relations practices and organizational social capital, moderated by the employee-organizational relationship in the Korean context. The results revealed that two-way and symmetrical internal communication strategies (open communication) were positively related to the employee-organization relationships and organizational social capital. Furthermore, satisfaction and control mutuality have mediated the relations between internal communication strategies and organizational social capital.

Suciyati (2013) finds that in marketing public relations, service quality influences corporate image significantly in the Indonesian banking industry. The results showed that marketing public relations, and service quality influence corporate image significantly. This supports the notion that the function of public relations is pivotal for corporations to formulate favorable relations and build a positive image (Ahmed & Khan, 2019; Singh & Pandey, 2017).

Alhadid and Qaddomi (2016) investigate the role of public relations and corporate image in a Jordanian private university, through the moderating role of social media. The study focused on the employees of the middle management and results indicated that there is a significant impact of public relations on corporate image and the moderating role of social media was also ascertained. Based on the above discussion, therefore, the current study is conceptualized and hypothesized:
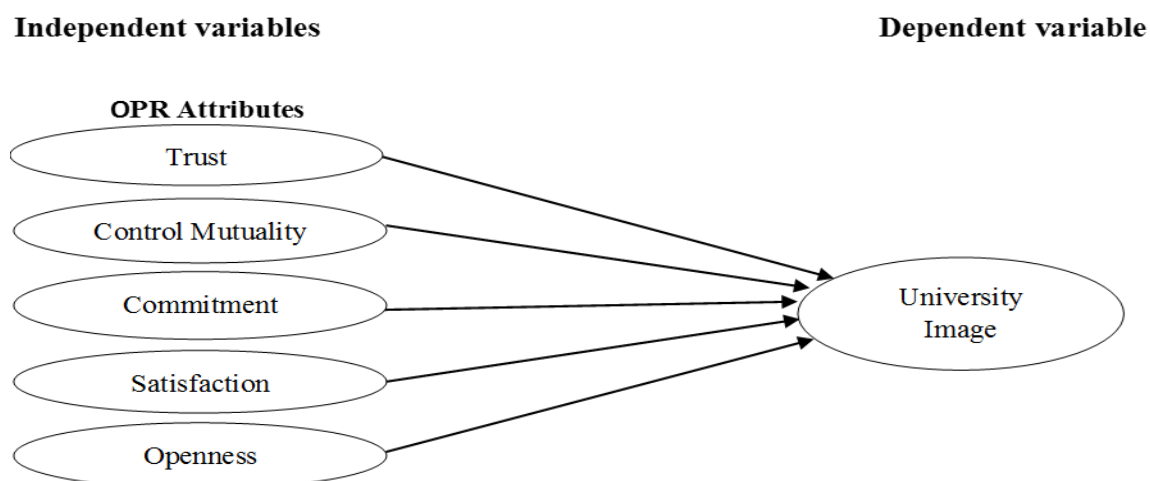


**Independent variables**                    **Dependent variable**

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
$H_1$: There is a positive relationship between trust and a university's image.
$H_2$: There is a positive relationship between control mutuality and a university's image.
$H_3$: There is a positive relationship between commitment and a university's image.
$H_4$: There is a positive relationship between satisfaction and a university's image.
$H_5$: There is a positive relationship between openness and a university's image.
$H_6$: OPR attributes (trust, control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, openness) are the predictors of a university's image.

**Methodology**
*Research Design*
Quantitative research was applied in this study which includes the gathering of quantifiable evidence, statistics, and analysis (Apuke, 2017). Survey research is the most prominent method among all forms of quantitative study as stated by Babbie (2020), who emphasized

that survey design is one of the best methods of social science studies because it can help researchers explain several research objectives in one research.

### Sampling Procedures

A non-probability sampling (convenient) was used in this study as researchers were unable to get the sampling frame (population's list). To know the sample size for the current study, researchers used the A-priori sample size technique (Memon *et al*., 2020) via the power analysis as it is a prominent analysis in most social sciences research as suggested by Hair et al., (2017), and the sample size via the G*Power 3.1.9.2 software indicated that the minimum sample size for the current study is 92 (effect size: 0.15; power: 80; number of predictors: 5). Thus, 117 valid responses were deemed sufficient for statistical analysis. It has reinforced the notion of Bougie and Sekaran (2019) that for social science studies a sample size ranging from 30 to 500 would be appropriate and reasonable.

### Measurement

There are 3 sections in the questionnaires which are Section A, B, and C. The English language was used as the medium for the entire questionnaire. Section A was the questions on demographic information of the respondents such as gender, age, race, nationality, education level, and year of study. Section B was items on the 5 dimensions of OPR which are trust, control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, and openness which were modified and adapted from (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Shen, 2011). Section C was items on the university's image which were derived from Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001).

The research instrument consists of 29 questions (six questions on the profile of the respondents, 20 questions on the dimensions of OPR, and three questions for the university's image) using the 5-point Likert-type like scale, where 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Somewhat agree; 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly agree.

### Data Collection Procedures

Researchers distributed the survey through Google Forms and distributed the link through various social media platforms to solicit the responses. The data collection started from early October 2020 till the end of October 2020, nearly a month. However, during the period of the data collection when Malaysia was still under the conditional movement control order (CMCO), where it was challenging to solicit more data from the respondents even though the link has been shared on various platforms. The researchers assured the respondents' confidentiality of their information.

### Reliability Analysis

A reliability test was conducted to test the internal consistency and stability of the variables in the measurement. 30 sets of questionnaires were distributed to the students of a private college as a pilot test. The results showed that the variables are reliable for both pre-test and post-test (Table 1). The results indicated that Cronbach's Alpha value ranged from α=.804 to α=.951. According to Saunders et al., (2019), reliability analysis can be accepted when Cronbach's alpha coefficient is more than 0.70 of the threshold value.

Table 1
*Cronbach's alpha value of the variables*

| Variable(s) | No. of items | Cronbach's Alpha Value (Pre-Test, n=30) | Cronbach's Alpha Value (Post-Test, n=117) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Dimensions of OPR** | | | |
| Trust | 4 | 0.893 | 0.886 |
| Control Mutuality | 4 | 0.901 | 0.873 |
| Commitment | 5 | 0.951 | 0.904 |
| Satisfaction | 4 | 0.937 | 0.939 |
| Openness | 3 | 0.804 | 0.826 |
| **University's Image** | 3 | 0.912 | 0.804 |

## Normality Analysis

To assess if the distributed data was normal or vice versa, Skewness and Kurtosis were used. According to Hair et al (2018), before conducting a multivariate analysis it is important to ensure that the data is normally distributed. With the consideration of 5% of sampling errors, the values for skewness and kurtosis should range from -2 to +2 for the data to be regarded as normally distributed (Siddiqi, 2014). Based on Table 2, the data is considered normally distributed as the skewness and kurtosis for both independent variables (IV) and dependent variable (DV) were ranged between -2 to +2. Therefore, multivariate analysis can still be carried out.

In this research, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance were used to access the multicollinearity which occurs when two or more variables are highly correlated (Allen, 2017). Furthermore, the VIF should not be greater than 10, and tolerance values should be greater than 0.10 (Hair et al., 2018). Table 2 showed that the range of tolerance is between 0.210 to 0.305 which is more than 0.10. The study's VIF range is between 3.276 to 4.754 which did not exceed the value of 10. Hence, it can be concluded that the current study has no issues with the multicollinearity problem among the independent variables.

Table 2
*Skewness and Kurtosis of the variables*

| Variable(s) | Min | Max | Skewness | Kurtosis | Tolerance | VIF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dimensions of OPR** | | | | | | |
| Trust | 4.00 | 20.00 | -0.087 | -0.136 | 0.238 | 4.201 |
| Control Mutuality | 4.00 | 20.00 | -0.069 | -0.523 | 0.247 | 4.050 |
| Commitment | 5.00 | 25.00 | -0.124 | -0.408 | 0.210 | 4.754 |
| Satisfaction | 4.00 | 20.00 | -0.087 | -0.201 | 0.254 | 3.936 |
| Openness | 3.00 | 15.00 | -0.228 | -0.393 | 0.305 | 3.276 |
| **University Image** | 3.00 | 15.00 | -0.005 | -0.301 | | |

## Results & Discussion

A total of 117 students participated in the study (Table 3). More than half (59.8%) of the respondents are females, and the rest (40.2%) are males. The majority (74.4%) of them are local students while the remaining are international students (25.6%). In terms of age group, the majority of the respondents are from the age group of 20 to 24 years old (84.6%). In addition, the data showed that the majority of the respondents are Bachelor's degree students (88.0%). In terms of year of study, almost half of the respondents are currently in Year 3 of the study (48.7%).

Table 3
*Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=117)*

| Variable(s) | *f* | % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Gender** | | |
| Male | 47 | 40.2 |
| Female | 70 | 59.8 |
| | | |
| **Student** | | |
| Local | 87 | 74.4 |
| International | 30 | 25.6 |
| | | |
| **Age** | | |
| 20 - 24 | 99 | 84.7 |
| 25 - 29 | 10 | 8.5 |
| 30 - 34 | 4 | 3.4 |
| 35 - 39 | 2 | 1.7 |
| > 44 | 2 | 1.7 |
| | | |
| **Race** | | |
| Malay | 36 | 30.8 |
| Chinese | 26 | 22.2 |
| Indian | 28 | 23.9 |
| Others | 27 | 23.1 |
| | | |
| **Education** | | |
| STPM/HSC/Diploma | 12 | 10.3 |
| Bachelor's degree | 103 | 88.0 |
| Postgraduate degree (Master/Ph.D) | 2 | 1.7 |
| | | |
| **Year of Study** | | |
| Year 1 | 22 | 18.8 |
| Year 2 | 34 | 29.1 |
| Year 3 | 57 | 48.7 |
| Year 4 | 4 | 3.4 |

According to Table 4, it shows that the correlation matrix among the dimensions of OPR, trust ($r = 0.621$, $p < 0.05$), control mutuality ($r = 0.611$, $p < 0.05$), satisfaction ($r = 0.686$, $p < 0.05$), openness ($r = 0.634$, $p < 0.05$) have a positive and moderate relationship with the university's image as a dependent variable. Furthermore, based on the results, commitment ($r = 0.728$, $p < 0.05$) seems to have a positive and high relationship with the university's image, where the interpretation of the strength of the relationship was based on Moore et al., (2013)'s indicators. Thus, the results showed significance in all the relationships. Therefore, it can be concluded that $H_1$, $H_2$, $H_3$, $H_4$, and $H_5$ were accepted. Hence, when the students of the university understudied perceived the OPR attributes positively, this will help boost the university's image.

Table 4
*Correlation test on the relationship between the dimension of OPR and the university's image (n=117)*

| Dimensions of OPR | University | Image |
|---|---|---|
|  | *r* | *p* |
| **Trust** | $0.621^{**}$ | .000 |
| **Control Mutuality** | $0.611^{**}$ | .000 |
| **Commitment** | $0.728^{**}$ | .000 |
| **Satisfaction** | $0.686^{**}$ | .000 |
| **Openness** | $0.634^{**}$ | .000 |

$^{**}$Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

To further test the contribution of the OPR (trust, mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, and openness) in predicting the university's image, a multiple regression analysis was administered through the Stepwise method. The result in Table 5 shows that commitment (Model 1) gives a significant result with $F = 129.800$, $p < 0.05$. As well as the combination of commitment and satisfaction (Model 2) which also gives a significant result ($F = 69.307$, $p < 0.05$). Meanwhile, multiple regression tests show that commitment significantly contributes 53.0 % of the variance ($R^2 = 0.530$) toward the university image of the total of 117 respondents in the study. This means that commitment ($\beta = 0.728$, $p < 0.05$) is the main contributing factor that causes a university to have a good image. However, with the combination of predictors commitment ($\beta = 0.517$, $p < 0.05$) and satisfaction ($\beta = 0.251$, $p < 0.05$), the contribution value of variance towards university's image has increased to 54.9%. Therefore, the increment was 1.9% (54.9 - 53.0). Based on the multiple regression analysis, $H_6$ is partially accepted, and it showed the predicting factors of OPR dimensions and the university's image are commitment and satisfaction. Attributes that do not significantly contribute to this study were trust, control mutuality, and openness. Hence, it can be concluded that there are some other variables (45.1%) that are currently not being investigated in this study that can contribute to the increment of the university's image.

Table 5
*Coefficient regression of independent variables: Multiple regression analysis*

| Model | | B | Beta | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | (Constant) | 3.077 | | 6.051 | 0.000 |
| | Commitment | 0.390 | 0.728 | 11.393 | 0.000 |
| F=129.800, | df=1, 116, | p=0.000, | R=0.728, | $R^2$=0.530, | $\Delta R^2$=0.526 |
| 2 | (Constant) | 2.724 | | 5.172 | 0.000 |
| | Commitment | 0.277 | 0.517 | 4.455 | 0.000 |
| | Satisfaction | 0.166 | 0.251 | 2.161 | 0.033 |
| F=69.307, | df=2, 115, | p=0.000, | R=0.741, | $R^2$=0.549, | $\Delta R^2$=0.541 |

The current findings are comparable and aligned with numerous past studies which found that OPR has a positive and significant relationship with image and reputation (Alhadid & Qaddomi, 2016; Kim & Park, 2017; Lee & Choi, 2009; Mohammed & Sharipuddin, 2017).

In addition, this study supported the study of Ki (2013) who stated that commitment and satisfaction were the OPR practices that influence the attitudes of the public against the organization and it is a very significant aspect that must be managed in a positive relationship. In addition, the findings also supported the study of Mohammed and Sharipuddin (2017) which found that commitment and satisfaction were the strongest contributing predictors in the university's setting. This shows that both commitment and satisfaction are the best predictors to justify the image of the university.

However, trust was found not the predictor which contrasted with the results of (Lee & Choi, 2009; Zeqiri, 2020). The possible explanation is that trust was not the predictor as it indicated that the students (stakeholders) did not perceive trust toward the institution due to the complex operating system of the university. In addition, control mutuality was also found not the predictor of the image which yielded different results from (Kim and Park, 2017). It can be further explained that the relationships between the students (who are mostly in their first degree) have not matured to a level where there is not much awareness of the power dynamics between the two groups. At this stage, neither the university nor the students have the rightful power to influence one another yet (Hon & Grunig, 1999), which caused some imbalance in the relationship. Last but not least, openness was found not the predictor of the university's image, and it can be explained that the culture of the university may be focused much on the bureaucratic culture and top-down, where the transparency of communication between university and students as the stakeholder was not well established.

**Conclusion**
The present findings of this research showed that all five (5) dimensions of OPR have positive and significant relationships with the university's image. Moreover, commitment and satisfaction were the predicting factors of the university's image.

### Theoretical Implications

This study provides empirical insight into Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1961) as universities and students are keen to make an interactive relationship in the form of exchange and mutual benefits. From the theoretical perspective, the exchange or reciprocal connection will create an eagerness among the institution (organization) and students (stakeholder) to ensure their benefits.

This study also supports the OPR framework by investigating and contextualizing a multidimensional facet of OPR, which included openness as one of the OPR attributes. When the university provides greater organizational support to the students, the perception of the students would be influenced by the effects of OPR. The reciprocal relationship is evident in the findings suggesting that the delivery of OPR attributes as the inputs/ rewards in the Social Exchange Theory, where these inputs/rewards will help to drive positive perception and formulate a favorable image in the mind of the students and lead to positive outcomes.

### Practical Implications

This study provided insight into private universities through a highly competitive field of business. Commitment and satisfaction are found to have a significant influence on a university's image. Hence, the university's public relations team should focus more on these two prominent dimensions highlighted to maintain a good relationship with the students. Also, the private university should focus more on upholding the loyalty of students and relationships with the students as the current study shows that commitment is recorded as the highest factor in predicting the university's image.

This study verifies the notion of the past studied (Ahmed & Khan, 2019; Singh & Pandey, 2017) that public relations are a pivotal element in establishing and sustaining the organization's image. This is highly important as public relations practitioners seek to develop their role as part of the management and demonstrate their commitment to the performance of the institution. Showing a positive university image requires good relationships. This is an aim that most corporate leaders aspire for, taking public relations professionals closer to the management table.

The implication that can be taken from this study is public relations practitioners should not only build the relationship, but should maximize the degree of engagement with their stakeholders through relationship cultivation strategies. Another significant implication is that positive communication can theoretically be a gateway to accomplishing successful relationships and it adds to the good image of the organization. Thus, the university should communicate and show transparency via the official website or social media to the students, to keep students updated with the university's operations, and activities to gauge their trust.

### Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study

There are several limitations in the study, specifically the sample size (n=117). Hence, future studies may collect a larger sample size to obtain better results.

Moreover, this study only focuses on one private university in Malaysia. It is recommended for future studies to include other private universities to get a better picture of its validity, as well as to include public university students/customers to compare the OPR

between different groups. On the other hand, evaluating the study with more post-graduate students would be necessary, as they already have professional experiences and can give a clear picture related to the corporate image of the university. This study also did not explicate the multi-dimensional concept of corporate reputation which includes corporate identity and corporate image. Perhaps future studies could focus on that and OPR dimensions.

Other than that, future researchers may also include other variables such as transparent communication, reputation, and retention to name a few to add to the current framework to test the mediating and moderating effects, which will add insights and robustness to the model. Last but not least, future studies can apply a qualitative approach to further explore the OPR dimension to better find the potential attributes that can contribute to the public relations scholarship.

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