

Predictors of Intention to Join a University Alumni Association

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Introduction

The higher education sector is a rapidly growing industry in the United States and throughout the world, with enrollment and graduation rates growing significantly over the past ten years. In addition, the changing economy and reductions in government spending on education are forcing universities to adapt and become more competitive. Better understanding stakeholders (i.e., students/graduates) experiences and the factors that contribute to the relationship between the university and community are important considerations in assessing how well the university is accomplishing its mission. Past research has shown that organizational identity is correlated with a wide range of attitudes, behaviors, and content variables. Mael and Ashforth (1992) found that organizational identification with alma mater was associated with: antecedents of organizational distinctiveness, organizational prestige, and absence of intraorganizational competition. Much research has also reiterated the importance of measuring relationships in public relations. Emotional appeal, social and environmental responsibility, and financial performance have all been found as significant predictors of alumni involvement with the university (Ressler, 2010). In previous research, factors associated with membership of university graduates have commonly been investigated through small samples of students after graduation. The current study aimed to capture a more accurate representation of student experience, attitudes, and opinions before students graduate and students' intention to join the alumni association.

Participants and Procedure

Participants ($N = 6268$, 62.5% women; $M_{age} = 31.89$, $SD = 9.79$) included Texas A&M University-Commerce students in the last semester before graduation. Participants indicated their racial/ethnic category as European American (58.1%), African American (17.2%), Hispanic (9.9%), Asian/South Pacific Islander (5.6%), Central Asian/Indian/Pakistani (3.2%), Arab/Middle Eastern (2%), multiracial (1.6%), other (1.3%), or Indigenous Peoples (1.1%). Participants completed measures regarding reputation, organization-public relationship, predictors of alumni association membership, and intention to join the alumni association. Unless noted otherwise, all measures used a 7-point Likert-type response scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

Results

To examine which variables uniquely predict intention to join the alumni association we entered the assessed variables simultaneously as predictors and intention to join as the dependent variable. The regression was significant, $F(27, 6240) = 138.38$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .38$. As shown in table 1, the strongest positive predictors of intention to join alumni association were frequency of involvement at the university, identification with the university, commitment, willingness to recommend the university to others, and age.

Materials

University reputation. We adapted short measures from prior research (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000; Ressler, 2010) to assess six dimensions of reputation: emotional appeal ("I have a good feeling about the university," "I admire and respect A&M-Commerce;" $r = .90$, $p < .001$), products and services ("A&M-Commerce stands behind its programs and services," "A&M-Commerce offers high quality and innovative programs and areas of study;" $r = .80$, $p < .001$), vision and leadership ("A&M-Commerce has excellent leadership," "A&M-Commerce has a clear vision for its future;" $r = .85$, $p < .001$), workplace environment ("A&M-Commerce looks like a good place to work," "A&M-Commerce has good non-teaching employees," "A&M-Commerce has a good administration," "A&M-Commerce has good faculty;" $\alpha = .90$), social and environmental responsibility ("A&M-Commerce is environmentally responsible," "A&M-Commerce maintains high standards in the way it treats people;" $r = .74$, $p < .001$), and financial performance ("A&M-Commerce has a strong record of financial stability," "A&M-Commerce looks like it has a strong prospect for future growth;" $r = .79$, $p < .001$).

Organization-public relationship. We adapted short measures from prior research (Jo, Hon, & Brunner, 2004) to assess six dimensions of the organization-public relationship: control mutuality ("I believe people like me have influence on the decision makers of this university," "This university and students have an equal amount of power in deciding the future of the university;" $r = .76$, $p < .001$), trust ("I trust A&M-Commerce," "A&M-Commerce is fair and just to their students," "A&M-Commerce can be relied on to keep its promises," "A&M-Commerce has the ability to accomplish what they say they will do;" $\alpha = .92$), satisfaction ("I am happy with A&M-Commerce," "Overall, I am satisfied with my experience at A&M-Commerce;" $r = .89$, $p < .001$), commitment ("I feel a sense of loyalty to A&M-Commerce," "I feel committed to A&M-Commerce;" $r = .88$, $p < .001$), exchange relationship ("I have received a good education for the cost of attending A&M-Commerce"), and communal relationship ("A&M-Commerce helps people like me without expecting anything in return," "A&M-Commerce is very concerned about the welfare of people like me;" $r = .78$, $p < .001$).

University identification. We adapted two items ("I strongly identify with Texas A&M University-Commerce," "I often describe myself as an A&M-Commerce student;" $r = .76$, $p < .001$) from prior research (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013) to assess identification with the university.

Frequency of involvement. We adapted ten items from Newman and Petrosko (2011) to assess the degree that students were involved with the university. Participants were asked to indicate the extent that during their time at the university that they had attended athletic events, worn university apparel, volunteered, sought out information about alumni, interacted with other alumni, spoke positively about the university, attended events, and read the university magazine, newspaper, and website ($\alpha = .90$).

Awareness of other alumni. Two items ("I know other people who donate money to the university," "I know other people who are members of the alumni association;" $r = .77$, $p < .001$) were adapted from prior research (Newman & Petrosko, 2011) to assess awareness of other alumni.

Recommendation to others. A single item ("I would recommend A&M-Commerce to other people considering attending college") assessed willingness to recommend the university to others.

Perception of alumni association. Three items ("A&M-Commerce does a good job communicating with alumni," "I am aware of the A&M-Commerce alumni association," "The A&M-Commerce alumni association is a valuable organization;" $\alpha = .87$) were adapted from prior research (Newman & Petrosko, 2011) to assess students' perception of the alumni association.

Perception of athletics. Two items ("The athletics program at A&M-Commerce is prestigious," "The A&M-Commerce athletics program has a good reputation;" $r = .90$, $p < .001$)

Student characteristics. To assess number of legacy relationships participants were asked to indicate family members (e.g., siblings, parents, spouse) that had attended the university. Participants also indicated if they had received any scholarships or financial aid (0 = no, 1 = yes). To assess length of time on campus participants indicated the number of semesters they lived on campus, from 1 = *none to 6 = more than 8 semesters*. To assess length of time as a student at the university, participants indicated the number of semesters they attended, from 1 = *1-2 semesters* to 8 = *more than 14 semesters*. To assess the number of extracurricular activities that students engaged in they indicated whether they participated in any of ten popular activities (e.g., greek social organizations, student government, athletics). Students indicated their grade point average on a scale from 1 = *below 2.5* to 5 = *3.8-4.0*. Lastly, participants indicated reported their age and gender (0 = male, 1 = female).

Intention to join the alumni association. To assess intention to join the university's alumni association we used a single item ("After graduation I plan to join the A&M-Commerce alumni association").

Predictors of Intention to Join the Alumni Association

Variable	β	t	p
Emotional Appeal	.009	0.34	.734
Products and Services	.036	1.48	.138
Vision and Leadership	-.026	-1.07	.283
Workplace Environment	-.009	-0.37	.711
Social and Environmental Responsibility	.000	-0.02	.984
Financial Performance	.018	0.82	.413
Control Mutuality	.026	1.92	.056
Trust	-.036	-1.43	.152
Satisfaction	-.092	-3.72	< .001
Commitment	.169	7.58	< .001
Exchange Relationship	.017	0.92	.357
Communal Relationship	.013	0.66	.507
University Identification	.209	11.62	< .001
Frequency of Involvement	.320	21.36	< .001
Aware of Alumni	.063	4.76	< .001
Recommend to Others	.123	7.69	< .001
Perception of Alumni	-.005	-0.35	.726
Perception of Athletics	-.046	-3.35	.001
Legacy Relationships	-.053	-5.12	< .001
Scholarships	-.041	-3.74	< .001
Financial Aid	.013	1.23	.219
Semesters on Campus	-.039	-3.08	.002
Semesters as Student	-.041	-3.65	< .001
Extracurricular Activities	.006	0.46	.649
Grade Point Average	-.010	-0.96	.338
Age	.069	6.00	< .001
Gender	-.008	-0.77	.444

Discussion

The results of the present research suggest that students' university involvement may be crucial in predicting intention to join a university alumni association. Interestingly, some variables considered important in determining alumni association membership emerged with negative, although weak, associations with intention to join the alumni association. These included satisfaction, perception of athletics, legacy relationships, and semesters on campus and as a student. These results may be utilized in planning ongoing education endeavors, by connecting them to previous or future data. The goal of the present study was to integrate these factors and examine their association with alumni association membership.