



What Makes a Loyal Consumer? The Role of Intangible Corporate Assets on Consumer Loyalty in Korea

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The current study examined the influence of two critical concepts in public relations literature on consumer loyalty: organization-public relationship and reputation. The role of two popular constructs, corporate image and involvement, were investigated in their causal relationship. Organization-public relationship, which is a behavior-oriented measure, and reputation proved to be strong predictors of consumer loyalty while corporate image mediated the relationships. At the same time, the results revealed that consumers' involvement in a company moderated the causal relationship among these variables, as structural equation models for different groups in terms of the involvement were yielded. Compared with previous studies, the findings of this study provides a broader framework that explains how organization-public relationship and reputation affect these important communication performance indices.

KEY WORDS Relationship • Reputation • Corporate Image • Involvement • Loyalty

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1. Introduction

The importance of a corporation's intangible assets such as corporate image and reputation is widely accepted as they contribute to overall corporate success (de Leaniz & del Bosque Rodríguez, 2016; Dowling, 2001; Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & van Riel, 2003; Hall, 1992). For example, studies have shown that corporate image has considerable influence on the success of businesses (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Barich & Kotler, 1991; Dick & Basu, 1994; Palacio, Meneses, & Perez, 2002; Raj, 1985); in a similar vein, researchers maintain that a favorable corporate reputation gives an organization a competitive advantage by positively stimulating customer satisfaction and loyalty (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Hence, organizations are increasingly engaged in actions to influence external constituencies' assessment of them (Andreassen, 1994; Chun, 2005; Fombrun, 1996).

The value of relationship management has been increasingly emphasized in several disciplines. In the fields of public relations, the concept of relationship has received great attention over the last two decades; public relations scholars are of the view that public relations can contribute to an organization's success with two major functions—building relationships with its strategic public members and maintaining a positive reputation (Grunig & Hung, 2002; Springston & Lariscy, 2005). Research has shown that strategic management of the relationships between an organization and its publics have a significant impact on how the organization is perceived and evaluated (Grunig & Hung, 2002). Consequently, scholars have called for research that links effective organization-public relationships (OPRs) and organizational outcomes such as the public's behavior, attitude, and perception of organizational image (Broom & Dozier, 1990; Bruning & Ledingham, 1998; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998); some researcher also pointed out the need to explore and define the relationships between OPRs and the organizational constructs, and consequently, their substantive impact on an organization. As part of this research effort, several scholars explored the relationship between the concept of OPR and reputation (Grunig & Hung, 2002; Kim, 2001; Yang, 2007; Yang & Grunig, 2005).

However, only few studies have examined the concept in the broader context of corporate constructs (e.g., Kim & Jo, 2009). This study attempts to explore the link between the OPR the organization's reputation and the organization's image from a corporate communication perspective with a specific emphasis on consumer relations. More specifically, this study examines how a consumer-goods company manages its relationship with consumers and how consumers' perception of the OPR, the company's reputation and the corporate image influences their loyalty to the organization.

Furthermore, most public relations studies that examined OPRs and their impact have regarded the public as a homogenous group in terms of their characteristics; the characteristics of the different publics and individuals often remain unconsidered despite the influence of these characteristics on perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. This research notes the findings from an early study that publics' attitudes and behaviors are significant measures of the overall impact of public relations activities and the perceptions of OPRs in particular (Ki & Hon, 2007). More specifically, the current study attempts to explore the influence of consumers' involvement in the organization and compare the effect of the company-consumer relationship on the consumers' attitude toward the company.

The purpose of this study is two fold. First, it attempts to investigate the relationship between the relational outcomes and organizational constructs, such as reputation and corporate image, and explores how they together affect consumers' loyalty to a company. Although significant research has been conducted on corporate image, reputation, and OPR respectively, the precise nature of the relationships that exists among these distinct but strongly related constructs and their integrated effect on consumer behaviors need further exploration. A better understanding of these constructs appears warranted, given the increasing interest in the management effectiveness and corporate communication. Are consumers more likely be loyal to the company if they have a better relationship with the university? Alternatively, are consumers' loyalty higher when the company is perceived to have a good reputation and/or a good corporate image? Second, the study examines how the extent of the public's involvement in the organ-

ization influences the relationship among these critical variables. In other words, how does consumers' involvement in the organization affect their loyalty to the organization? To do so, the study compares the effects of OPR on consumers' loyalty toward the company between those who are highly involved in the company and those with low involvement.

The current study attempts to develop a conceptual framework that considers relational outcomes as antecedents to reputation and corporate image evaluations, and consequently, consumer loyalty towards a company along with the moderating effect of consumer involvement in the company. Then it tests the proposed model using structural equation modeling (SEM) to simultaneously estimate a series of interrelated relationships.

In addition to the introduction, the present study consists of four sections. First, a review of the literature related to OPR, reputation, corporate image, involvement, and loyalty is presented. More specifically, the links between the constructs under investigation are presented in a conceptual model. Second, the model and the methods employed to investigate these concepts are explained. Third, the results of the study are analyzed and reported. Finally, the practical as well as the theoretical implications of the research are explicated with suggestions about the practical changes the organization in this study could make to improve and enhance its relationship and reputation with consumers.

2. Literature Review

Despite the growing interest in the value of OPRs in strategic corporate communication management, a review of the relevant literature shows that there is no generally accepted conceptual framework that integrates organization-public relationship, reputation, corporate image and loyalty to the organization. Moreover, very few studies empirically examine the role of involvement from the relationship management perspective.

1) Loyalty

Loyalty is one of the most popular concepts in the strategic communication literature and has been widely conceptualized and measured over the last four decades. It is defined as “a pattern of repeat product purchases, accompanied by an underlying positive attitude toward the brand that is based on the belief that the brand makes products superior to those of its competition” (Solomon, Marshall, & Stuart, 2008, p.146). Loyalty is a complex, multidimensional concept and has been conceptualized from three different perspectives: the behavioral perspective, the attitudinal perspective, and the composite perspective (Zins, 2001). The behavioral perspective, which focuses on purchase, concerns repeated purchase behavior, whereas the attitudinal perspective focuses on a consumer’s favorable attitude toward a company. The positive disposition is reflected in actions such as recommending the company or its product/service to others or inclination to repurchase it. In many business studies, loyalty has been defined as intention “to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future,” which emphasizes repetitive purchase behavior (Oliver, 1999, p. 34); on the other hand, the attitudinal loyalty assumes the underlying evaluation and cognition during the purchase decision making process (Pressgrove & McKeever, 2016). The composite perspective considers loyalty as favorable attitudes toward a company, recommending the company to other consumers, and exhibiting repurchase behavior (Dimitriades, 2006).

Although the conceptual scope of loyalty covers attitudinal areas including supportive attitudes toward a company, it clearly differs from the image of the subject itself. Since the loyalty is strong and resistant attitude with supportive behavior for a company, attitude toward the company is an antecedent of the loyalty (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998).

Although a number of other factors besides brand loyalty should affect the purchase behavior, loyalty has been highly valued due to its superior power to drive the purchase. Many antecedents of loyalty, including service quality and satisfaction, have been reported in the literature, and corporate image should be seen as one of them (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 1998). Evidence

of the positive link between corporate image and consumer loyalty is abundant (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Dick & Basu, 1994). Researchers also have demonstrated the correlations between loyalty and reputation (Andreassen, 1994; Bontis, Booker, & Serenko, 2007).

2) Organization-Public Relationships (OPR)

The concept of an organization-public relationship (OPR) has gained unprecedented attention in public relations research as the essence of the field is defined as relationship management. The studies based on the relationship management perspective argue that the practice of public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness as it develops, maintains and enhances on-going, long-term quality relationships between an organization and its key constituencies (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). According to Grunig et al. (2002), good relationships with strategic publics are beneficial because organizations may obtain autonomy and prevent crises.

After a comprehensive review of relationship definitions in several disciplines, Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000) maintained that OPRs are characterized “by the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics” (p. 18); similarly, Bruning and Ledingham (1998) viewed relationships as the broad consequences of actions by an organization and its key publics. Emphasizing relational outcomes, Huang (1998) defined OPRs as “the degree that the organization and its publics’ trust one another, agree on who has rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to one another” (p. 12).

Hon and Grunig (1999) developed relationship measurement indicators: control mutuality, satisfaction, trust, and commitment. Grunig and Huang (2000) further expanded the theory of relationship and pointed out that one of the critical aspects of OPRs is “communication behaviors” between an organization and its publics. Control mutuality is “the degree to which partners agree about which of them should decide relational goals

and behavioral routines” (Stafford & Canary, 1991, p. 224). Trust is defined as “one party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 19). From the perspective of relationship management, Morgan and Hunt (1994) defined commitment as “an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it; that is, the committed party believes the relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures indefinitely” (p. 23). Stafford and Canary (1991) explained relational satisfaction this way: “From a social exchange perspective, a satisfying relationship is one in which the distribution of rewards is equitable and the relational rewards outweigh the cost” (p. 225).

Numerous public relations studies examined the OPR in various contexts (e.g., Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000) and reported positive effects on organizational outcomes. Scholars with diverse perspectives have emphasized the substantial role of quality relational outcomes in obtaining a positive reputation (Bronn, 2007; Coombs, 2000; Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2003; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Grunig & Hung, 2002; Hutton et al., 2001; Sung & Yang, 2006; Yang & Grunig, 2005) and perceived image of the organization (Kim, Bach, & Clelland, 2007; Wan & Schell, 2007). In addition, it has been noted that there is a link between quality relationships and publics’ supportive behaviors (Bruning, 2000; Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; Bruning & Ralston, 2000; Caywood, 1997; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2000; Peppard, 2000; Reinchheld, 1996). Kang and Yang (2010) found that OPR outcomes significantly predicted positive attitudes toward an organization; stakeholders’ beliefs about OPR outcomes were a significant mediator between awareness of the organization’s performance and supportive intentions. Bruning and Ralston (2000) found that OPRs influenced the perceptions, evaluations, and behavioral intentions of key publics. Sung and Yang (2009) examined the effect of relational outcomes on supportive behavioral intentions and found that the quality of relationships with an institution had a great impact on supportive intentions as well as perceived reputation. That is, organizations need to cultivate a good relationship with

their publics to enhance the perceived reputation and to foster their supportive behaviors. Pressgrove and McKeever (2016) examined the role of OPR in a nonprofit context and found that OPR had a significant impact on loyalty and behavioral intention.

Other researchers (Bruning & Hatfield, 2002; Bruning et al., 2004; Bruning & Ledingham, 1998, 2000) have also regarded satisfaction as the attitudinal outcome of a quality OPR. Bruning and Ledingham (2000) investigated consumers' perceptions of relationships with a bank and found that the perception of personal and professional relationships had a significant influence on evaluations of overall satisfaction with the organization.

3) Corporate Reputation

The concept of corporate reputation has received extensive attention in various areas (Leiva, Ferrero, & Calderon, 2016). Management scholars have provided an empirical evidence that reputation significantly contributes to the success of an organization in the form of premium pricing, lower costs, better employees, supports and endorsements, and customer loyalty (Davies, Chun, da Silva, & Roper, 2004; Freeman, 2004; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000). Some public relations researchers professionals have embraced "reputation management" as a way to demonstrate the economic contribution of public relations (Griffin, 2002; Hutton, Goodman, Alexander, & Genest, 2001; Kim, 2000, 2001). According to Kim (2000, 2001), the effect of reputation on financial performance of the organization reflects the viability of the public relations function.

The concept has been defined variously depending on different perspectives. For example, it is defined as the total assessments that multiple stakeholders develop about an organization's ability to fulfill their expectations over time (Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2003) or a collective system of subjective beliefs among members of a social group (Bromley, 1993, 2000, 2002). Some public relations researchers view it as cognitive representations shared in the minds of multiple publics about an organization's past behaviors and attributes (Coombs, 2000; Grunig & Hung,

2002). Therefore, an organization's past behavior is the essence of corporate reputation, which is shaped by the organization actually doing what it promises it will do (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993) or accumulated judgments about its past interactions with multiple stakeholders (Coombs, 2000); individual experience with an organization is the key to organizational reputation. According to Knox, Maklan and Thompson (2000), a reputation is built through one's understanding of an organization's values and his/her experiences of its products and services, which are a result of the relationships between the organization and the individual customer.

Meanwhile, one's direct experience affects his or her perceived organizational reputation. Bromley (1993) defined two types of reputation: primary reputation is "the totality of opinions circulating within a primary face-to-face group," which is based on direct, first-hand experience (pp. 42-43), whereas secondary reputation means the opinions found in an extended social network that are not based on direct face-to-face acquaintance with the person of interest. Based on Bromley's (1993) notion of primary and secondary reputation, Grunig and Hung (2002) developed the concepts of first-order reputation, which is based on experience, and second-order reputation, which is based on overall impressions or what others say about the organization. Then they explained that one's involvement and personal experience with an organization highly influence the organization's reputation. According to them, second-order reputations are likely to be developed among publics with low-involvement; publics that are not involved with an organization are more likely to develop opinions based on what they hear about the organization from others, such as media, which only yields reputational cognitive representations. In contrast, those who are more involved with an organization come to maintain experiential cognitive representations about the organization based on their own experience(s).

The studies from varying areas have shown the significant role of quality relational outcomes between an organization and its key constituents in the organization obtaining a positive reputation (Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & van Riel, 2003; Grunig & Hung, 2002; Knox et al., 2000). Fombrun (1996) pointed out that a positive, long-term reputation is the outcome of good re-

relationships with a company's constituents. According to Mahon and Wartick (2003), reputation develops over time as "a function of complex inter-relationships and exchanges between and among stakeholders and the organization in different contexts" (p. 23). Therefore, assessing the impact of public relations on organizational reputation provides another useful opportunity for demonstrating the accountability of public relations (Kiouisis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007). The fact that managing both relationships and reputation is a primary goal of public relations implies why the two concepts need to be incorporated in order to present the value of public relations.

According to Grunig (1993), reputation is one of the symbolic relationships an organization has and is the by-product of an organization's behavior; it is captured in stakeholder perceptions of the relationships that they have with the organization (MacMillan, Money, Downing, & Hillenbrand, 2005). Consequently, to improve its corporate reputation, an organization needs to focus on building good relationships on the basis of good behavior; public relations can help "manage" reputation by cultivating positive relationships with strategic publics, which result from its behavior (Grunig & Hung, 2002). Yang and Grunig (2005) and Yang (2007) empirically tested the impact of relationships on reputation and demonstrated the positive correlation between relationship outcomes and favorable reputation.

Several studies found that quality relationships with customers increase the profits of companies by fostering supportive customer behaviors (Reinchheld, 1996; Peppard, 2000). According to Walker Information (2003), customer relationships are important as those relationships determine business success by maintaining loyal and committed customers. Ki and Hon (2007) also found that OPR outcomes had significant resulted in publics' supportive intentions. Favorable organizational reputation positively influences stakeholders' supportive behavioral intentions such as loyalty (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & van Riel, 2003) as well. In the marketing context, favorable corporate reputation results in consumers' loyalty of corporations and their products (Fombrun & van Riel, 2003). In their study of university image, Sung and Yang (2008)

showed that university reputation had a strong effect on students' supportive behavioral intentions toward the university.

4) Corporate Image

Previous studies have shown that a good corporate image has a positive influence on a company in various respects. It is widely accepted that companies with a good corporate image are likely to have growing sales and market share (Shapiro, 1982), increased customers' buying intentions and satisfaction (Barich & Kotler, 1991), enhanced customer loyalty (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 1998), and consumer attachment to the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

Although the concept of corporate image is broadly used, it has been accompanied by much confusion because scholars have used the term interchangeably with corporate reputation and identity (Abratt, 1989; Barich & Kotler, 1991; Dowling, 1993; Hsieh, Pan, & Setiono, 2004). Corporate image and corporate reputation are generally considered as two distinct constructs that are strongly related.

Image is defined as "the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others" (Dichter, 1985, p. 75) or the sum of beliefs, attitudes, ideas, and impressions that a person holds about an object, person, or organization (Kotler & Andreassen, 1996). Thus, corporate image is the outcome of the process where opinions, feelings, and experiences concerning a company are retrieved from memory and transformed into mental pictures (MacInnis & Price, 1987). Davies et al. (2004) differentiated image and reputation by defining reputation as "something that is dependent upon actual experience of the organization" (p. 126), while image is an opinion that is independent of actual experience. It should be noted, therefore, that attempts to convey a desirable corporate image to the public may not be successful.

In general, corporate image is considered to be more influential on consumer attitude and perception when consumers have little direct experience with the organization. It is the outcome of the actions and social interactions of involved stakeholders (Barich & Kotler, 1991). In addition, it is

not a single entity, since it depends on the perception of each specific group of people and on the type of experiences and contacts they have had with the company (Dowling, 2001). A review of research reveals that corporate image and reputation are closely related. Corporate reputation and corporate image are the outcomes of an aggregation process that incorporates a variety of information that consumers acquire to build a perception of the organization (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001). Hence, even consumers who have limited experience with a company may have these perceptions based on various sources of information such as corporate communication activities. They further maintained that “corporate image and corporate reputation may share a close relationship because of the psychological dimensions which contribute to their formation” (p. 229). According to Porter (1985), a positive corporate reputation helps a company build a favorable image.

Corporate image has the potential of influencing customer loyalty (Barich & Kotler, 1991; Rindova & Fombrun, 1999). From a marketing standpoint, numerous researchers have recognized the critical roles of corporate image and corporate reputation in consumers’ buying behavior (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Barich & Kotler, 1991; Dick & Basu, 1994; Dowling, 2006; Raj, 1985; Richard & Zhang, 2012) or students’ loyalty towards their university (Helgesen & Nettet, 2007). Through the analysis of the relationship between OPRs and corporate image, Lee and Choi (2009) found a significant impact of relationship on corporate image. Although there appears to be a lack of consensus in the literature on how to define and operationalize the image construct, the authors believe that the overall image of the firm, which affects consumer loyalty, is influenced by perceived relational outcomes and reputation. Understanding the role of corporate image in consumer loyalty among these constructs is a key issue that has received little attention in the public relations arena.

5) Involvement

In the advertising as well as public relations literature, the concept of involvement has been widely recognized for its critical influence on many in-

dices of communication performance, including consumer loyalty, corporate reputation, attitudes toward the brand, intentions to purchase the product, and so forth. The level of involvement refers to the extent to which people connect themselves with a situation (Grunig, 1997, p.10). That is, it measures how an individual is personally and emotionally relevant to an issue or object (i.e., a company, a product, a decision).

Since the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) was introduced (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983), various types of involvement including involvements of purchase decision and specific brand as well as a product category have been conceptualized and investigated. Individuals are more likely to pay attention to an issue, event, or object with which they are personally involved or have a connection (Grunig, 1997). Therefore, involvement increases the likelihood of individuals attending to and comprehending messages (Pavlik, 1988). Those who have a high level of involvement tend to prefer messages that contain more information (Heath, Liao, & Douglas, 1995; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986), and attain greater knowledge levels (Chaffee & Roser, 1986; Engelberg, Flora, & Nass, 1995).

Involvement in an organization has been considered as a critical variable that impact the organizational effectiveness in many aspects. For example, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) maintained that “organizational involvement in, and support of the community in which it operates, can engender loyalty toward an organization among key publics” (p. 63).

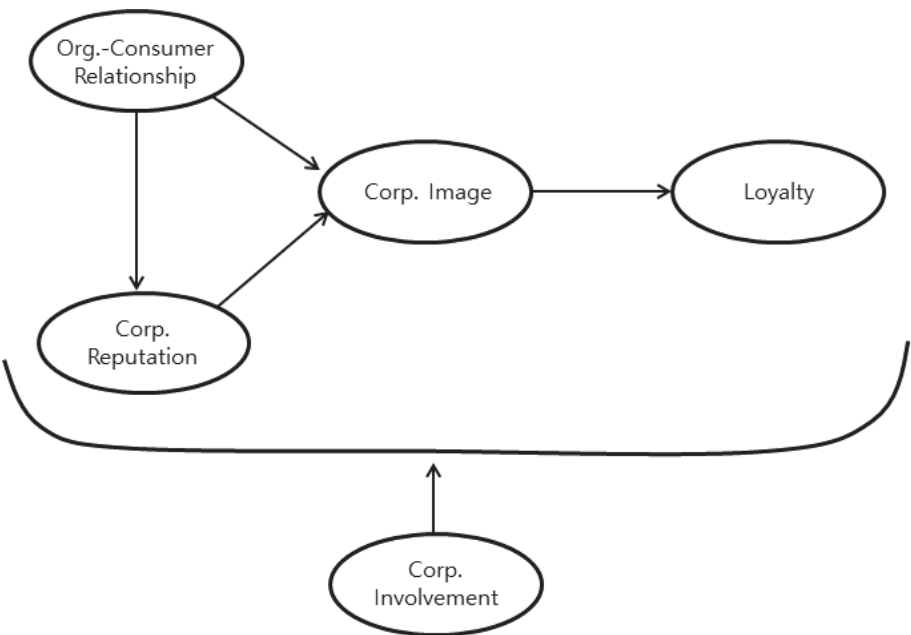
Based on Grunig and Hung’s (2002) discourses on the experiential (or first-order) and reputational (or second-order) reputation and relationships, it is conceivable that the directions and strengths of the causal links between relationships and reputation may diverge depending on the level of their involvement with the organization. The relationship should positively affect the level of involvement. In other words, consumers who keep strong relationships with a company tend to be highly involved with it. Accordingly, this can lead to a positive corporate image and consumer loyalty. Therefore, the role of relationship and reputation in enhancing the corporate image and loyalty can be varied depending upon the level of involvement. However, the moderating role of involvement in this frame

has been rarely tested, the current study poses it as a research question.

3. Hypotheses

The current investigation attempts to examine the influence of the OPR on organizational reputation, image, and consumer loyalty. In short, a positive relationship between an organization and its key publics helps to predispose consumers favorably to the organization, reinforces consumer decisions, and ultimately will influence their supportive behaviors. In addition, consumers' level of involvement is expected to moderate the causal relationships among the variables hypothetically linked above. Based on the review of previous research, the following theoretical links between major constructs were identified and a theoretical model was developed (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Hypothetical Model Tested



H1: Higher levels of perceived quality of relational outcomes with the company lead to higher levels of consumer assessments of corporate reputation.

H2: Higher levels of perceived quality of relational outcomes with the company lead to higher levels of corporate image.

H3: Higher levels of corporate reputation lead to higher levels of consumer assessments of corporate image.

H4: Higher levels of consumer assessments of corporate image lead to higher levels of supportive behavioral intentions.

RQ1: Does the level of involvement moderate the influence of relationship outcomes, reputation, and corporate image on the supportive behavioral intention?

4. Methods

The study investigated the relationship among four critical constructs-OPR, reputation, corporate image, and loyalty-and how their relationships could be varied by levels of involvement in the company. A survey was conducted to investigate the hypothesis.

1) Participants

The data in this study was collected by a large professional market research institution for a leading food and beverage manufacturer in Korea. Participants were drawn from the largest five cities in the country: Seoul, Busan, Daejeon, Daegu & Kwangju. Respondents were randomly selected through stratified random sampling and contacted through telephone by interviewers from the research firm. Potential participants were identified based on their ability to recognize the corporate name and having no family or friend involved in the food and beverage industry. A total of 800 respondents completed the interview. After removing incomplete and disqualified samples, a total of 672 samples were used for the analysis.

Approximately two-thirds of the participants were female (65%). The average respondent was 35 years of age and had two children.

To test the proposed model (see Figure 1), participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that included items about five theoretical constructs: corporate reputation that they held regarding the company, their relationship with the company, perceived corporate image, their loyalty toward the corporate brand, and their involvement in the company. A questionnaire was designed using 5-point Likert scale to measure the constructs.

2) Organization

The organization that was examined in this study is a leading food and beverage manufacturer in Korea. The company was selected because it produced a wide range of food, beverage and dairy products and is well known among consumers. In addition, the company has a relatively long history and have shown a good record of several consumer satisfaction rankings. This particular company is an appropriate organization to examine because it provides reliable and valid outcomes due to its inherent characteristics. According to a previous study, consumers' involvement takes a critical role in their attitudes toward the food industry and its companies (Pieniak, Verbeke, Olsen, Hansen, & Brunso, 2010). This is mainly due to the high attentions of contemporary consumers to their health. The company's inherent characteristics include a long corporate history and is known as one of top companies in the industry with a large scale of advertising and public relations expenses for communication. These characteristics provide this study an ample size of samples that had a wide range of relationships and reputations with this company.

3) Measurements

Multiple items were used to enhance the reliability of the measures for each construct. To measure latent variables of relationship outcomes, this study used the scales developed in Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Hung

(2002). Participants assessed their perceived relationships with the company based on four dimensions: control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, and trust. Multiple items were used to measure these dimensions and, the reliability of each dimension was relatively acceptable (Cronbach's alphas were 0.861, 0.874, 0.799, and 0.902, respectively). Composites for those indicators with multiple measurement items were constructed using the mean scores of the measured items.

The Harris-Fombrun Reputation Quotient (Fombrun et al., 2000) was used to measure corporate reputation perceived by consumers. Considering the characteristics of the participants-general consumers, six items that appeared to be appropriate and relevant for the study were modified from the Harris-Fombrun Reputation Quotient: Three 'work place environment' items and three 'social and environmental responsibility' items. The mean score was used to construct composites for each dimension; the reliability of these dimensions was qualified with Cronbach alphas of 0.876 and 0.891 respectively. Corporate image was measured on Nguyen and Leblanc's (2001) three items ($\alpha = 0.740$). As in previous concepts, composite was constructed using the mean scores of the measured items. Consumers' involvement was measured along three items from Grunig (1997) and showed a high reliability ($\alpha = 0.900$). The involvement scale measured how much the consumers were involved with the company. The median-split method was used for classifying the sample into two groups based on the level of involvement (high-low involvement group).

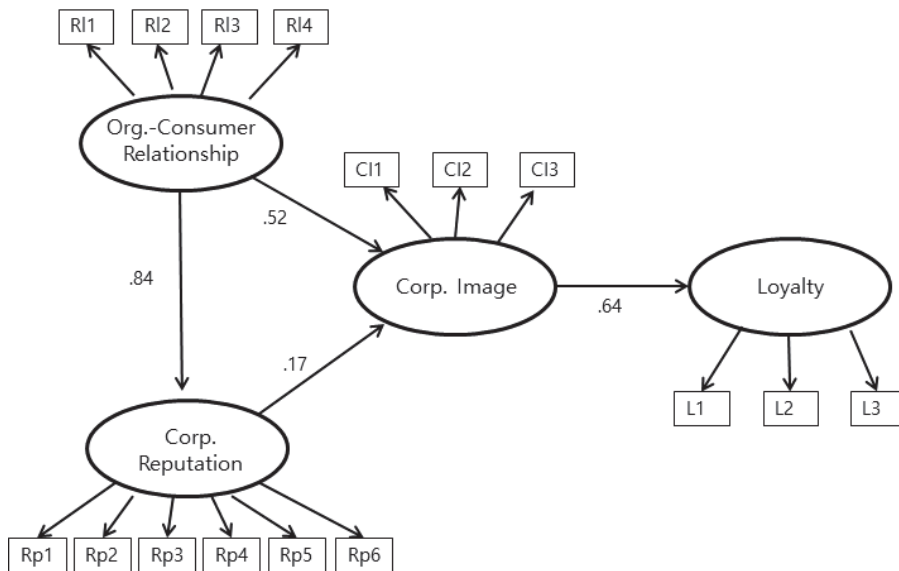
Last, the loyalty scales of Zeithaml et al. (1996) were used to measure consumers' loyalty toward the company. Three items were adopted: "I consider the company my first choice to buy," "I prefer the company's product to those of others," and "I will do more business with the company in the future." The mean score was used to construct composites; the reliability of loyalty was fairly high with Cronbach's α of 0.935.

5. Results

The proposed model was analyzed with SEM to investigate the relationships among variables as proposed in the tested model with two steps. First, the entire sample data set was analyzed to test hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4 and to examine the direct, causal relationships among four variables. Second, the moderating role of involvement was analyzed with each of two groups (high and low involvement) in the SEM process to see whether causal relationships between four variables can be different between the two models. The causal relationships among four variables in paths are supported (see Figure 2).

As shown in <Figure 2> above, the hypothetical relationships represented with arrows in the model were supported with moderate or high path coefficients. The relationships predicted by hypotheses 1 through 4 showed higher coefficient values. Especially, the influence on reputation by relationship was the strongest (path coefficient of .84). The hierarchical

Figure 2. A Structural Equation Model with the Entire Sample



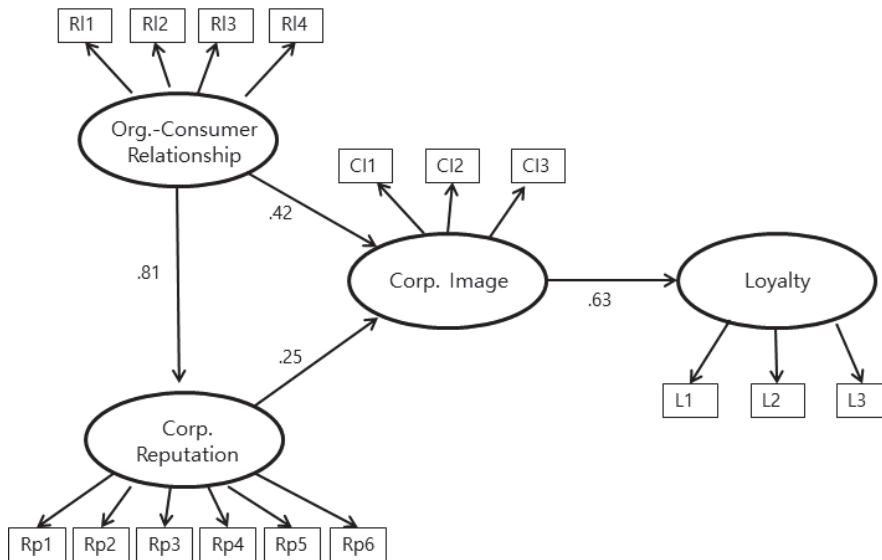
all path coefficients are measured with $p < .05$

causal relationships from relationship, corporate image, and loyalty were also strongly supported (path coefficient of 0.52 and 0.64, respectively). However, the causal relationship between reputation and corporate image was relatively weak (path coefficient of 0.17) in the model.

The validity of the structural equation model was assessed by examining whether the structure of the model is internally consistent as explicated by the theoretical model proposed with SEM. The confirmatory model of the four constructs was measured by 16 factorial variables including four from relationship, six from reputation, three from corporate image and three from loyalty. Important goodness-of-fit indices were examined to assess the overall fit of the model, and confirmed its predictive power. The results showed good overall fit: CFI = 0.941, GFI = 0.920, NFI = 0.925, RMR = 0.042, RMSEA = 0.071.

As noted above, the moderating role of involvement was examined with SEM analyses of two groups (high and low involvement). The hypothetical model with four causal relationships (represented as arrows in the

Figure 3. A Tested SEM with the Lower Involvement Group



all path coefficients are measured with $p < .05$

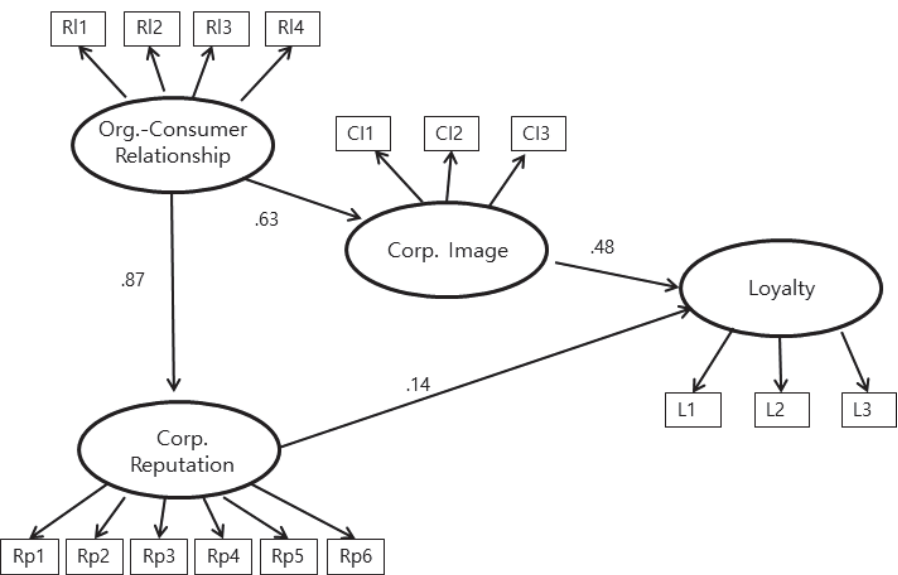
model) was tested with each of the two groups and revision was conducted where a revised model for a group can yield higher goodness-of-fits.

First, in the group with lower involvement, the tested model was strongly supported with maintaining high goodness-of-fits and path coefficients (see Figure 3). The causal relationship between relationship and reputation was still supported with the highest coefficient of 0.81. Other hypotheses were also supported with similar levels of causal links (0.25 or higher path coefficients). The model showed good overall fit: CFI = 0.936, GFI = 0.905, NFI = 0.904, RMR = 0.044, RMSEA = 0.051.

In contrast, the group with higher involvement showed a different outlook. The relatively weaker path between reputation and corporate image (0.25 in the lower involvement group) was considerably decreased with coefficient of 0.11, which is not statistically significant ($p = .391$). The model fit also worsened and was evaluated as less acceptable. A revision work is needed to identify any alternative explanation for the causal relationships among variables in the context of higher involvement. The problematic path between reputation and corporate image was removed and an alternative path from reputation to loyalty was included in the revised model. Since corporate image was assumed to provide a mediating role between these two variables, an alternative relationship between them should be a direct, causal relationship. As Baron and Kenny (1986) suggested, the direct path should be close to zero in order to support a mediating role of a variable. In other words, if the direct causal relationship path is stronger than the mediating path with more reliable fit of model, the mediating role is denied and the direct relationship should be supported.

As shown in (Figure 4), a revised model for the low involvement group presented enhanced path coefficient of 0.14 between reputation and loyalty ($p < .05$) as compared with the path from reputation and corporate image in the general model (see Figure 2). The goodness-of-fit indices of this revised model also supported the improved fit of model (CFI = 0.937, GFI = 0.906, NFI = 0.904, RMR = 0.042, RMSEA = 0.051). Therefore, it is inferred that corporate reputation positively influences consumer's loyalty in case of people highly involved in a company. Otherwise, corporate image

Figure 4. A Revised Model for the Higher Involvement Group



all path coefficients are measured with $p < .05$

takes a mediating role in the case of people with lower involvement in the company.

6. Discussion and Implications

The current study aimed to investigate the role of critical organizational constructs from the literature of public relations and business, organization-public relationship, reputation, and corporate image, in improving major indices of organizational performance such as loyalty. In addition, consumers' involvement in the organization was assumed to moderate the causal relationships among these variables. Although several studies support the individual relationships among these constructs, very few studies have examined their relationships within a single framework. Moreover, involvement as a critical personal characteristic, which has been relatively ne-

glected in previous studies, was included in the analysis. Understanding how consumers' perceived assessments of the organization impact their loyalty has important managerial implications in the present competitive environment. This study provides a comprehensive review of organizational constructs and their relationships based on an integrative approach.

In this study, the researchers have introduced a relationship-focused model of consumer loyalty derived from a comprehensive review of business, reputation, and public relations literature. The literature shows that three variables are key determinants of consumer loyalty: (1) perceived quality of relationships with the company, (2) perceived reputation of the company, and (3) perceived corporate image. In addition, consumers' involvement in the organization was examined as it influences overall consumer's perception of and attitude toward the organization. Most of the model's structure was confirmed in structural equation modeling using empirical data from a survey of 672 consumers from Korea.

To analyze the proposed model, a structural equation model was used. The results clearly demonstrate that a close relationship exists between the relational outcomes consumers have with the company and its reputation. In addition, both relationship and reputation were strong determinants of consumers' loyalty. Across the different data-model fit indexes, the proposed model turned out to perform well to be retained as a valid model. Also, according to the results, the three factors successfully predicted consumers' loyalty to the company.

The findings partially confirmed the relationships among the three constructs with valid and reliable indices; the proposed model was confirmed for the low-involvement consumer group, whereas corporate image did not mediate the relationship between perceived reputation and loyalty among the consumers with high involvement. First, in general, relationship proved to be a strong predictor of its hypothetical consequences. Especially, relationship strongly affected corporate image. The role of relationship was fairly important, since its influences on corporate image as well as reputation were much stronger than other causal paths. Second, OPR had stronger influence on corporate image than reputation, meaning relationship outcomes

were the core driver of the entire relationship. Third, the role of corporate image varied depending on the public's involvement in the organization. In the case of low-involvement consumers, corporate image as a mediator between relationship, reputation, and loyalty was significantly supported. However, when consumers had a high level of involvement, corporate image mediated only the relationship between OPR and loyalty; corporate reputation only had a direct effect.

Consequently, a potential value of this study should be examining the moderating role of involvement. The proposed model was not supported for the higher involvement group; in fact, the causal link between reputation and corporate image was not significant with a small amount of impact. A revised model for high involvement group showed that reputation directly affected loyalty not mediated by corporate image. This implies that people highly involved in the company can build qualified level of loyalty with the recognition of fair reputation regardless of the level of corporate image.

The path model shows how OPR drive consumer's responses to corporate performance; it ultimately affects consumer loyalty mediated by corporate image and corporate reputation. This implies that corporations should enhance their relationship with consumers and improve the corporate reputation in order to achieve higher levels of corporate image and loyalty. Whereas corporate image is substantially difficult to improve because of its abstract characteristic, it is relatively practical for managers to enhance the relationship with consumers by changing the company's behaviors. In other words, a company should make considerable efforts to improve the relationship with its target consumers in order to improve its corporate image, and accordingly, consumer loyalty.

The findings of this study corroborate Grunig's argument (1993) that organizations should not merely focus on symbolic images; rather, they should build behavioral relationships with publics. The findings also imply that there is an association between public relationships and the level of loyalty mediated through corporate reputation and corporate image. An organization that desires to improve consumer loyalty needs to cultivate long-term quality relationships with its public rather than maneuver reputa-

tion or image for short-term benefits.

As expected, the level of involvement in a company influenced how consumers' perception of relationship outcomes and reputation influence the perceived corporate image, and consequently, loyalty toward the company. That is, those who were highly involved in the particular organization were more influenced by the relationship they had with the organization; how the organization behaved is more important than what it says. Their direct experience (relations) and accumulated outcome of the experience (reputation) had direct impacts on loyalty without mediation of corporate image. On the other hand, as the causal link between reputation and corporate image had a significant impact on consumers' loyalty toward the company among those who had lower involvement, indirect experience or symbolic relationships (image) played a critical role in their loyalty. These results suggest that more sophisticated consumer relationship cultivation and maintenance strategies are needed, which corroborate the findings of Pressgrove and McKeever (2016).

Practically, the results of the study offer valuable insights for management of corporate communication. Overall, an important finding is the influence of OPR on the consumers' loyalty. This result suggests that companies should not give priority to only intrinsic, symbolic attributes such as corporate image in their communication strategy. Although corporate image is considered the predominant antecedents of consumer loyalty, relational outcomes based on behavioral relationships precede those relationships. It is suggested that marketers and communication managers should emphasize and cultivate a good relationship with their consumers to foster a favorable corporate reputation, image, and eventually loyalty.

Furthermore, companies are advised to develop multiple strategies based on more scientific public segmentation. A majority of corporate communication activities tend to consider the public as a group of people with homogenous characteristics. However, as the results of this study show, individual characteristics such as the level of involvement influence how different organizational constructs affect the individuals' perception, attitude, and eventually behavioral intentions. Corporate communication managers

will benefit from more scientific research and analysis of their targets before developing corporate communication programs including messages. Therefore, corporate public relations programs that accompany behavioral experiences, such as company visit, tour and trial, will be more effective for the consumers with higher involvement.

Some potential limitations of the study should be noted. First, admittedly, the present study measured the perceptions of a sample of consumers about one particular food and beverage company. The type of the company and industry may have influenced the result. For example, recently, food safety has become a critical issue among Korean consumers; this social trend could have influenced consumers' evaluation of this particular organization. Therefore, the study does not attempt to generalize the findings to all types of companies across industries. Given the great diversity of products and services, it would be helpful to realize similar studies in other industries. Second, for a more valid result, future studies should need to consider including the competitor variable. As Kim and Jo (2009) pointed out, the availability of competitors tend to have great influence on consumers' purchase decision making. Third, to expand the theoretical framework of consumer relations, it is necessary to consider the variables that influence consumer characteristics other than involvement. Fourth, although the data allow for the verification of the hypothesis at one point in time, they do not provide an absolute proof of causality. The efficacy of the items used to measure the constructs under investigation must also be considered. In the study, they were selected based on the review of the literature. However, at this stage, the identification of the indicators that best represent the constructs continues to challenge researchers in the field. Finally, it is possible that social culture in South Korea has influenced how consumers evaluate a company. Further investigations should consider the influence of culture on consumers' perception of organizational behaviors.

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고객 충성도에 대한 기업 자산의 역할

조작-공중 관계성과 평판을 중심으로

성민정 중앙대학교 광고홍보학과 교수

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본 연구는 PR 연구에서 중요하게 다루어져 온 '조작-공중 관계성'과 '평판'이 소비자의 기업에 대한 충성도에 미치는 영향을 살펴보았다. 기업 이미지와 조직에 대한 관여도가 이들 변인 간의 관계에 영향을 미치는 매개 및 조절 변인으로 검증되었다. 연구 결과, 행동 차원의 변인인 '조작-공중 관계성'과 또 다른 변인인 '평판'은 고객 충성도에 대한 유의미한 예측력을 보여 주었으며, 이들 간의 인과관계에 있어서 기업 이미지는 매개 역할을 하는 것으로 나타났다. 본 연구는 관계성과 평판이 이러한 주요 커뮤니케이션 결과 지표에 대한 영향을 폭넓게 설명해 주는 틀을 제공하였다는 면에서 이론적 기여가 있다고 할 수 있으며, 더불어 서로 다른 수준의 관여도 집단에 따른 개별 구조방정식 모형을 검증한 결과, 소비자 관여도가 이들 간의 인과관계에 대해 조절적 역할을 하는 것으로 나타났다는 점 또한 주목할 만하다.

KEY WORDS 조작-공중 관계성 • 평판 • 기업 이미지 • 관여도 • 충성도