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Alumni Perception and Attitude Towards Donation: Where are we now towards university success?

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Abstract. Recently, university's management had seek a systematic approaches in maintaining long term relationship with their alumni. A strong bond between alumni and their alma maters could benefited university in strengthen their academic reputation and ranking as well as to secure financial sustainability. Study on alumni donors towards their alma mater had gained much attention in developed countries and lacks of studies have been done in developing countries such as Malaysia. Recent study had recorded that trend on alumni donors to their alma mater had decreased yearly. This study attempts to understand alumni perception and attitude towards donation to alma mater through profiling donors and less-donors. Cross-tabulation analyses on demographics profile among 90 postgraduate students from one of the well-known business school in Malaysia shows that almost 70% of the respondents were willing to donate to their alma maters. Female found to be more willing to donate than male. Age, income, religion also plays a significant role in determining donors and non-donors. Besides profiling donor behavior, this study also discovers that Malaysian alumni also at the readiness stage to involve in other .supportive behaviors such as willingness to become as a mentor, academic talk and networking as well as provide expert opinion to strengthen academic quality thus relevant in supporting university success. Implication and recommendation for future research also were discussed in this article.

Keywords: alumni; donor behavior; marketing activities; university performance

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, in Malaysia, most of the university spending is funded by the government. However, nowadays university either public or private required strategic funding to compete in the global arena. University

required huge investment in order to provide consistent and quality education for their stakeholders. In general, university required at least RM150 million a year to serve their stakeholders whereby almost 90% of expenditure is supported by the government [1]. According to [2], Malaysian government expenditures on university had increased more than RM7 billion per year within 2010 to 2014. It is reported the government expenditure towards higher education has risen to 14% per year [3]. Due to the reason, Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia had introduced The National Higher Education Strategic Plan and revised Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 which purposely designed to empower national higher education on both academics matter as well as financial. Among other, it is set to reduce the financial burden of government. It is outlined through its fifth pillars-financial sustainability in “The 10 shifts” of Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2015-2025. The two most relevant initiatives as highlighted were 1) improving the funding formulae for public university and 2) incentivising creation of endowment and *waqf* funds.

Contrary to western countries, Malaysian university’s fund from public is still lacking. Reference [4] stated, gift and donor culture especially among alumni of Malaysian universities is still debatable. Reference [1] stressed that government support to public universities in United Kingdom is around 25%, whereby Australia and New Zealand about 45% and neighbor country i.e. Singapore being supported around 75%. Basically, the remaining percentage is supported by their alumni. Despite the interesting figure, it is recorded statistics on alumni giving had dropped from year to year. Reference [5] highlighted that alumni participation rate had dropped to 9.2% (2012), from 9.5% (2011) and 9.8% (2010). Surprisingly, the author also stated that it is nearly 50% drop within 20 years (18% in 1990). The author strategically underlined several questions for such decline, such as does university really engaged their alumni in philanthropy as students? And does university build strong relationship with their alumni? Hence, this study attempts to examine the nature and landscape as well as to profile alumni donor behavior specifically in Malaysia.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reference [6] attempted to profile the alumni behavior into four broad continuums namely; 1) inactive, 2) volunteer, 3) donor and 4) supporter. Inactive refers to alumnus with no record of donor and volunteer, while volunteer is defined as alumnus that support alma mater in one or more activities of institution. Donor associate with financial support only and supporter is conceptualized as alumnus that support financial and volunteer in various activities held by the institution. Their findings suggested that life stage (age, employment status), inclination to give and volunteer and connection to campus (social, cultural, recreational) plays a significant role in defining inactive and active alumnus. Contrary to expectation, social exchange theory dimension (academic and social experience) is insignificant.

A study towards Malaysian alumni as in [2] specifically focused on social cycle impact of alumni towards endowment income. Study among 152 alumni indicated that almost 74% agreed to contribute to their alma mater which almost 70 percent of them were female. The authors also stressed that personality factor play a crucial roles in explaining donor behavior. Factors such as financial management, university’s management, university-community network and external factors were insignificant among the studied sample.

Reference [7] attempted to outline Australian attitude towards charitable donor behavior. A study among 539 respondents among Australian revealed that more elderly citizens and less educated tend to engage in donation as compared to young and educated people. Religiosity plays a very low influence on

charitable donation. Beside, donors are more willing to donate to international charities as compared to local charities.

A study as in [8] revealed that 60.1% of 481 alumni were actively involved in alumni activities. These respondents also found to exhibit strong positive attitudes towards social and personality in serving others as a result of experience in service-learning and community service during the college. Thus the authors highlighted that service learning and community services participation during college life have a long term effect of their involvement of alumni and other community service related and concurred with the findings of [9] and [10].

III. METHODOLOGY

This research employed a quantitative approach with cross-sectional study in nature to profile and report descriptive analysis on alumni donor behavior. This study focuses to examine alumni donor behavior at individual level of study. As an initial study, the sampling frame of this study is based on Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School (OYAGSB) who enrolled a postgraduate studies, thus, students had at least become one of any alumni before joining their postgraduate studies (either Master or PhD level). Based on the Graduate Academic Information System (GAIS) (2017) database, about 5000 were registered as an OYAGSB students. Based on rules of thumb proposed by [11], an appropriate number of sample for 5000 population is 357. Hence, every 10th student in the student list provided by the authorized officer were invited to complete the online survey questionnaires. After a two months duration of data collection, a total 145 set questionnaires were gathered. Thus response rate is 40.6%. However, based on pre-data screening, only 90 responses were usable. The remaining data could not be further analyzed due to too many missing values and 'easy answer' selection by the respondents (indifference score for all statement).

The questionnaire consists of several section mainly to gain information regarding alumni profiles, general alumni perception and attitude towards donors and their willingness to contribute to university. Measure for alumni profiles and general perception on donors were specifically developed for the purpose of this study mainly in dichotomous scale. The analyses were done through statistical tools; SPSS 24.0.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

(A) Respondent's Profile

The following Table 1 summarized the profile of the respondents in this study. Based on the Table 1, majority of the respondents were female (58.9%) and 41.1% were male. Most of the respondents fall into age between 25 to 30 years old (63%) and this is consistent whereby majority of the respondents also pursuing Master level at OYASGB (47% had obtained degree level). About 14.4% aged between 36-40 years old, 8.9% between 31 to 35 years old and 13.4% aged above 40 years old. With regard to education attainment, about 30% of the respondents had gained Master, 17.8% had gained PhD and 4.4% were diploma holder. In term of marital status, about 62.2% of the respondents were single and 37.8% had married. Almost 58% of the respondents were employed, 32.2% were fulltime student, 4.4% self-employed and 5.6% were job seekers. Most of the respondents earned below RM1500 monthly (31.1%), followed by RM1500 to RM2000 (20%) and more than RM5501 (17.5%). About 47.8% of the respondents with no children, whereby about 22.2% of them have either two or three children, 13.3% with one kid, 10% with four kids and 6.6% have more than five kids.

Table 1
Respondent's Profile

<i>Profiles</i>	<i>Frequency (N)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Gender		
Male	37	41.1
Female	53	58.9
Age		
25 to 30 years old	57	63.3
31 to 35 years old	8	8.9
36 to 40 years old	13	14.4
41 to 45 years old	6	6.7
More than 45 years old	6	6.7
Ethnicity		
Malay	67	74.4
Chinese	5	5.6
India	5	5.6
Other (International)		14.4
Religion		
Muslim	80	88.9
Buddhism	4	4.4
Hinduism	4	4.4
Christianity	2	2.2
Education attainment		
Degree	43	47.8
Diploma	4	4.4
Master	27	30
PhD/DBA	16	17.8
Marital status		
Single	56	62.2
Married	34	37.8
Employment status		
Employed	52	57.8
Looking for job	5	5.6
Self-employed	4	4.4
Student	29	32.2
Monthly income		
Below RM1500	28	31.1
RM1501 to RM2500	18	20
RM2501 to RM3500	13	14.4
RM3501 to RM4500	6	6.7
RM4501 to RM5500	9	10
More than RM5500	16	17.8

(B) Alumni General Behavior

Table 2 summarized alumni general perception and attitude towards their alma maters. The finding shows that majority of the respondents were Universiti Utara Malaysia alumni (26.7%), followed by alumni from international university (17.8%), Universiti Sains Malaysia (14.4%), Unisza (13.3%), and Universiti Teknologi MARA (6.8%). The remaining alumni from Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Universiti Malaya and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Majority of the respondents were graduated between year 2011 to 2017 (68.9%) followed by year 2001 to 2010 (22.2%) and year 1990-2000 (8.8%). Based on the studied sample, only 68.9% were officially registered as an alumni and 31.1% were not officially registered. When alumni were asked their intention to maintain relationship with alma mater, surprisingly about 26.7% of alumni were not sure either to maintain or vice versa. Majority of the alumni stated that they willing to maintain the relationship between 1 to 5 years (28.9%) and about 20% were willing to be a lifetime membership.

Table 2
Alumni General Behavior

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency (N)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Respondent's Alma mater		
Local		
UUM	24	26.7
USM	13	14.4
UPM	4	4.4
UKM	2	2.2
UM	1	1.1
UITM	6	6.8
UTM	2	2.2
UNIMAP	3	3.3
Unisza	12	13.3
Others	7	7.8
International	16	17.8
Year of graduation		
1990-2000	8	8.8
2001-2010	20	22.2
2011-2017	62	68.9
Membership as alumni		
Yes	62	68.9
No	28	31.1
Intention to maintain relationship with alma mater		
Not sure	24	26.7
1 to 5 years	26	28.9
6 to 10 years	9	10
11 to 15 years	-	-
16 to 20 years	9	10
More than 20 years	4	4.4
Lifetime	18	20

contd. table 2

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency (N)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Intention to donate to alma mater		
Yes	60	66.7
No	30	33.3
Keep update information to alumni office		
Yes	36	40
No	54	60
Preferable medium of contact by alma mater		
Bulletin	2	2.2
Mail/email	62	68.9
Social media	17	18.9
Telephone	9	10
Preferable events held by the alma mater for alumni		
Alumni gathering/ dinner/reunion/ holiday	52	57.8
Career talk/ networking	11	12.2
Collaboration events with top ranking university/ ministry of education	3	3.3
Community service/ volunteers/charity	6	6.7
Cooperative for alumni	2	2.2
Nothing	16	17.8

When alumni were asked on their intention to donate to their alma maters, about 66.7% stated their willingness whereby 33.3% said they didn't have intention to donate to their alma maters. This is consistent with the findings of [2] that almost 70% of alumni were willing to contribute to their alma maters. Only 40% of the alumni keep their information updated to the alumni office. Majority of the alumni prefer mail and email as a tools of communication between alumni and their alma maters (68.9%), almost 20% choose social media, 10% favor telephone and only 2.2% prefer bulletin on the regular basis. Hence, to improve communication effectiveness between alma mater and alumni, university should established database and update information on mail and email address of their alumni. University specifically alumni office need to identify strategies on how to encourage alumni to update their information because based on the findings only 40% of the alumni had their initiative to update their information to alumni office. For instance, a frequent contact via bulletin and social media, management could asked alumni to update their personal information and this could help the management to maintain the long term relationship with their alumni.

Majority of the respondents seek to have alumni gathering as an activities held by their alma maters (57.8%). Unfortunately, 17.8% of the alumni or about 16 respondents states that their alma maters should done nothing. Interestingly, 12.2% of alumni expected to have career talk and networking session with their alma maters' student. Beside, 6.7% were willing to participate in any volunteer and/or charity events held by their alma mater, 3.3% expected to collaborate with their alma mater and hope their university to strengthen academic collaboration with top university and about 2.2% seek the opportunity to have cooperative institution for alumni. These findings indicate that, alumni not only looking to have a formal gathering organized by their alma maters. More importantly, besides showing their willingness to contribute monetarily, alumni also at the readiness stage to contribute to their alma mater in term of supporting their university through mentoring (such as giving motivational and career talks) to students as well as strengthening

academic reputation through feedback and networking. This is in line with the findings by [12] that alumni supportive behaviors goes beyond donors namely university loyalty and university support and the findings of [6] on volunteerism (include recruiting students, mentoring, and participating in special events).

(C) Donors versus less-Donors: Who are they?

Who are they more willing to donate to their alma maters? Cross-tabulation in SPSS analysis between demographic profiles and intention to donate revealed that female were more willing to donate to their alma maters as compared to male with 69.8% and 62.2% respectively. The findings is concurs with [13] and [14]. In term of age distribution, alumni aged between 36-40 years old were more willing to donate (76.9%), followed by 31-35 years old (75%) and aged between 25-30 years old and more than 45 years old. Only 33.3% of the aged category between 41-45 years old was willing to donate. This finding also consistent with the previous study of [7] and [13] that alumni willingness to donate increased with the age at the decreasing rate.

For the ethnicity, more Chinese (80%) were willing to donate as compared to Malay (65.7%), Indian (60%) and from other international alumni (69%). In term of religion, 100% Christian’s alumni are willing to donate to their alma maters, followed by Buddhism (75%), Islam (66.2%) and Hindu (50%). This findings add to the body of knowledge on donor behavior that religion factors such as religiosity plays a significant roles in explaining gift and donor behavior [15][16]. Hence, the finding of [7] that indicate religiosity has no influence on donor behavior is arguable and debatable. For academic attainment, no significant different between diploma, degree, master and higher degree holder category is observed from the statistic, whereby more than 50% of the alumni were willing to donate to their alma maters. Based on the findings, it is seem that alumni (despite of their graduation level) would willing to contribute to their alma maters. In term of marital status, more single alumni were willing to donate (71.4%) as compared to married alumni (58.8%). Surprisingly, more alumni who were seeking for a job were willing to donate (80%). 75-76% of the alumni who were self-employed and students were willing to donate and about 60% who were employed were willing to donate. Ideally, it is expected that more alumni with higher income could contribute to their alma mater. The findings show that alumni who earned more than RM5501 were more willing to donate (81.2%) as compared to others. More than 60% of each income categories were willing to donate and this included alumni who earned below RM1500 with 71.4% of them willing to donate. This is consistent with the findings of [13]. In term of number of children and dependents, alumni with one kid tend to be more willing to donate (91.7%) as compared to the others. About 65% who had no children were willing to donate. In summary the following Table 3 summarized a profile of donors:

Table 3
Comparison Between Donors and Less-donors

<i>More donors</i>	<i>Less donors</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female • Aged between 36-40 years old • Chinese • Christian • Degree holders • Single • Employed alumni (public & private) • Above RM5500 earners • One kid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • 41-45 years old • Indian • Hinduism • Diploma holders • Married • Self-employed alumni • RM1501-RM2500 earners • More than 5 kids

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

Where are we now? Does Malaysian Education Blueprints in strategizing donation, endowment and *waqf* seem achievable within 2015-2020? Based on the findings, we can concluded that we are at the readiness stage of strengthening university financial performance through alumni contribution. However, more strategic decisions and action need to be done before we can ensure 100% financial sustainability of our public universities.

First and foremost, marketing function could be seen as a crucial tool in strengthen the alumni-alma maters bonding. Either could be tackle based on loyalty theories and/or relationship marketing perspectives, alumni should be seen as a brand community that integrate how alumni value of their degree, sense of identification among alumni, and interaction with other's stakeholders (faculty, alumni office, peers, etc.) [17]. Based on the findings, more than 30% of the respondents were not officially registered as alumni of their alma mater. In addition to that, about 27% have no idea either to maintain the relationship with their alma maters. Thus it is indicate that, there is still a room for improvement. As majority of the alumni hope to have an official gathering from their alma maters, this could be seen as the best tools to strengthen the relationship between alumni and alma maters.

Secondly, regular communication between alumni and alma mater could be deem necessary to sustain "the share of mind" state among the alumni. This could be done through an update sharing information on university's activities and achievement via email, social media and bulletin mainly to sustain alumni's loyalty towards their alma mater. Based on the findings, alma maters could not depend on single source of information dissemination as alumni seek to have an update of their alma maters from multiple sources of communication

Thirdly, numerous researchers highlighted the emerging trends of the effect of religiosity and religion on giving and donor behaviors [7]. *Waqf* in Malaysian Education Blueprints (2015-2020) is introduced as a strategy to strengthen university financial sustainability which is closely related to Islam law and practices. Unfortunately, based on the findings, only small numbers of Muslim alumni were willing to contribute to their alma maters as compared to other religion. Hence, further research need to be done to confirm the situation. If the situation holds true, we are at uncertainty to materialize the *waqf* project aimed by Ministry of Higher Education. Hence, awareness campaign on donor, endowment and *waqf* need to be upheld among university's student especially among Muslim community.

Other supportive behaviors also observed through this study. Beside voluntarily donate to alma maters, alumni also seek an opportunity to support their alma maters in numerous ways such as act as a mentor during career talk and academic talk, participating in charity events as well as provide feedback and suggestion to strengthen academic quality of the faculty. Thus, alumni office manager should strategizing more relevant activities to their alumni. Table 3 could be used as a guidance to select the potential segment of alumni that willing to contribute to their alma maters. Based on [6], alumni of this study could be categorized into "supporter" (financial and non-financial supporters).

As this is an initial study among alumni from one of business school, future study should be based on larger sample with additional variables. Correlational and/or cause-effect study could be consider mainly to deepen understanding influential factors for donor behavior among alumni.

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