



Impact of country image on relationship maintenance: a case study of Korean Government Scholarship Program alumni

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Abstract

Governments sponsor student-mobility programs with the expectation that students will build a more favorable and informed opinion of the host country which, in turn, will determine more favorable behavior towards the host country. Nevertheless, assessments of this logic are rare. Based on a survey of the Korean Government Scholarship Program's alumni ($n=579$), we analyze the alumni's country image of South Korea and how this image determines their relationship maintenance behavior with South Korean people. Our findings show that the KGSP alumni's image of South Korea partly explains the variance in their personal and professional relationship maintenance with South Koreans. Our findings show that the alumni's emotions about South Korea influence their personal relationship maintenance behavior more than does each of the cognitive dimensions of the country image, while the functional dimension, which evaluates their beliefs about the country's competencies and the competitiveness of its economic and political systems, has the highest influence on the alumni's professional relationship maintenance.

Keywords Public diplomacy · Korean Government Scholarship Program · Student-mobility programs · Relationship management · Country image · PLS-SEM

Introduction

There has been a relational turn in the public diplomacy scholarship in the post-9/11 era (Fitzpatrick 2007; Leonard et al. 2002; Yun 2006; Zaharna et al. 2013). Building and maintaining relationships are now seen as being vital to the long-term outcomes of public diplomacy (Leonard et al. 2002). Sponsored student mobility programs are viewed as a significant public diplomacy tool, first, because it helps manufacturing students' sympathy towards the host country; and second, it facilitates relationship-building processes between the people of host and home countries (Nye 2008; Snow 2008; Zaharna 2009; Wilson 2014).

Three significant questions emerge from these generic premises of student mobility programs as public diplomacy. First, how do sponsored foreign students evaluate

the host country? Second, do students build and maintain relationships with host country people during their sojourn there? Third, whether and if there is a connection between scholarship recipients' evaluation of the host country and their relationship maintenance behavior with host country individuals.

Building on Buhmann and Ingenhoff's (2015) 4-Dimensional Model (4D Model) of the Country Image, we explore how Korean Government Scholarship Program (KGSP) alumni cognitively and affectively evaluate South Korea (hereafter, Korea) and how these evaluations influence their relationship maintenance with Koreans.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, we bring together different areas of research. We use a country image model, but as opposed to sampling random foreigners which is common in most studies, we use KGSP alumni population as the subject of this study. These alumni participated in a sponsored student mobility program. In other words, the host country invested in them with some expected outcomes in mind. Therefore, we uncover how they evaluate Korea's country image, which is related to one of the program objectives. We go further to dig into whether their evaluation of Korea influenced their relationship maintenance

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with Koreans, which is another objective, indeed one of the ultimate goals of the program. One of the distinguishing features of this study is that, while most attitude–behavior studies use conation, for example students' intention to maintain their relations with host country individuals as the dependent variable, we use self-reported behavior, i.e., alumni's relationship maintenance with Koreans, as our dependent variable. We believe that the latter is a better indicator of the actual behavior.

The organization of this article is as follows. In “[The Korean Government Scholarship Program](#)” section, we introduce the KGSP as a background for this study. Further, in “[Analytical framework](#)” section, we build analytical framework which guided this research and review the literature on relational public diplomacy, student mobility programs, attitude–behavior studies, and relationship maintenance behavior. In the “[Research questions](#)” section, we outline research questions for this study. In “[Methodology](#)” section, we explain our research methodology. In the “[Results](#)” section, we present our findings. The “[Discussion and conclusion](#)” section discusses and interprets the findings and implications for the theory and practice of public diplomacy.

The Korean Government Scholarship Program

The National Institute for International Education, which is under the Korean Ministry of Education, runs the Global Korea Scholarship (GKS) program. The KGSP began in 1967 and is the flagship scholarship program within the GKS. Until 2008, the number of scholarships remained quite limited, but after the re-design of the project, the number rose to between 700 and 800 scholarships for graduate students and about 150 for undergraduate students, annually. The number of participating countries also grew in 2008. The government began considering international students not only for the internationalization of Korean higher education and as a source of income but also as a means of producing private ambassadors that could further promote Korea abroad and become a networking link (Byun and Kim 2011; MOFA 2016). In other words, the Korean government introduced public diplomacy-related objectives to this primarily educational program; these objectives being the promotion of cooperation and friendship between countries through educational exchanges; enhancing Korea's national status by providing aid for the development of the education sector in developing countries; and the establishment of a Korea-friendly global network (NIIED 2018). In the next section, we introduce the analytical framework that guided our research.

Analytical framework

Relational public diplomacy

Public diplomacy refers to international actors' engagement in communication-based activities to understand, inform, and influence foreign publics and build relationships with them in order to achieve their political goals as they relate to foreign policies (Ayhan 2019; Cull 2013; Gregory 2008; Pamment 2018; Sevin 2017). Recent literature on public diplomacy is in agreement that the one-way dissemination of designed and mediated messages towards passive target audiences is not enough to achieve long-term public diplomacy goals (Leonard et al. 2002; Nye 2004; Zaharna 2010). Building and maintaining two-way symmetrical relationships with strategic stakeholders, in which both sides' interests are taken into account, became a core imperative of public diplomacy initiatives (Fitzpatrick 2007; Zaharna 2011; Zaharna et al. 2013). The relational framework of public diplomacy concentrates on relationship-building processes and “the construction of social structures to advance political objectives” (Zaharna 2009, p. 86). Public diplomacy is no longer merely about the authority sending a particular message to a particular audience but about mutuality, shared interests, communication, networking, and collaboration between stakeholders across group boundaries (Snow 2010; Van Ham 2014; Zaharna 2009; Zaharna et al. 2013). The relational framework of communication in public diplomacy implies that long-term goals can be achieved by building and managing well-functioning relationships between home and foreign publics. Once built, relationships are not automatic and self-perpetuating but require maintenance to be sustained in the long run (Brown 2013). After being built, relationships must be maintained to increase the odds of there being collaborative initiatives in the future.

Student mobility programs as public diplomacy

Student mobility programs are not a new phenomenon. Student mobility programs have been practiced for more than a century by France (Lane 2013), Russia (Yiğit Gülseven 2017), China, the USA (Bevis 2013), the Great Britain (Pietsch 2010), among others. The prevailing rationales behind the decision to run a student mobility program are that these programs contribute to deepening relationships between countries and that the students, who participate in these programs, develop a more sophisticated understanding of and affection towards the host country and bridge between home and host countries (Scott-Smith 2008; Wilson 2014). Student mobility programs are utilized to



facilitate relationship-building between sponsored students and host country people. The role of the government is often limited to designing and facilitating interpersonal interactions between them, while the people directly involved build and maintain relationships (Ayhan 2020).

The measurement of actual impacts of the student mobility programs and causal mechanisms between host country perception and students' behavior is a complex task (Banks 2011; Pahlavi 2007; Pamment 2014). There are many factors at play that can influence students' attitudes and behavior towards the host country. The government agencies prefer to focus on more tangible and easy-to-count outputs rather than outcomes (Banks 2011). They tend to report anecdotal or descriptive positive outcomes of student mobility programs, emphasizing its impact on opinion about the host country abroad (Scott-Smith 2008; Wilson 2014). Furthermore, these reports often tend to focus on attitudes about the host country, without paying much attention to how these attitudes may affect the participants' behavior related to the country (Banks 2011). Additional complications arise due to the methodological limitations when assessing long-term impacts of the exchange mobility program.

To measure the effect of the student mobility programs, scholars might choose to survey participants before the start of the program and after completion or using retrospective questions when longitudinal study is not available (Boyd et al. 2001; Wilson 2014). Alternatively, scholars sometimes use 360 degree approach to measure the ripple effect of a student mobility program by surveying both direct and indirect participants of the program (chaperones, host families, host faculty) (Olberding and Olberding 2010).

There is no unanimously accepted methodology on how to measure the outcome of the student mobility programs. Program evaluations by governmental agencies can be both short and long term but they concentrate on outputs instead of outcomes (Banks 2011). Longitudinal tracing of student mobility program alumni is possible but difficult, while concentration on the alumni who achieved certain decision-making positions would not deliver representative results (Wilson 2014). Studies focusing on current exchange students are capable to report change in attitude towards the host country and potential change in conation (e.g., Yun 2014), but do not report on actual behavior of program alumni.

Attitude–behavior theories and country image

The development of the Theory of Reasoned Action catalyzed understanding of behavior antecedents. This theory, or more generically belief–attitude–behavior theories, predicts that individuals' attitudes towards behavior and subjective norms determine intention to behave in a certain way, and intention to do certain behavior determines actual behavior

(Ajzen 1985, 1991; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). There is strong theoretical basis supporting the concept that intention can be considered as proxy to direct behavior (Ajzen 2005; Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). This theory is widely applied in studying the attitudes and behavior towards host country, for example, traveling (Kim and Kwon 2018) and product purchasing behavior (Wang et al. 2012). Recent studies employ this theory to country image, treating country as the object of the reasoned action (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015; Yun 2014).

In this paper, we employ Buhmann and Ingenhoff's (2015) 4D Model of the Country Image to measure how the KGSP alumni's beliefs about and emotions towards Korea affect their relationship maintenance behavior. In general, attitude–behavior studies regarding student mobility programs focus on behavioral intention instead of actual behavior (Thomas et al. 2016; Rahman et al. 2017; Yun 2014; Yousaf et al. 2020). In this paper, we ask alumni to self-report their actual behavior, which is a better indicator than their self-reporting of intention to do the behavior. The distinctive advantage of the 4D Model of the Country Image is that it includes judgements of people about various country attributes, as well as personal feelings about the country (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015).

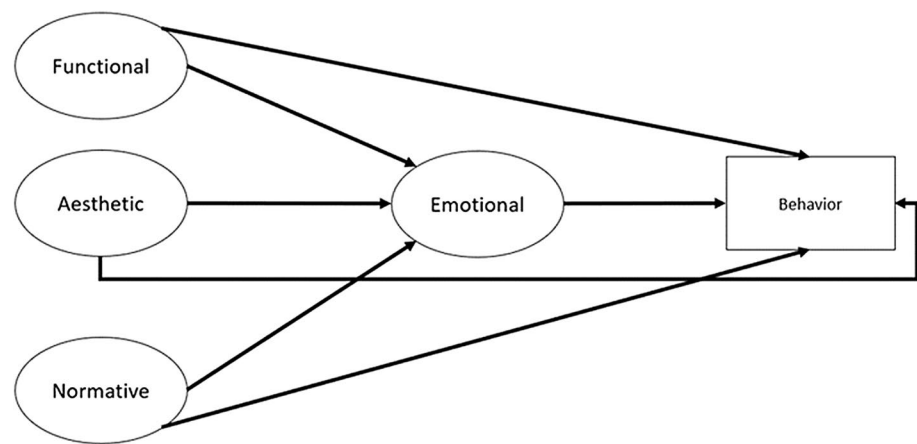
Country image is a complex attitudinal construct which is composed of two components: cognitive (personal beliefs and judgments about a country's attributes) and affective (emotions about the country) (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015). The cognitive component influences behavior not only directly but also through the mediation of the affective component (see Fig. 1). In other words, the person's beliefs about a country determine their emotions towards it. And both beliefs and emotions influence people's behavior related to the country in question.

The cognitive component consists of three diverse dimensions (aesthetic, functional, normative). It allows analyzing country image perception on the basis of a list of various judgments about the country (nature, culture, norms, economic performance, diplomacy, and others) (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015). The model implies that a social object is judged on object's beliefs about its functional qualities (abilities, competences, and success), its normative qualities (integrity), its aesthetic qualities (culture and nature) as well as its emotional qualities (sympathy and fascination) (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015).

The functional dimension contains beliefs about the competencies and competitiveness of a country in terms of the functioning of its economic and political systems (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015). The normative dimension is composed of personal beliefs about the country's norms and values (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015). The aesthetic dimension encompasses the country's aesthetic qualities, such as its beauty and attractiveness with respect to its culture and



Fig. 1 The 4D Model of country image and influence on behavior (based on Buhmann 2016; Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015)



scenic space (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015). The affective component of the 4D Model has a single emotional dimension, which consists of feelings of affection and fascination toward the country (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015). The analytical framework of this research assumes that these four dimensions of the country image determine the country-related behavior.

Relationship maintenance behavior

There are several studies that explore attitude–behavior relationship of students towards a host country. Cai and Loo (2014) analyze how national image predicts choosing the destination for tertiary study. Eder et al. (2010) find that the country image expressed with culture, reputation, history, safety, and attraction is among pull factors that predicts international students' decision to study at US universities. Nadeau and Olafsen (2015) show that the country image predicts Norwegian students' intention to move to Canada. Shafaei and Razak (2016) explore the antecedents of cross-cultural adaptation of foreign students in Malaysia, which in turn determines their behavioral outcomes including students' word-of-mouth about their institutions in Malaysia in their networks. Aziz et al. (2016) argue that universities are stakeholders in place branding of a host country influencing students' attitudes towards the country and in turn, their intention to travel to the country. Unlike many other studies, Li et al. (2013) find host country image to be less important when alternative explanations are considered.

Even though relationship-building and maintenance are pronounced as primary goals of sponsored student mobility programs, there are only a handful studies that analyze country image as a determinant of relationship maintenance of students or alumni. Despite difficulties for international students to build relationships with local students due to self-isolation in “foreigners” groups, language barrier, competition with classmates, and fear to establish contacts with locals (Astfalk and Müller-Hilke 2018), the relationships

are built and the alumni of student mobility programs tend to maintain their networks and relationships with people from the host country (Sunal and Sunal 1991; Bachner and Zeuschel 2009). Bachner and Zeuschel (2009) found that even after a decade since graduation, more than 90% of German students who were hosted by American families maintained their relationships with the host families, and 60% were in contact with other Americans. Even though they did not test the relationship between perceived country image and relationship maintenance behavior they have found that “evaluation of the exchange experience is more closely linked to liking or disliking the host country as a nation rather than to a regard or liking of individual members of the host country” (Bachner and Zeuschel 2009, p. 49).

There is some evidence on foreign alumni's relationship maintenance with their professors and supervisors. Jiang and Shen (2019) explored research partnership of Chinese scholars who received their Ph.D. degrees abroad with their former supervisors. They found out that after returning to China, the Chinese scholars maintain research partnerships with mentors from the institution where they were trained for the Ph.D. The finding hints that exchange alumni maintain relationships with professors and nurture relationships through joint research. Nevertheless, this study's scope included only doctoral alumni and did not inquire about the role of the country image in the relationship maintenance.

The relationship between country image and relationship maintenance behavior is relatively an under-researched area. In a rare study, Yun (2014) constructed a model to study the influence of students' attitudes about a country on their intention to maintain their relations with the host country individuals and bridging professionally between the home and host country. He outlined two types of relationships maintenance behavior that is determined by country image: personal relationships with host country friends, professors, and acquaintances; and professional relationships which are about forging relationships between host and home countries through professional activity (Yun 2014).



Using Yun's model, Yousaf et al. (2020) explored China's country image's impact on international students' intention to maintain relationship with Chinese people and the country of China, and concluded that national image of China significantly impacts Higher Education Institution (HEI) brand equity, while both national image and HEI brand equity have positive relationship with personal and country-oriented behavioral intentions (Yousaf et al. 2020).

In our study, we use Yun's operationalization of these two kinds of relationship maintenance behavior with two differences. First, we test actual relationship maintenance behavior rather than intention to maintain relationships. This was possible because we surveyed the alumni, and not students. Second, we explore professional relationships only for alumni who are employed. By looking at professional relationship maintenance behavior of employed alumni of KGSP, we respond to the call by Wilson (2014) who suggested testing the taken-for-granted expectation that the alumni of student mobility programs will bridge between host and home countries, bringing dividends on the investment in them.

Research questions

We treat the KGSP as a relational public diplomacy program in which the Korean government designs and facilitates unsolicited relationship-building between the KGSP recipients and Koreans. We analyze how the KGSP recipients' beliefs and emotions about Korea, i.e., their country image, influence their relationship maintenance behavior with Korean people. We look at personal and professional relationships separately, following Yun's constructs. We explain our instrumentation further in the methodology section. We aim to address the following research questions:

- RQ1 How do KGSP alumni cognitively and affectively evaluate South Korea?
- RQ2 Does KGSP alumni's cognitive and affective evaluation of South Korea influence their personal relationship maintenance behavior with South Korean friends, professors, and acquaintances?
- RQ3 Does employed KGSP alumni's cognitive and affective evaluation of South Korea influence their forging relationships between host and home countries through professional activity?

Methodology

Survey procedures

We surveyed KGSP alumni for their cognitive and affective evaluations of Korea and their relationship maintenance with

Koreans. An online survey was conducted using Survey-Monkey software. A pilot survey of 55 alumni was conducted on March 1, 2018. Responses from this group helped us improve the validity of our survey instrument. Next, on June 7, 2018, a revised survey was sent out to all 3831 KGSP alumni and it was open for one week. Overall, we received 741 responses of which 579 were complete and, therefore, useful for our analysis. All of the survey participants took part voluntarily.

Participants

Of the respondents, more than half (55%) were female; 110 different countries were represented and no single nationality dominated the survey. The biggest portion of alumni of the same nationality belongs to Indonesia, with 4.8% of participants; followed by Vietnam, with 4.3%; Mongolia, 3.9%; the Philippines, 3.6%; India and Malaysia, 3.1% each; while other nationalities did not exceed 3%. The respondents' demographic statistics reflect all KGSP alumni (obtained through personal communications with NIIED staff). Table 1 shows the demographic details of the survey participants.

Instrumentation

The questions on country image were adapted from Buhmann (2016). The model includes indicators that are either formative or reflective constructs. It is a necessary measure because the indicators have different functions. In the formative measurement models, it is implied that indicators cause the construct (they form it). The indicators in the formative model do not need to correlate with each

Table 1 Demographics of survey respondents

Gender		
Female	320	55.3%
Male	259	44.7%
Total	579	100%
Employment status		
Employed in a full-time job	343	59.2%
Employed in a part-time job	49	8.5%
Continuing student	80	13.8%
Unemployed	70	12.1%
Other	37	6.4%
Total	579	100%
Employment across gender		
Employed females	177	51.6%
Employed males	166	48.4%
Total	343	100%



other and are independent of each other (Bollen 1984). The formative measurement model implies that the dependent variable (P) is caused by a set of factors (X). In contrast to formative indicators, reflective indicators manifest consequences of the model (Fornell and Bookstein 1982). In other words, X does not cause P , but rather reflects it (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer 2001; Fornell et al. 1991). Reflective indicators are interrelated with each other and are correlated and interchangeable (Ley 1972). The functional (16 items), normative (10 items), and aesthetic (7 items) dimensions were operationalized with the formative indicators because they are formative constructs, while the emotional dimensions (4 items) were operationalized with the reflective indicators because this is a reflective construct (Ingenhoff et al. 2018, pp. 265–266). We asked three summary questions related to the functional, normative, and aesthetic dimensions, respectively. The summary items allowed for an assessment of the external validity of the indicators that built the constructed formative variable (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer 2001). The formative indicators significantly and positively correlate with the constructed variable. The correlation between the dimension items and the summary questions indicates the validity of the items for the formative dimensions (see Tables 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 in Appendix 2).

As opposed to previous research which asked about conation (intention to do a behavior), we asked the KGSP alumni about their actual (current) relationship maintenance behavior with Koreans. We define relationship maintenance behavior in this study as the maintenance of linkages and ties between the KGSP alumni and the Korean people they met during their stay in the country. We operationalized relationship maintenance based on Yun's (2014) research on the impact of beliefs about and attitudes toward a country on the actual conation for relationship-building. According to Yun (2014), foreign students have individual-level (personal/micro-level) relations with friends, professors, and acquaintances from the host country, while they contribute to macro-level (professional) relations between the home and host societies. For personal relationship maintenance, we used three questions which we adapted from Yun, to measure participants' relationship maintenance with Korean friends, professors, and acquaintances, respectively. For professional relationships, we only included one item ("I work in public or private sectors forging relations between my home country and South Korea" (Yun 2014)) and we named this variable *professional_relationship*. We combined three personal relationship items into an aggregated variable called *personal_relationship*. Using a combination of variables should increase the explained variance of the model (Ajzen 2005). The question items for each construct are listed in Appendix 1.

Analysis

For the analysis measurement, we used SmartPLS software, which is a graphical instrument with a structural equation model that employs the partial least squares method (PLS-SEM). We used 2000 bootstraps for all of the calculations, with the exception of the validating procedures that do not require bootstrapping.

Results

Measurement model evaluation

We first test the validity of the 4D Model of the Country Image. After establishing the validity of the model, we then examine the impact of the country image on the relationship maintenance behavior of KGSP alumni.

First, we validated the reflective (affective component) and formative indicators (cognitive component). Then we tested the validity of the structural model. To run the measurement model evaluation, we relied on the procedures described by Buhmann (2016) and on the latest guidelines for SmartPLS use elaborated by Hair et al. (2019).

First, the reflective indicators (emotional dimension) were validated. To be recognized as significant, the outer loadings for a reflective indicator should exceed 0.7. All four items successfully passed this benchmark (see Tables 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 in Appendix 2). The Cronbach α , which shows the internal consistency reliability, should be above 0.7, and for the emotional dimension, it was 0.86. The composite reliability fit needed a range of between 0.7 and 0.95 and reached 0.908. The average variance extracted (AVE) showing convergent validity was higher than the minimum of 0.5 and reached 0.713. Consequently, the reflective component of the model was successfully validated.

We conducted validation tests for the *personal_relationship* latent variable. The outer loadings for all three items were higher than 0.7. The Cronbach α passed the threshold (0.737 > 0.7). The composite reliability was 0.851, which is higher than the threshold of 0.7. The AVE was higher than an accepted threshold of 0.5 and reached 0.657. Consequently, the variable *personal_relationship* was successfully validated for further tests.

In the case of the formative-model measurement, there are several validating steps. First, we tested the correlation between the formative items and the respective summary questions. Each of the items showed a significant correlation with the summary questions ($p < 0.01$) and none of the items was dropped. Next, we measured the significance of the items' outer weights. The p values show the statistical significance of the weights. The results of the t test show that there are some statistically insignificant items (p value should be



smaller than 0.05) with low outer weights. We also checked the variance inflation factor (VIF); this should report on possible collinearity issues. Ideally, the VIF should be less than 3, but a VIF of between 3 and 3.5 is considered acceptable (Hair et al. 2019). The highest VIF value for the formative items does not exceed 3.2. To check the relevance of the indicators that had a non-significant weight, we checked the outer loadings. They should be over 0.5 to be considered statistically significant parts of the model. Among the items with insignificant weights, the lowest outer loading is 0.542; hence, none of the items can be excluded because they contribute to the model. The results of the validity tests for the formative indicators allow us to confirm the validation of every item of the formative part of the model and also to confirm that none of them should be omitted because they all contribute to the model formation.

Structural model evaluation

The analysis of the implementation of the 4D Model is based on several factors. While the p values indicate the statistical significance (should be smaller than 0.05) of the impact of the country image dimension on the dependent variable, the T value is a secondary indicator for measuring this significance (it should be at least 1.96 or higher). Path coefficients also indicate the strength of one variable on another variable; however, if the p value of the path is over 0.05 and T value is smaller than 1.96, then the path coefficient can be negated. R^2 indicates the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables. In other words, R^2 shows the explanatory power of the model. The traditional cutoffs for R^2 , as proposed by Chin (1998), are 67%, 33%, and 19% which, respectively, indicate the substantial, moderate, and weak power of the model in terms of explaining the variances in the latent variable. These cutoffs are debatable and there is no strict limitation on what to consider as statistically significant.

Furthermore, f^2 effect size measure “is another name for the R^2 change effect” (Garson 2016, p. 84). f^2 measures effect size of the dimensions and, according to the guidelines of Cohen (1988), the cutoffs are as follows: 0.02 for the small, 0.15 for the medium, and 0.35 for the large effect size. The f^2 “expresses how large a proportion of unexplained variance is accounted for by R^2 change” (Garson 2016, p. 84). Finally, the value of Q^2 demonstrates the predictive relevance of the PLS-path model. Instead of measuring the “out-of-sample prediction,” Q^2 blends aspects of the “in-sample explanatory power” with the “out-of-sample prediction” (Hair et al. 2019). Q^2 values larger than 0 suggest that the model has predictive relevance for a particular endogenous construct, while the opposite results signify a lack of predictive relevance (Hair et al. 2016).

Table 2 Structural model validation: impact of cognitive component on the affective component

Cognitive dimensions → Emotional dimension	t value	Path coefficient
Functional → Emotional	4.450	0.239***
Normative → Emotional	6.344	0.286***
Aesthetic → Emotional	9.670	0.392***
R^2 emotional	0.667	

*** $p < 0.001$

The evaluation test for the structural model showed that each cognitive dimension contributes to the emotional dimension (see Table 2). The p values of all the paths showed significance ($p < 0.001$). The R^2 of the emotional dimension reached 0.667, which means that the cognitive dimensions can explain 67% of the variance in the emotional dimension. From the viewpoint of the standard cutoffs, the 4D Model of the country image showed “substantial” explanatory power (Chin 1998, p. 323).

The additional indicator of f^2 demonstrates that the effects of the normative and functional dimensions are small (0.09 and 0.07, respectively), while the aesthetic dimension has a medium effect (0.23). The value of Q^2 shows that the attitudinal construct of the country image has good predictive relevance in the model (0.44).

The validity tests suggest that this 4D Model of the country image is valid and that further analyses can be conducted. In the following section, we present the findings of our analyses.

How do KGSP alumni perceive South Korea’s country image?

The results of the analysis show that all cognitive dimensions have a direct influence on the emotional dimension of the country image. The path coefficients show that the aesthetic dimension influences the emotional dimension the most, with a path coefficient of 0.392 ($p < 0.001$). The aesthetic dimension also has the strongest effect size, f^2 , on the emotional dimension ($f^2 = 0.233$, medium effect size). The item *aesthetic7* (“South Korea has lots of charismatic people (e.g., in politics, sports, the media, etc.)”) has the strongest influence on the aesthetic dimension, with an outer weight of 0.355 at $p < 0.001$.

The normative dimension is shown to have a statistical significance in influencing the emotional dimension and achieved a path coefficient score of 0.286. The normative dimension has a small effect on the emotional dimension ($f^2 = 0.093$). The *normative7* variable (“South Korea is a welcoming country”) has the greatest outer weight, 0.527 at $p < 0.001$, among all of the other items for this dimension.



The functional dimension has a statistically significant influence on the emotional dimension, with a path coefficient of 0.239. It also has a small effect on the emotional dimension ($f^2=0.066$). The *functional6* variable (“South Korea holds a strong position in the global economy”) has the biggest influence on the functional dimension, with an outer weight of 0.253 at $p < 0.001$. See Table 2 for a summary of the cognitive dimensions’ influence on the emotional dimension.

Country image’s impact on the relationship maintenance behavior of the KGSP alumni

The 4D Model of the country image has explanatory power in relation to the KGSP alumni’s personal and professional relationship maintenance behavior with Koreans. In cases of the variable *personal_relationship*, the explanatory power of the model is 0.241 (see Table 3). This means that the model explains 24% of the variance in behavior in relation to personal relationship maintenance. As shown in Table 3, the emotional dimension has the strongest effect on the *personal_relationship* variable, with a path coefficient of 0.254 ($p < 0.01$). The normative dimension has a path coefficient of 0.151 ($p < 0.05$). The functional and aesthetic dimensions do not have statistically significant direct influences on personal relationship maintenance. However, all three cognitive dimensions have an indirect influence ($p < 0.05$) on the *personal_relationship* variable, which suggest that their influence on this behavior is mediated through the emotional dimension (aesthetic dimension \rightarrow emotional dimension \rightarrow *personal_relationship*: $\beta = 0.1$; functional dimension \rightarrow emotional dimension \rightarrow *personal_relationship*: $\beta = 0.061$; normative dimension \rightarrow emotional dimension \rightarrow *personal_relationship*: $\beta = 0.073$).

As for the variable *professional_relationship*, the country image can explain a smaller proportion of the variance (10%). For the variable *professional_relationship*, the functional dimension is the core influencer. It directly influences the variable *professional_relationship*, with a path

Table 3 Country image impact on personal relationship maintenance behavior

Country image \rightarrow Personal relationships maintenance behavior	<i>t</i> value	Path coefficient
Functional \rightarrow Behavior	1.047	0.081
Normative \rightarrow Behavior	2.206	0.151*
Aesthetic \rightarrow Behavior	0.907	0.059
Emotional \rightarrow Behavior	3.279	0.254**
R^2 emotional	0.667	
R^2 behavior	0.241	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 4 Country image impact on professional relationship maintenance behavior

Country image \rightarrow Professional relationships maintenance behavior	<i>t</i> value	Path coefficient
Functional \rightarrow Behavior	2.204	0.225*
Normative \rightarrow Behavior	1.073	0.112
Aesthetic \rightarrow Behavior	0.350	0.033
Emotional \rightarrow Behavior	0.340	-0.036
R^2 emotional	0.692	
R^2 behavior	0.099	

* $p < 0.05$

coefficient of 0.225 ($p < 0.05$). The other dimensions do not demonstrate a significant influence ($p < 0.05$) either directly (Table 4) or indirectly.

Our results indicate that, depending on the type of relationship maintenance behavior, different dimensions of the country image have varying degrees of influence. For the variable *personal_relationship*, the main influencing dimensions are emotional and normative. For *professional_relationship*, it is the functional dimension. The demonstrated differences in the influence of the 4D Model on personal and professional relationships signal that the 4D Model of the Country Image can explain how different dimensions influence different kinds of behavior.

Discussion and conclusion

Our findings show that country image can have some explanatory power for personal and professional relationship maintenance behavior. The explanatory power of the model demonstrates that a significant portion of the variance in the relationship maintenance behavior cannot be explained by the perceived country image. Country image explains 24% of the variance in personal relationship maintenance behavior and only 10% for professional relationship maintenance behavior. This finding supports Yun’s argument when he claimed that attitude itself should not be treated as “the hallmark of, or the evidence on, the achievement of behavioral goals” (Yun 2014, p. 802). This result can be due to relationships being much more complex than other country-related behaviors. Relationship maintenance behavior includes a variety of contextual factors that are outside the control of the KGSP alumni. For example, if a friend, a professor, an acquaintance, or a business partner of a KGSP alumni is not active in maintaining the relationship, then it would not be possible for the alumni to maintain the relationship. Relationship building and maintenance require the active agency of at least two parties. In other words, compared to one-way



behaviors, such as buying goods or recommending things for others to do, relationship maintenance is a two-way behavior that introduces an extra layer of behavioral control required to maintain relationships. Therefore, future research that uses attitude–behavior models, including the 4D Model of Country Image, to study relationship maintenance behavior should take into account behavioral controls, particularly that of the (perceived) willingness of the second party to maintain the relationship, which is in line with Icek Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior.

On a related note, a shortcoming of our study is in analyzing the country (Korea) as the object towards which beliefs and emotions influence the behaviors related to it. Relationship maintenance behavior is rather more about the people (Koreans) than the country, although Korea's country image and the image of its people may be highly correlated. In other words, future studies on relationship-related behaviors must differentiate between the country image and the image of the host country people by treating the host country people, rather than the host country, as the object of the relationship-building.

Our findings show that KGSP alumni evaluate Korea's country image primarily by relying on their beliefs and feelings about the country's beauty, culture, and nature as expressed in the aesthetic dimension. Normative and functional dimensions are significant but contribute less to KGSP alumni's evaluation of Korea's country image. The domination of aesthetic over other dimensions corresponds to previous studies that use the 4D Model (Buhmann 2016; Ingenhoff et al. 2018). It means that even for individuals who have more information and emotions related to the host country based on their time and experiences there, the country's beauty, culture, and nature still play a greater role when they evaluate the country image. We contribute to the public diplomacy literature and the practice of public diplomacy in four ways. First, we contribute to the study of attitude–behavior theory. This exploration supports the validity of the 4D Model of country image to explain country-related behaviors. This model had previously been tested in a limited number of contexts. We extended the use of this model in a case study on Korea's image. We add to the literature in our use of this model in a case study on Korea's image.

Second, we tested the relationship-related behaviors that are in line with the new public diplomacy literature that emphasizes relationships management as its major purpose (Fitzpatrick 2007, pp. 205–208). Previously, scholars using the 4D Model of country image used conation or intention to predict behavior. We asked alumni about their current behavior, which gives us a clearer picture of reality than would conation.

Third, in this study, we applied the model to the scholarship program's alumni that would have had direct extensive experiences in the country, rather than to general

foreign publics who may only have received information about the country through mediated communications.

Fourth, we contribute to the assessment of student-mobility programs from a public diplomacy perspective. Student-mobility programs that originate from non-Western countries have attracted less attention in the public diplomacy literature.

Finally, our research contributes to the understanding of practical side of using scholarship programs as tools of public diplomacy. For public diplomacy implementations it might be useful to know that, as we have found in the research, even after completing the program some alumni maintain personal and professional relationships with Koreans and the impression about Korea that they have obtained through the experience of the scholarship participation can partially explain this behavior. Hence, public diplomacy practitioners should not disregard public diplomacy that targets foreign public living in the country, i.e., sociological public diplomacy (Yun and Toth 2009).

Especially, public diplomacy officers should pay attention to the specific dimension that influence relationship maintenance behavior. For example, for professional relationship maintenance the employed alumni concentrate on functional dimension of the country. Since this dimension is the strongest explaining factor the government could improve KGSP students' and alumni' perception of functional dimension of the country by adding to the program some activities that would allow the scholarship participants to make understanding of the functional aspects of the country deeper. It could be visits to manufacturing plants or short-term internships.

Further research can take into account the date of graduation as another factor that may determine professional relationship maintenance. While common sense would suggest the longer it is since graduation, the less relationships will be maintained, for public diplomacy purposes, older alumni's professional relationship maintenance with the host country individuals would be more meaningful because of their potential seniority in their positions. Graduation date can also help assess the depth of personal relationships in terms of years.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.



Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Formative dimension items	How much do you agree with this statement? [Strongly disagree—1, Strongly agree—7]
<i>functional1</i>	South Korea's economy is highly innovative and fit for the future
<i>functional2</i>	South Korea produces very high-quality goods and services
<i>functional3</i>	South Korea has highly competent entrepreneurs
<i>functional4</i>	South Korea is very wealthy
<i>functional5</i>	South Korea is technologically highly advanced
<i>functional6</i>	South Korea holds a strong position in the global economy
<i>functional7</i>	The labor markets in South Korea are equipped with highly competent people
<i>functional8</i>	South Korea has a globally influential culture
<i>functional9</i>	Athletes and sports teams from South Korea are internationally known for their success
<i>functional10</i>	Competent officials govern South Korean politics
<i>functional11</i>	South Korea has a very stable political system
<i>functional12</i>	South Korea has a well-functioning infrastructure
<i>functional13</i>	South Korea provides well-functioning welfare systems and pension plans
<i>functional14</i>	South Korea is highly innovative in science and research
<i>functional15</i>	South Korea provides great educational opportunities
<i>functional16</i>	The level of education in South Korea is very high
<i>normative1</i>	South Korea is very active in protecting the environment
<i>normative2</i>	South Korea is known for its strong commitment to social issues (e.g., development aid, civil rights)

Formative dimension items	How much do you agree with this statement? [Strongly disagree—1, Strongly agree—7]
<i>normative3</i>	South Korea has high ethical standards
<i>normative4</i>	South Korea is a socially responsible member of the international community
<i>normative5</i>	South Korea respects the values of other nations and peoples
<i>normative6</i>	South Korea takes responsibility for helping out in international crises
<i>normative7</i>	South Korea is a welcoming country
<i>normative8</i>	South Korea has excellent civil rights
<i>normative9</i>	South Korea has a very just welfare system
<i>normative10</i>	South Korea acts very fairly in international politics
<i>aesthetic1</i>	South Korea is home to beautiful cultural assets (e.g., arts, architecture, music, film etc.)
<i>aesthetic2</i>	South Korea has delicious foods and a wonderful cuisine
<i>aesthetic3</i>	South Korea has a very fascinating history
<i>aesthetic4</i>	South Korea has rich traditions
<i>aesthetic5</i>	South Korea has beautiful scenery
<i>aesthetic6</i>	South Korea has a lot of preserved nature
<i>aesthetic7</i>	South Korea has lots of charismatic people (e.g., in politics, sports, media, etc.)

Appendix 2: Supplementary data

See Tables 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

Table 5 Validation of the reflective components of the country image

Item	Outer loadings	<i>t</i> values
<i>emotional1</i>	0.883	76.723
<i>emotional2</i>	0.879	53.892
<i>emotional3</i>	0.865	53.519
<i>emotional4</i>	0.745	29.059
Cronbach α	0.864	
Composite reliability	0.908	
AVE	0.713	



Table 6 Correlation with summary questions

functional_sum		functional1	functional2	functional3	functional4	functional5	functional6	functional7	functional8	functional9	functional10	functional11	functional12	functional13	functional14	functional15	functional16
Pearson Correlation		.572**	.459**	.562**	.531**	.432**	.538**	.484**	.420**	.428**	.563**	.539**	.428**	.357**	.559**	.545**	.582**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N		568	568	568	568	568	568	568	568	568	568	568	568	568	568	568	568
**p<0.01																	

normative_sum		normative1	normative2	normative3	normative4	normative5	normative6	normative7	normative8	normative9	normative10
Pearson Correlation		.555**	.654**	.639**	.693**	.658**	.634**	.558**	.706**	.623**	.723**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N		557	557	557	557	557	557	557	557	557	557
**p<0.01											

aesthetic_sum		aesthetic1	aesthetic2	aesthetic3	aesthetic4	aesthetic5	aesthetic6	aesthetic7
Pearson Correlation		.637**	.412**	.487**	.554**	.648**	.571**	.567**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N		572	572	572	572	572	572	572
**p<0.01								

Table 7 Validation of the formative component of the country image

Item	VIF	Outer weights	t values	Outer loadings
functional1	2.230	0.196	1.827	0.788
functional2	1.878	0.137	1.733	0.700
functional3	2.196	0.035	0.350	0.702
functional4	1.899	-0.042	1.263	0.599
functional5	1.695	0.117	2.033*	0.611
functional6	1.945	0.253	3.502***	0.803
functional7	2.074	0.159	1.996*	0.752
functional8	1.635	0.157	2.522*	0.632
functional9	1.806	0.114	1.321	0.643
functional10	2.518	-0.063	0.135	0.593
functional11	2.257	0.025	0.181	0.545
functional12	1.466	0.068	1.059	0.542
functional13	1.501	0.069	3.169**	0.495
functional14	1.983	0.061	1.482	0.697
functional15	2.175	-0.002	0.416	0.664
functional16	2.253	0.135	1.131	0.707
normative1	1.806	0.063	0.620	0.584
normative2	3.178	-0.001	0.392	0.665
normative3	2.612	0.152	1.494	0.758
normative4	2.519	0.111	1.609	0.771
normative5	2.592	0.005	0.149	0.758
normative6	2.047	0.028	0.964	0.686
normative7	2.022	0.527	7.764***	0.897
normative8	3.174	0.087	1.267	0.739
normative9	2.191	-0.022	0.028	0.616
normative10	2.134	0.280	3.952***	0.773
aesthetic1	2.200	0.226	3.249**	0.824
aesthetic2	1.569	0.159	2.573*	0.673
aesthetic3	1.996	0.080	1.221	0.691
aesthetic4	2.363	0.196	2.157*	0.794
aesthetic5	2.174	0.143	1.539	0.735
aesthetic6	1.805	0.151	1.796	0.681
aesthetic7	1.636	0.355	6.470***	0.806

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Table 8 Validation of the personal relationship maintenance behavior construct

Item	Outer loadings	t values
personal_relationship1	0.818	30.597
personal_relationship2	0.754	25.843
personal_relationship3	0.856	43.852
Cronbach α	0.737	
Composite reliability	0.851	
AVE	0.657	

Table 9 f² scores of cognitive dimensions influence on emotional dimension

f ²	Personal
Aesthetic → Emotional	0.233**
Functional → Emotional	0.066*
Normative → Emotional	0.093*

f² cutoffs: *0.02—small, **0.15—medium, ***0.35—strong

Table 10 Q² value score

Q ²	Personal	Professional
Emotional	0.442	0.469
Behavior	0.143	0.068

Q² should be higher than 0

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