

# Foreign-Born Public Relations Faculty Members' Relationship with their Universities as a Soft Power Resource in U.S. Public Diplomacy

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## Abstract

With globalization and new communication technologies, governments aim to cultivate relationships with their foreign publics. This goal represents the convergence of the public relations and public diplomacy domains. In this regard, this study aims to explore how foreign-born faculty members' attitudes and behaviors toward the U.S. are shaped by their relationships with their universities. Findings confirm a significant link between foreign-born faculty members' perceived relationships with their universities and their attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the U.S. The authors conclude that a positive relationship between universities and foreign faculty members can serve as a soft power resource in U.S. public diplomacy. This study contributes to governments' public diplomacy efforts by analyzing the roles of the foreign-born faculty members as strategic communication channels in cultivating relationships between a host country and their homelands.

**Keywords:** Public diplomacy, Soft power, Public relations, Faculty members, Higher education, Universities, Foreign-born faculty

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## Introduction

The relational approach has become one of the growing subjects in public diplomacy. Public diplomacy traditionally dealt with the “management of communication among diplomatic actors, including nations and non-state actors, which have specific informational or motivational objectives toward reaching the foreign publics to promote national interest.” (Golan & Yang, 2015, p. 2). The influence of globalization has shifted the focus of public diplomacy from traditional diplomatic means to building and maintaining relationships with foreign publics. In addition, the roles of global publics have become significant in public diplomacy (Golan & Yang, 2015) because with the development of new communication technologies, global publics have become more interconnected and active in cultivating relationships with governments (Ki, 2015). Therefore, the twenty-first century approach to public diplomacy has started to focus on engagement, collaboration, and relationship building (Zaharna et al., 2013).

Public diplomacy scholars agree that the field of public diplomacy has no boundaries (Gregory, 2008). Even though public diplomacy is not an interdisciplinary program of study, the field is a sort of crossroads that provides opportunities for scholars from other disciplines to examine power, media, communication, and culture (Sevin et al., 2019). In particular, public diplomacy has grabbed public relations scholars’ attention and the twenty-first century relational approach has supported the convergence of public relations and public diplomacy scholarship. Public diplomacy is not seen as just public relations or persuasion (Sevin, 2015), and some public diplomacy practitioners (e.g., Armstrong, 2009; Floyd, 2007) have emphasized the differences between the two areas. Nevertheless, public relations scholars (e.g., Fitzpatrick, 2007; Macnamara, 2012; Signitzer & Wamser, 2006; Vanc & Fitzpatrick, 2016) have argued that public relations has contributed significantly to the conceptual and practical development of public diplomacy. Doing this helps further advance the conceptual and practical convergence of the two scholarships.

Public diplomacy has become a main perspective that considers immigrants, international students, and foreign-born faculty members (Vibber & Kim, 2015). Another public diplomacy approach, which focuses on sociological globalism, serves as a new context for future public diplomacy because the flow of people via migration creates a need for new communication channels (Yun & Toth, 2009). This approach states that a society that is accessible to foreign publics and interacts constructively with foreigners could do more for that country’s soft power and diplomatic efforts than governmental applications (Vibber & Kim, 2015). In addition, migrants carry information, values, and culture as well as provide direct interaction and negotiation between nations (Yun & Toth, 2009). In this respect, education can be seen as a major contributor to soft power and a significant area of public diplomacy. Therefore, international students, foreign-born faculty members, and exchange programs can be considered powerful non-state actors in public diplomacy. By providing face-to-face communication and direct interaction between people from different countries, education helps diminish stereotypes, facilitate intercultural communication, and create favorable beliefs

about and attitudes toward the host country (Ayhan et al., 2021; de Lima Jr., 2007, Vaxevanidou, 2018). Since sociological globalism also emphasizes the importance of direct person-to-person interactions as one of the more important approaches in cultivating a nation's soft power (Kim & Ni, 2011; Vibber & Kim, 2015; Yun, 2012; Yun & Kim, 2008), this study considers education as an important public diplomacy effort and foreign-born faculty members as immigrants who are worthy of study. As soft power resources, foreign faculty members may have the ability to provide wanted outcomes through attraction rather than coercion (Nye, 2017). Moreover, as soft power resources, foreign-born faculty members can produce favorable outcomes towards the U.S. depending upon the context (Nye, 2006). Therefore, if foreign-born faculty members have positive relationships with their universities, these positive relationships could serve as soft power resources in U.S. public diplomacy.

Migrants are not separated from their countries; some return to their countries with foreign cultural experiences, while others are connected to people in their countries physically and virtually (Yun & Toth, 2009). Because foreign-born faculty members are not separated from their countries, their experiences in the host country have a powerful influence on the formation of public opinion about the host country in their homelands (Yun & Toth, 2009). They remain connected to their people through communications such as word of mouth, interpersonal networks, and the mass media of the homelands (Yun & Toth, 2009). Moreover, globalization and new communication technologies lead governments to connect with, listen to, and cultivate long-term relationships with the public. This goal reflects the integration of relationship management and public diplomacy (Ki, 2015). In addition, Yang et al. (2012) state that relationship management theory provides a starting point for understanding the multipolar relationships among nations in public diplomacy efforts. Lee and Jun (2013) found links between international students' relationships with the U.S. embassy and their attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the U.S. and its citizens to some degree. However, as several scholars (Ki, 2015; Lee & Jun, 2013) have pointed out, there is still a gap as to how public relations frameworks can be applied to public diplomacy contexts. Therefore, this study aims to discover how foreign-born faculty members' relationships with their universities shape their attitudes and behaviors to provide a potential soft power resource in U.S. diplomacy in U.S. public diplomacy. In this study, this relationship, meaning the interaction between foreign-born faculty members and their universities, is the dependent variable.

Several studies focus on various aspects of the experience of foreign-born faculty members. For example, Sabharwal (2011) analyzed the satisfaction levels of foreign-born faculty members, whereas Akulli (2015) examined their embeddedness. Collins (2008) conducted a survey with foreign-born faculty to determine the key issues these faculty face at U.S. institutions. However, none of these studies cover faculty members in public relations. Public relations is one of the fast-growing sectors in the U.S., with projected growth from \$88 billion generated in 2020 to \$129 billion by 2025 (Guttman, 2021), and public relations programs have also become one of the fastest-growing courses of study in the U.S. (Snow, 2015). As Snow (2015) noted, the influence and involvement of public relations in public diplomacy strategies will continue to increase. Yet, Vanc and Fitzpatrick (2016) emphasized

that public relations scholars have huge potential to contribute to the intellectual and practical development of public diplomacy (p. 432). Therefore, it is significant to investigate the role and value of foreign-born public relations scholars in building and maintaining relationships as soft power resources in terms of public diplomacy practices. To fill this gap, this study examines the relationship between foreign-born faculty members working in the public relations field and their universities in the U.S.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Public Diplomacy and Foreign-Born Faculty Members***

Golan and Yang (2015) emphasize that “international public relations can be understood as a relationship management function in its global sense” (p. 1). As the world becomes more diverse, intertwined, and global, maintaining relationships across international boundaries with foreign publics gains importance (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006). Furthermore, a shift from state-level and government-to-government diplomacy to public-level and people-to-people diplomacy is taking place. This shift brings together public relations and international relations, known as public diplomacy (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006). Zaharna et al. (2013) called this shift the twenty-first-century “connective mindshift” that emphasizes the significance of connections of multi-dimensional networks and accepts relationships as key units of analysis for public diplomacy (p. 1). The main focus of public diplomacy is now cultivating relationships between nation-states and their strategic foreign publics (Golan & Yang, 2015). Both public relations and public diplomacy aim to facilitate information exchange, correct misconceptions, promote goodwill, construct a positive image (Lee & Lin, 2017), and emphasize the significance of relationships (Ki, 2015). Therefore, within the framework of these objectives, public relations and public diplomacy converge to identify, build, and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with foreign publics.

To be successful, public diplomacy needs to meet the challenges of understanding, respecting, and appreciating cross-cultural differences (Payne, 2009). For instance, according to the Public Diplomacy Foundation (2002), educational and cultural exchanges such as academic exchanges and international visitors programs are public diplomacy activities. As an example of people-to-people diplomacy, exchange programs aim to maintain mutual understanding between U.S.-born and foreign-born scholars (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006). These activities are interpersonal in nature, so participants’ personalities and psychology are central and there is more emphasis on the role of non-state actors, domestic publics, and social media (Scott-Smith, 2020). Educational public diplomacy efforts promote global stability and benefit U.S. interests (Rosendorf, 2009), so the U.S. government agencies pay a lot of attention to them. For example, the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) has developed an evaluation process to understand participants’ experiences, their reflections on the impact of the programs, and shifts in their perspective (Scott-Smith, 2020). Rosendorf (2009) suggests that U.S. colleges and universities should make it easier for students and faculty from abroad to join them (Rosendorf, 2009). Since the

U.S. is the largest host nation for international students and almost every college and university acknowledges a global education mission (Snow, 2009), sociological globalism serves as a new context for the twenty-first-century public diplomacy approach with its focus on the flow of people in the U.S.

Although sociological globalism — “the dimension of people flow through migration” (Yun & Toth, 2009, p. 498) — is not a new phenomenon in the twenty-first century, this sociological approach to diplomacy has become a more essential consideration given that numbers of immigrants, international students, and foreign-born scholars have increased steadily over the years (Vibber & Kim, 2015; Yun & Kim, 2008). For example, Yun (2012) emphasizes that international students be seen as effective channels, with their studies, personal contacts, and intercultural experiences, for host countries’ public diplomacy, especially for building and cultivating relationships with international students’ homelands. The nature of immigrants’ intercultural communication includes direct interaction and negotiation between cultures (Yun & Toth, 2009). Sociological public diplomacy emphasizes these characteristics of intercultural communication and addresses the necessity of governmental policy efforts to enable and maintain independent interaction among its citizens and foreign-born individuals (Vibber & Kim, 2015). Because people-to-people diplomacy has gained in importance, and because education itself has become a significant public diplomacy activity, the role of foreign-born faculty members should not be ignored as an effective channel for public diplomacy. Within the perspective of sociological public diplomacy, foreign-born faculty members are powerful immigrants who can create new communication channels among countries because they provide direct interaction between their nations and the U.S. through visiting their home countries or being a part of exchange programs.

Immigrants’ experiences affect a country’s public diplomacy efforts. In this era of people flow, their words either can enhance a country’s credibility and reputation or cause negative consequences (Yun & Toth, 2009). Moreover, their experiences and perceptions carry more weight with fellow citizens because, as Kim and Ni (2011) mentioned, “immigrants have more substantial, direct, and natural, rather than superficial, indirect, and artificial interaction and contact with the hosting countries” (pp. 140-141). As the number of foreign-born scholars has increased, and as communication technology development has advanced, much needs to be learned about how these scholars’ relationships with U.S. higher education affect their attitudes and behaviors as a soft power resource in U.S. public diplomacy.

### ***Organization-Public Relationship (OPR)***

Relationship management is a shared characteristic of public relations and public diplomacy (Fitzpatrick, 2007). The significance of relationship management literature for public diplomacy research shows that relationship management literature is valuable not only for understanding nations’ image building strategies (Yang et al., 2012) but also for achieving public diplomacy objectives and goals (Fitzpatrick, 2007; Hayden, 2009). In addition, the importance of engagement and collaboration in today’s networked world has increased

emphasis on the relational dimensions of public diplomacy (Zaharna et al., 2013). Therefore, this study considers that the relationship between organizations and foreign-born publics contributes to the U.S.'s public diplomacy. By considering this contribution to analyze the relationship between organizations and foreign-born publics, this study used Hon and Grunig's (1999) four dimensions for measuring relationships: control mutuality, satisfaction, trust, and commitment. These dimensions have reached reliability and validity across studies (e.g. Brunner, 2005; Ki & Hon, 2007). Also, Ki (2015) has stated each key components' applicability to public diplomacy.

*Control mutuality.* This dimension is related to the degree of power. It refers to an agreement that one or both parties may influence the other (Stafford & Canary, 1991). In public diplomacy, this agreement signifies that nations have less control than non-state actors over politics and must engage with foreign publics rather than simply communicate with them (Fitzpatrick, 2011). Because of globalization, technological innovations, and new media, nations cannot do public diplomacy by themselves; they need to pay attention to non-state actors and agree that non-state actors also have the power to affect public diplomacy efforts (Fitzpatrick, 2011). Control mutuality is similar to power balance, which emphasizes stability between competing parties (Ki, 2015), in that no party in this relationship should have more power to force its desires upon the others (Ki, 2015).

*Trust.* This dimension refers to having confidence in and being intentionally open to the other party (Hon & Grunig, 1999), reflecting a feeling or a belief that one can rely on someone or something (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). This dimension has several underlying components, including integrity, dependability, and competence. Integrity is the belief that an organization is fair and just; dependability is the assurance that the organization will do what it says it will, and competence is the belief that the organization can do what it says it will (Hon & Grunig, 1999). In public diplomacy literature, trust has an important role in creating an environment in which people are willing to cooperate, prefer diplomatic solutions, take risks, and avoid conflicts (Mogensen, 2015).

*Satisfaction.* This dimension is "the extent to which one party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced" (Hon and Grunig 1999, p. 20). If one party perceives that the other's behaviors are positive, then his or her satisfaction with the relationship rises (Grunig and Huang, 2000). In terms of public diplomacy, if foreigners perceive that a country's behaviors are affirmative, their satisfaction with their relationship with that country increases (Ki, 2015).

*Commitment.* This dimension addresses whether the organization and its publics believe that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote (Hon & Grunig, 1999). In public diplomacy literature, this term emphasizes dialogue and exchange. This dimension prevents stereotypes and provides opportunities for feedback (Ki, 2015).

Public relations scholars have also evaluated the effects of relationship outcomes and suggested *attitude* and *behavior* as significant relationship outcomes (e.g., Ki & Hon, 2007, 2012). The main objective of public relations is to cultivate positive relationships between the

public and organizations. These positive long-term relationships provide supportive feelings and behaviors among publics toward organizations (Ki & Hon, 2007). This study focuses on academic institutions in higher education as the research context and evaluates foreign-born faculty members' attitudes and behaviors as significant relationship outcomes. In light of Bruning and Lambe's (2002) observation that colleges and universities are structured and operated based on a corporate model, it is important to identify the linkages between relationship attitudes and behavior. This knowledge would help universities and other educational organizations to link their relationship-building activities to tangible outcomes. Moreover, public diplomacy efforts involve different types of organizations and a variety of publics that should be examined to understand the effects of the relationships between these organizations and publics (Lee & Jun, 2013). Since education is an important area of public diplomacy, this study focuses on U.S. universities as public diplomacy organizations and foreign-born public relations faculty members as foreign publics to analyze the outcomes of this relationship towards the U.S. In public diplomacy, foreigners' perception of their relationship with host countries tends to influence their attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, this study considers attitudes and behaviors of foreign-born faculty as relationship outcomes because they are wanted outcomes of public diplomacy (Lee & Jun, 2013). Moreover, Yun (2014) emphasizes attitude toward the host country as the focal variable in public diplomacy research; that the attitude is the trigger for behavior is also meaningful.

*Attitude.* An attitude is defined as “a predisposition to respond to a certain object either in a positive or in a negative way” (Di Martino & Zan, 2010, p. 28). It is related to some aspect of the person's world, such as another person or a physical object (Ajzen & Fishbein 1977) and people's salient beliefs at a specific time (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Attitudes are one of the factors that determine behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977).

In public relations, the public's attitude is an important variable to measure the effectiveness of public relations programs. Similarly, in public diplomacy, it is important to evaluate foreigners' attitude as a soft power source because it is one of the “focal variables of interest in assessing public diplomacy outcomes” (Lee & Jun, 2013, p. 412). Specifically, in sociological public diplomacy, the opinions of immigrants, refugees, sojourners, students, business people, and travelers have impacts on public diplomacy (Vibber and Kim, 2015). Therefore, in terms of a sociological approach to public diplomacy, it is important to evaluate foreign-born faculty members' attitudes as a soft power source for the U.S.

Lee and Jun (2013) argued that U.S. embassies represent the U.S. and its citizens with its organizational characteristics in their studies. By following their arguments, this study also evaluates U.S. universities and the education system as representative of the U.S. Therefore, the foreign-born faculty members' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the U.S. universities and education system were measured as well.

*Behavioral intention.* A single behavior is determined by the intention to perform that behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), and behavioral intention is defined as an individual's subjective estimate of the possibility that he or she will engage in a behavior (Lutz, 1981,

cited in Yun, 2014). According to Ajzen (1991), “intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behavior; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior” (p. 181).

In public diplomacy, it is also important to measure behavioral intention because an objective of public diplomacy is to positively influence the behavior of foreign publics toward host countries. Especially with new communication technologies, active communication behavior spreads around the world faster than ever before (Vibber & Kim, 2015). Therefore, a sociological approach to public diplomacy also needs to consider the behavioral intentions of foreign-born faculty members towards the U.S.

## **Research Question and Hypotheses**

As the effect of interpersonal interaction has become a key component of sociological public diplomacy in the globalizing world (Yun & Vibber, 2012), foreign publics’ thoughts are more valuable and trustworthy, and have higher priority than a government’s statements or national news (Vibber & Kim, 2015). Foreign publics can have close relationships with the citizens of host countries, and these relationships can affect their views of the country. For example, Yun and Kim (2008) emphasized that the global dimension of human mobility has provided opportunities among people to contact and interact with each other constantly, which could affect foreign people’s images. Furthermore, the ethnic relations among them affect the attractiveness of their nations. Yang (2019) discussed cross-border tourism as a significant factor in building soft power. She found that while interactions between tourists and host culture can help build soft power in countries, they could also create negative effects because of the limited interaction between tourists and the locals that can cause mutual misinterpretations and undesirable impressions. Yun and Vibber (2012) state that if the relationship between foreign publics and the citizens of host countries goes bad, this situation erodes the soft power that a country may have earned through creating a broad attractiveness of its resources through mediated channels (p. 78). Furthermore, foreign publics’ experiences form their attitudes toward the host country, and these attitudes lead to their behaviors (Yun, 2014). Therefore, the relationship between foreign-born scholars and their universities and outcomes of this relationship, including attitude and behavior in the public diplomacy environment, need to be analyzed. Thus, this study’s research question and hypotheses are as follows:

- RQ.1. What are the links between foreign-born faculty members’ relationships with their universities and relationship outcomes, including attitudes and behaviors, as a soft power resource in U.S. public diplomacy?
- H1. Foreign-born faculty members’ perceived relationships with their universities are positively associated with their attitudes toward the U.S.
- H2. Foreign-born faculty members’ attitudes toward the U.S. are positively associated with their behavioral intentions toward the country.



## Method

The researchers used an online survey method to answer the aforementioned research question and test the hypotheses. Several rounds of survey links were sent to increase the response rate. In the first round, the authors sent the online survey link to the public relations divisions of major associations, including the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and the International Communication Association (ICA), as well as associations that were determined to have foreign-born scholars as members, such as the Chinese Communication Association (CCA) and the Korean American Communication Association (KACA). In the second round, the authors selected foreign-born public relations faculty members who work at a U.S. university by first identifying the universities in the U.S. that have a public relations program. To identify universities that have public relations departments, we consulted two websites as sources.<sup>1)</sup> This process identified a total of 298 universities. Then, the authors looked for faculty members who focus on public relations within those universities. Finally, the authors went through each faculty member's CV and looked for their alma mater to determine whether they are international or not, with the assumption that if their BA and MA were from an international university, they were likely to be foreign-born.

## Participants

The authors found foreign-born faculty members' contact information on the official websites of the universities that have public relations departments. Participants were contacted via e-mail with a link to the online survey. We sent e-mails to 152 foreign-born faculty members who are currently working as faculty members in the public relations field at U.S. universities. The sample of this study was foreign-born public relations scholars because public relations scholars are seen as people who can contribute to the intellectual and practical development of public diplomacy scholarship (Vanc and Fitzpatrick, 2016). In the recruitment e-mail, the authors mentioned that participants were selected because they were identified as foreign-born public relations scholars in the U.S. Only two faculty members stated that they were born in the U.S. and did not participate in the survey. A total of 101 respondents completed the online survey questionnaire, yielding a 66.44% response rate. The respondents consisted of 36 men (35.6%) and 65 women (64.4%). The current status of the participants was as follows: 58 (57.4%) assistant professors (tenure-track), 24 (23.8%) associate professors (tenured), two (2%) assistant professors (not tenure-track), two (2%) instructors, and 13 (12.9%) professors. Two (2%) of them identified as visiting scholars. Participants were originally from all over the world, such as China, India, Ukraine, Hong Kong, Canada, Amsterdam, Spain, Brazil, and Kenya. Twenty-five (24.8%) were U.S. citizens, 53 (52.5%) were permanent residents (Green Card holders), and 23 (22.8%) had a work visa (J-1, H-1, etc.).

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1) The two websites are [www.topuniversities.com](http://www.topuniversities.com) and [www.bachelorsportal.com](http://www.bachelorsportal.com). [www.topuniversities.com](http://www.topuniversities.com) lists universities in terms of university rankings, country and course guides, events, and international student forums, while [www.bachelorsportal.com](http://www.bachelorsportal.com) lists bachelor's degrees worldwide.

## ***Measurements***

*Relationship Perceptions.* Using Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship measures, this study focuses on relationship perceptions, which imply how one or both parties see the relationship and defines relationship perceptions as how foreign-born faculty members see their relationships with their universities as a whole. A 7-point Likert scale was used for all of the variables: 1 indicates strong disagreement, and 7 indicates strong agreement.

*Control mutuality.* In this study, control mutuality is related to the distribution of power and engagement between the university and foreign-born faculty members. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements such as "This university really listens to what foreign-born faculty members like me have to say" or "This university and foreign-born faculty members like me are attentive to what each other says."

*Trust.* Participants were asked to indicate their level of confidence about the feeling that they believe in the relationship with their universities through items such as "This university treats foreign-born faculty members like me fairly and justly" and "I feel very confident about this university's skills."

*Commitment.* This dimension asked foreign-born faculty members for their thoughts about their long-term relationship with their universities. For example, "I feel that this university wants to maintain relationships with foreign-born faculty members like me" and "There is a long-lasting bond between this university and foreign-born faculty members like me."

*Satisfaction.* Participants were asked to indicate their level of contentment with their universities, such as "I am happy with this university" or "Most foreign-born faculty members enjoy dealing with this university."

*Attitude.* Attitude refers to foreign-born scholars' beliefs about the U.S. This study used a 7-point semantic differential scale (unfavorable–favorable; bad–good; unlikable–likable; negative–positive) to measure foreign-born faculty members' attitudes toward the country. This scale is a standard tool that is mostly used to measure attitude (Lee & Jun, 2013).

*Behavioral intentions.* This dimension refers to the intention that foreign-born faculty members have to perform a behavior toward the U.S. Seven-point semantic-differential scales were also used to measure behavioral intentions toward the U.S. with items such as "I would say positive things about the U.S. to others" and "I would recommend the U.S. to others." This measurement scale was also chosen because it is a standard tool that is mostly used to measure behavioral intentions (Lee and Jun, 2013).

## **Results**

Results indicate that foreign-born faculty members generally have good relationships with their universities. Most study participants indicated a high level of agreement with the

amount of control mutuality that they experience with their universities. The average of control mutuality is 5.1 which ranges from 4.6 to 5.5 on a 7-point Likert scale. Among the control mutuality measurement items, the statement “for this university believes the opinions of foreign-born faculty members like me are legitimate” received the highest score ( $M = 5.5$ ,  $SD = 1.1776$ ).

Most foreign-born faculty members also indicated a high level of confidence in their relationships with their universities. Agreement levels ranged from 4.7 to 5.7. The highest-rated item was “this university treats foreign-born faculty members like me fairly and justly” ( $M = 5.75$ ,  $SD = 1.0715$ ), followed by “this university has the ability to accomplish what it says it will” do ( $M = 5.3$ ,  $SD = 1.3909$ ), “this university can be relied on to keep its promises” ( $M = 5.12$ ,  $SD = 1.4398$ ), “I believe that this university takes the opinions of foreign-born faculty members like me into account when making decisions” ( $M = 4.96$ ,  $SD = 1.4894$ ), and “I feel very confident about this university’s skills” ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.5116$ ). The lowest measure was obtained for “whenever the university makes an important decision, respondents know that it will be concerned about foreign-born faculty members” ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 1.5289$ ).

All participants indicated a positive level of agreement with all measures of commitment and satisfaction. The highest commitment measure was “I would rather work together with this university than not” ( $M = 5.7$ ,  $SD = 1.4250$ ). The highest satisfaction measures were “I am happy with this university” ( $M = 5.66$ ,  $SD = 1.4783$ ), and “both the university and foreign-born faculty members like me benefit from the relationship” ( $M = 5.69$ ,  $SD = 1.1894$ ).

Most participants indicated positive attitudes toward the country ( $M = 5.7$  to  $6.3$ ). The most highly rated item was “I like working in one of the U.S. universities” ( $M = 6.3$ ,  $SD = .7581$ ), followed by “I like working in the U.S.” ( $M = 6.2$ ,  $SD = .7942$ ). They also indicated positive behavioral intentions toward the U.S. ( $M = 5.5$  to  $6.0$ ). The highest behavioral intention measures were “I would say positive things about the U.S. education system to others” ( $M = 6.0$ ,  $SD = .9539$ ) and “I would say positive things about U.S. universities to others” ( $M = 6.0$ ,  $SD = .8955$ ).

### ***Reliability and Validity***

Cronbach’s alpha values were used to test the internal reliability of the scaled measures. As indicated in Table 1, Cronbach’s alpha values for relationship quality outcomes were .90 for four items of control mutuality, .88 for six items of trust, .90 for five items of commitment, and .91 for five items of satisfaction. Cronbach’s alpha values were respectively .85 and .93 for the attitude and behavioral intentions measures. Thus, the reliability of the relationship perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions measures for this study was above an acceptable level (above .70 (Pallant, 2013)).

To test validity, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. For the OPR measures, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy value was .93, which should be .60 or

above (Pallant, 2013), and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value is significant ( $p < .05$ ). Also, for the attitude and behavioral intentions measures the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy values were .85 and .86 respectively, with a significant level of the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. Therefore, the suitability of this data set was confirmed. As indicated in Table 1, factor loadings of each item ranged from .64 to .95. Two items that did not correspond to an acceptable value were excluded, with .50 as the cutoff value, following Peterson (2000).

**Table 1.** Items, Means, Reliability and Factor Loadings of Relationship Perceptions, Attitude and Behavioral Intentions Measurements

	Item	Means	Reliability	Factor loadings
Control Mutuality	This university really listens to what foreign-born faculty members like me have to say	5.17		0.86
	This university believes the opinions of foreign-born faculty members like me are legitimate	5.57		0.89
	The management of this university gives foreign-born faculty members like me enough say in decision-making process.	4.65		0.91
	This university and foreign-born faculty members like me are attentive to what each other say	5.12	0.90	0.89
Trust	This university treats foreign-born faculty members like me fairly and justly	5.75		0.71
	Whenever this university makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about foreign-born faculty members like me	4.73		0.78
	This university has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.	5.31		0.79
	This university can be relied on to keep its promises	5.13		0.82
	I believe that this university takes the opinions of foreign-born faculty members like me into account when making decisions	4.96		0.80
	I feel very confident about this university's skills	5.07	0.88	0.87
Commitment	I feel that this university is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to foreign-born faculty members like me	5.35		0.87
	I would rather work together with this university than not	5.70		0.88
	There is a long-lasting bond between this university and foreign-born faculty members like me	4.75		0.81
	Compared to other universities, I value my relationship with this university more	5.08		0.80
	I feel that this university wants to maintain relationship with foreign-born faculty members like me	5.18	0.90	0.90
Satisfaction	I am happy with this university	5.66		0.89
	Both the university and foreign-born faculty members like me benefit from the relationship	5.69		0.78
	Most foreign-born faculty members enjoy dealing with this university	4.87		0.88
	Generally speaking I am pleased with the relationship this organization has established with foreign-born faculty members like me	5.38		0.95
	Most foreign-born faculty members like me are happy in their interactions with this organization	4.89	0.91	0.85

	Item	Means	Reliability	Factor loadings
Attitude	I like the U.S. education system	5.84		0.82
	I like working in the U.S.	6.30		0.77
	I like the country U.S.	5.77		0.76
	I like U.S. higher education	6.13		0.73
	I like working in one of the U.S. universities	6.31		0.73
	I like U.S. universities	6.12		0.73
	I like working with U.S. students	5.84	0.85	0.64
Behavior Intentions	I would say positive things about U.S. education system to others	6.10		0.87
	I would recommend the U.S. to others to work	5.93		0.86
	I would say positive things about the U.S. to others	5.80		0.86
	I would say positive things about U.S. universities to others	6.09		0.86
	I would recommend U.S. universities to others to work	5.95		0.85
	I would recommend the U.S. to others	5.57		0.81
	I would say positive things about U.S. higher education to others	6.06		0.77
	I would say positive things about working in the U.S. to others	5.92	0.93	0.77

As Table 2 indicates, the Average Variance Extracted values were greater than .5, which suggests adequate convergent validity. In addition, the construct reliability of OPR, the attitude, and behavioral intentions measures were also higher than .7, which indicates adequate convergence or internal consistency (Hair et al., 2014). Therefore, convergent validity was also established.

**Table 2.** Convergent Validity

	Control Mutuality	Trust	Satisfaction	Commitment	Attitude	Behavioral Intentions
<i>N</i>	4	6	5	5	7	8
Average Variance Extracted	0.78	0.63	0.75	0.73	0.55	0.69
Composite Reliability	0.93	0.91	0.94	0.93	0.89	0.95

### ***Regression Analyses***

To test H1 (foreign-born faculty members' perceived relationships with their universities are positively associated with their attitudes toward the U.S.), this study conducted a stepwise multiple regression, which helps select significant variables among the list of independent variables (Bruce, 1995). If a researcher finds a non-significant variable in each step, that variable can be removed from the analysis (Pallant, 2013). Another reason for using stepwise regression analysis rather than structural equation modeling (SEM) is the sample size. Whereas structural equation modeling (SEM) requires large sample sizes (Kline, 2016), the sample size of this study is not adequate for using SEM.

The stepwise regression analysis shows that only trust was a statistically significant predictor of attitude, as Table 3 shows. The other relationship dimensions (control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction) were not significant predictors of attitude. Trust made a substantial contribution with a substantive R<sup>2</sup> value of .27. Trust makes a moderate attribution to variations in attitude ( $\beta = .52$ ). In addition, trust has positive coefficients, which means that more positive relationship perceptions of trust increase positive attitudes toward the U.S.

**Table 3.** Summary of Regression Analysis for Variable Predicting Attitude

Variable	Model 1		
	B	SE B	$\beta$
Trust	0.52	0.09	0.519*
$R^2$		0.27	
$F$		36.554*	

\*  $p < .01$

To test H2 (foreign-born faculty members' attitudes toward the U.S. are positively associated with their behavioral intentions toward the country), this study conducted a stepwise regression, as well. Commitment and attitude were statistically significant for predicting behavioral intention. Therefore, other relationship dimensions (control mutuality, trust, and satisfaction) were excluded from the analysis. As indicated in Table 4, the first variable (attitude) added to the equation made substantial contributions to the overall model fit, with a substantive  $R^2$  value. The first variable (attitude) accounted for 74% of behavioral intention. The second variable (commitment) was added to arrive at the final model, but this variable, although statistically significant, made a much smaller contribution: the  $R^2$  increased by only 2%. All variables had positive coefficients, meaning that more positive attitude and commitment indicated more positive behavioral intentions. In the final model, attitude recorded a higher beta value ( $\beta = .79, p < .001$ ) than commitment ( $\beta = .16, p < .005$ ), meaning that attitude showed a more marked effect than commitment.

**Table 4.** Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Behavioral Intention

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
Attitude	0.87	0.05	0.87*	0.79	0.05	0.79*
Commitment				0.16	0.05	0.16**
$R^2$		0.75			0.77	
$F$		293.074*			8.682**	

\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .005$

The first model supported that foreign-born faculty members' perceived relationships with their universities, specifically with regards to trust, were related to their attitudes toward the U.S. The final model also supported that foreign-born faculty members' attitudes toward

the U.S. were significantly related to their behavioral intentions toward the country. Moreover, their perceived relationships, specifically with regards to commitment, were related to their behavioral intentions toward the U.S.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

### ***Discussion***

Since the globalization and development of new communication technologies has altered public diplomacy to people-to-people diplomacy (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006), not only have people's thoughts become more significant and trustworthy than government's statements or national news (Vibber & Kim 2015), but their relationships with national organizations and governments have also become more valuable (Golan & Yang, 2015; Ki, 2015). Therefore, public relations and public diplomacy are converging to cultivate relationships between foreign people and governments. Scholars (e.g., Fitzpatrick, 2007; Hayden, 2009; L'Etang, 2008) suggested the convergence between public diplomacy and public relations in a theoretical way. Lee and Jun (2013) and Ki (2015) confirm that little has been done in a practical way to indicate how public relations frameworks can be applied to public diplomacy contexts. Therefore, this study considered sociological globalism as a future public diplomacy approach, focusing on people's global mobility, to analyze the relationship between the interaction of host countries with foreign-born publics and the contribution of this interaction to host countries' public diplomacy efforts. To do this, relationship measures were used to evaluate how the relationship between foreign-born faculty members and their universities contributes to host countries' public diplomacy efforts. Findings of this study confirmed that foreign-born faculty members' relationships with their universities could be evaluated by using OPR measures. Thus, these findings contribute to theory building in the area of public diplomacy by indicating how OPR can improve public diplomacy efforts even further.

In addition, this study is one of the few empirical efforts to study soft power. By highlighting the importance of soft power, Nye (2004) indicates that it is better to use attractive power such as culture, political values, and institutions than military or economic power to achieve strategic goals. Yun and Kim (2008) note that there have been few efforts at empirical theory building on this subject. For example, Huang and Xiang (2019) conducted a large-N empirical analysis to demonstrate how China employs the Confucius Institute to maximize its soft power. Wojciuk et al. (2015) attempted to provide a theoretical conceptualization of educational soft power and presented three mechanisms that it can work 1) as a carrier of genuine values, 2) as a resource that countries possess, and 3) as a tool in achieving certain goals. Moreover, this study analyzed foreign-born faculty members as soft power resources by empirically testing their attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the U.S. By using attitudes and behavioral intentions toward a country as a measure of soft power, this study indicates the role of the foreign-born faculty members as effective soft power resources for people-to-people diplomacy and education as one of the key public diplomacy efforts in the context of sociological public diplomacy.

As in previous studies (e.g., Ki & Hon, 2007; Seltzer & Zhang, 2010), the relationship outcome of trust was found to be a significant predictor of foreign-born faculty members' attitudes toward the U.S. Their attitudes and the relationship outcome of commitment were significant predictors of foreign-born faculty members' behavioral intentions toward the U.S. These findings indicate that foreign-born faculty members' relationships with their universities may play an important role in U.S. public diplomacy efforts. Therefore, foreign-born faculty members can be seen as soft power resources because their positive relationships with their universities bring favorable attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the U.S., which are desirable outcomes for public diplomacy. As Ki (2015) indicates, influencing the attitudes of foreign-born faculty members is significant in the context of public diplomacy because the attitudes and opinions of members of foreign publics have direct and indirect effects on governmental foreign policy decisions. Therefore, U.S. universities should build and maintain positive, long-lasting, and attentive relationships with foreign-born faculty members.

The findings indicate that although all of the dimensions of the OPR measurement were statistically significant in terms of measuring the relationship between universities and foreign-born faculty-members, only two dimensions, trust and commitment, predicted public diplomacy outcomes. These results are interesting, especially for satisfaction, because previous studies (e.g., Lee & Jun, 2013) stated that satisfaction is an important predictor of attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the U.S. and its citizens. This discrepancy can be explained by the type of samples. Participants in previous studies were students, whereas our study samples are faculty members. Compared with the students, faculty members spend a much longer duration in the United States. As suggested by Ki and Hon (2007), there is an order of relationship dimensions. For short-term relationships, satisfaction is a key factor for attitude and behavioral intention. However, for long-term relationships (the faculty case in this study), trust and commitment play more important roles. Most faculty members in the sample have already received their graduate degrees in the U.S. This means that they have lived at least 3–5 years in the U.S., in addition to the number of years they have been working as faculty members.

Control mutuality was not found to be a significant predictor of attitudes and behavioral intentions in terms of sociological public diplomacy. One plausible explanation is that there are no differences between foreign-born and U.S.-born scholars in terms of the degree of control in the decision-making process at U.S. universities. Specifically, in faculty meetings all faculty collectively make decisions, contribute to a team effort, participate, and interact with one another (Michel, 2011).

These findings also provide insight into the ongoing effort to build relationships between foreign publics and governments (Lee & Jun, 2013; Yun & Vibber, 2012) by indicating the importance of higher education in public diplomacy efforts. Because education is one of the most significant public diplomacy tools for establishing mutual benefit and trust among nations (Golan, 2013; Snow, 2015), this study calls for U.S. government attention to support these relationships. For example, the U.S. government can encourage and facilitate foreign-born faculty members' mobility to the U.S. through visa policies and immigration laws that



encourage them to come to the U.S. This can also encourage international graduate students to stay and apply for academic jobs in the U.S. after graduation. In addition, they can fund programs to enable foreign-born scholars to teach and conduct research in U.S. universities as well as to improve universities' capacities to host foreign-born scholars.

Moreover, similar to the findings of the Public Diplomacy Foundation (2002), this study also indicates that educational exchanges are a significant public diplomacy practice with valuable effects on attitudes and behaviors toward U.S. universities. For instance, as a part of educational exchanges, universities can play a significant role in fostering positive and favorable attitudes toward the U.S. In addition, foreign-born scholars can be effective channels for U.S. public diplomacy because, as immigrants, they have direct interaction with their home cultures (Yun & Toth, 2009). Thus, foreign-born scholars who have positive attitudes toward the U.S. are more likely to say positive things about the U.S. education system and recommend the U.S. to others to work or to visit, which are the wanted outcomes of public diplomacy efforts. This study suggests that higher education has the potential to be an effective soft power tool of U.S. public diplomacy via building and maintaining positive and favorable relationships not only with foreign-born scholars but also with international students.

### ***Limitations and Conclusion***

This study bears several limitations that can guide future research directions. First, this study was limited to foreign-born faculty members in the public relations field working in U.S. universities. Therefore, the findings of the study are not generalizable to other types of public or disciplines' foreign-born faculty members. Scholars in other fields might consider applying this study's framework to their contexts. Second, this study did not consider the effects of other variables such as the influence of social lives, previous experiences, and U.S. politics on the attitudes and behavioral intentions of members of foreign publics toward the U.S. In incorporating these variables, future studies should examine potential drivers, mediators, and moderators of foreign public members' views of the U.S. to offer a more comprehensive picture of soft power. In addition, future studies may conduct experimental and longitudinal analyses to establish the actual causal links among the variables in this study.

Within the framework of sociological public diplomacy, this study surveyed foreign-born faculty members, considering them as soft power resources for U.S. public diplomacy. Findings indicated that foreign-born faculty members' positive relationships with their universities affect their attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the U.S. positively. Therefore, this study suggests that OPR measures can be applied to public diplomacy and there is also a link among relationship perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions in a public diplomacy context. In addition, foreign-born faculty members' positive relationships with their universities can be trustworthy, valuable, and effective soft power resources for governments or nations in today's world.

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