Categories and Institutional Change: Contesting the Uncontested Space Through National Rankings

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Abstract

The current study aims to examine how and why actors contest the business education field through rankings. Inspired by the field structuration process and field level change, we argue that categorization systems, in this case, rankings, construct boundaries of the business education field and redefine authority and elites for the field. Ten highly ranked Pakistani business schools were selected through a purposive sampling method. For the thematic analysis adopted in the current study, we collected empirical evidence mainly through interviews with the directors of accreditation and ranking bodies, deans, and marketing directors of business schools. The interview data was also supplemented by secondary data such as internal student surveys, business school's annual reports, and other relevant sources of data. The current study showed institutional work in the business education field. Through categorization systems, actors use their authority to challenge the existing social order and define the uncontested space of the business education field in developing countries. Actors then populate the uncontested space with new members thus legitimizing new rules and standards for the field and promoting new elites for the field thus creating new social order.

Keywords

rankings, categorization, institutional work, business schools, field boundaries, higher education

Introduction

Ranking lists of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), such as business schools, are popping up in magazines, newspapers, and the internet around the world. News media companies, national and international media, business magazines, and governments are all involved in producing rankings for business education and schools (Johnes, 2018; Vernon et al., 2018). The study by Usher and Savino (2006) argued that rankings although reviled by critics remained popular among students and their parents. Rankings provide comparisons and offer information and thus became popular among students; however, they are also frequently used by other members of the field. For instance, governments, other industries, and Higher Education (HE) regulatory bodies use ranking information for developing strategies and policies (Hazelkorn, 2011).

Rankings have been debated by academics and their significance for HE has been expressed from different perspectives. The rankings literature falls into two broad

perspectives: methodological perspective and theoretical perspective. Hazelkorn (2011) argued that the majority of the rankings literature falls into the methodological perspective and limited research is available on the theoretical perspective. From a methodological perspective, several studies (Hazelkorn, 2007; Johnes, 2018; Liu & Cheng, 2005; Sadlak et al., 2008; Turner, 2005; Usher & Savino, 2006; Vernon et al., 2018) have discussed rankings by examining the method implied in rankings, such as the indicators used for evaluation, authentication of data, and the use of proxies. A common theme among these studies highlights the volatility of the ranking

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systems and the problems in measurement criteria, which causes uncertainty and insecurity among business schools about how they should respond (Hazelkorn, 2011). However, Hazelkorn (2011) further argued that a limited number of studies (for instance, Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Hazelkorn, 2011; Labi, 2008; Wedlin, 2006) have taken a theoretical stance and argued the significance, power, and influence of rankings on HEIs. However, even with the insecurity and uncertainty about ranking information, there is paucity of research to understand why rankings are so important and how they affect business education field?

With the expansion of business schools across the world, several types of transparency instruments such as research-based rankings, media-based rankings, student surveys, and accreditations have been introduced into the HE system (Hazelkorn, 2011). It is still not clear how and why these different types of transparency instruments became so important in the HE field in developing countries like Pakistan. Previous research studies largely investigated the global rankings (Hazelkorn, 2011; Wedlin, 2006) and did not consider the domestic rankings and their implications for the domestic HE market in countries like Pakistan where HEIs have not achieved any significant rankings on the global ranking list. We will discuss this further later in the context of the Pakistani higher education system. Hazelkorn (2011) has appropriately classified the different ranking systems but our understanding is limited to the implications of national rankings in emerging HE markets. National rankings have gained significance in developing countries where the global rankings have not made inroads into their HE systems (Hazelkorn, 2011). We may ask why and how these rankings are formed and with what consequences.

The current study looked beyond the view of rankings as a transparency mechanism by conceptualizing rankings as part of field and field boundaries formation. The concept of boundary work argues for determining the epistemic and cultural authority in the field and focuses on actors, individuals, and institutions and their role in forming and reforming field boundaries (Beunen & Patterson, 2019; Gieryn, 1999). In line with Suddaby and Viale's (2011) study of institutional work, we attempted to analyze the construction of fields, field boundaries, and the contestation of uncontested space through categories in the field of business education. Building on these streams of literature, the overall aim of this study is twofold; first, to show that Pakistan's national rankings are created to define and populate the uncontested space of domestic competition and category, and second; the creation of new category triggers a struggle for supremacy, legitimacy, and positions within Pakistan, thus setting new boundaries for the domestic field.

Actors within Pakistan's business education field use categorization systems for countering the widely accepted categories, for instance, the Financial Times (FT) and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) business education rankings, by constructing a perception of domestic field boundaries and a contest within the newly defined boundaries. The current study uses the field settings of Pakistan, with a relatively newly developed ranking system, to examine the field boundary formation of business education.

Framework

Fields and Institutional Work

The role of boundaries and the issues related to boundaries remained a key topic in several research fields such as sociology, history, political science, anthropology, and social psychology; however, the integration among different lines of research is limited (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). The concept of field boundaries have dealt with environmental governance (Beunen & Patterson, 2019), health care (Wallenburg et al., 2019), culture (DiMaggio, 1987), science (Gieryn, 1999), professions (Abbott, 1995), and class (Lamont, 1992), and a common argument among these research studies relates to the understanding and explanation of symbolic resources in social systems and societies (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). While symbolic resources remained a core element in research studies, there is limited research about the role of boundaries in field development and field formation (Dacin et al., 2002). Actors play an important role by debating the process and content of science and spreading ideas and scientific claims. The boundaries of the field are constantly defined and redefined (Wallenburg et al., 2019) depending on who is doing the boundary work, for whom, and against whom (Gieryn, 1999).

The field boundaries are often established on the industry, geographical area, or a shared normative framework where organizations produce the same things that distinguish them from others. In defining the field and field boundaries, it is not the struggle to define a group of institutions per se that is important but, rather, the ideas and perceptions of individuals about what is a suitable and good practice within the field (Wedlin, 2011). These perceptions of individuals construct the symbolic boundaries of the field. Lamont (1992) argued that symbolic boundaries do not describe social order or structure; rather, they are a conceptual classification of practices that are drawn by the individuals within the field.

Fields reflect on the structure of the organizations, and the behavior of the members, and define legitimate activities for the field. The institutions in the field are subject to isomorphic pressures, which trigger a change in the field and competitive pressures (Powell &

DiMaggio, 1991) thus leading competing institutions to be more alike. Defining legitimate activities in terms of laws, regulations, rules, and beliefs is a key process of the field approach (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991).

Field logic is defined as "the underlying assumptions, deeply held, often unexamined, which form a framework within which reasoning takes place" (Horn, 1983, p. 1). The emphasis in the field approach is on the group rather than separate actors to provide opportunities for a wider explanation of the field logic (Martin, 2003). A shift in intuitional logic brings institutional change, which triggers legitimacy in the field (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). The criteria used for assessing the legitimacy of institutional forms can change due to a shift in logic; however, there is a paucity of research about the means, by which these logics are contested. Suddaby and Viale (2011) elucidated institutional work by explaining the four-step process through which professionals shape institutions and organizational fields.

> "First, professionals use their expertise and legitimacy to challenge the incumbent order and to define a new, open and uncontested space. Second, professionals use their inherent social capital and skill to populate the field with new actors and new identities. Third, professionals introduce nascent new rules and standards that recreate the boundaries of the field. Fourth, professionals manage the use and reproduction of social capital within a field thereby conferring a new status hierarchy or social order within the field" (Suddaby & Viale, 2011, p. 1).

The current study attempts to examine institutional work by providing empirical evidence about the key role of categorization tools (Pakistan Business Schools Rankings) that shapes the business education field.

Categorization Systems

Categorization systems are social constructs of knowledge structures with the ability to define rules for a category and to influence the behavior of actors in the field (Douglas, 1986; Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010). A category classifies groups and their characteristics, creates distinctions, and sets boundaries for the category, which allows actors to interpret them more easily (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Categorization makes objects and individuals of a category more visible in the field and defines prototypes of benchmarks for a category (Bowker & Star, 1999). Rankings in this sense can be seen as a categorization tool that creates hierarchal positions, knowledge about the field and field members, and distinctions, thus setting a category of business schools (Hazelkorn, 2011). Rankings are highly significant as they can influence resources and material rewards (Rao, 1994) and symbolic value (Wedlin, 2011), thus playing an active role in the field structuration process (Lamont & Molnár, 2002).

In the international arena, business schools across the world are competing for the top spots in international business school rankings. This can be seen as a major concern for business schools in less developed countries such as Pakistan as they fail to appear in these international business school rankings. Today, several developing countries have established their ranking systems. For example, in Pakistan, the HEC produces ranking lists for Pakistani business schools and ranking systems such as *Zee News* rankings, *Hindustan Times* rankings, *Business India* rankings, and *Business Today* rank business schools in India. Similarly, in several other developing countries such as Nigeria and Kazakhstan, governments have started producing national HE rankings (Hazelkorn, 2011) thus creating new contestations through these categorization systems.

A Context of Pakistani Higher Education

The higher education sector in Pakistan has shown steady progress in terms of student access to higher education. Currently, there are 211 universities out of which 69 are private. There are 142 business schools in Pakistan. About 1.86 million students are studying at the undergraduate level and .86 million students are enrolled at the postgraduate level (Government of Pakistan, 2020).

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan was established in the year 2002, which can be seen as a turning point in the development of HE in the country. The HEC since its inception took several measures to boost both the quality and quantity of HE in the country. For instance, more than 50% of Pakistan's total universities were established after the year 2002. HEC's (2012) new policies encouraged the private sector to invest in HE and several private universities were established thus triggering competition in the country . More universities meant more choices for the students and the well-reputed public universities now had to compete for student enrolment.

Inspired by the QS ranking system, the HEC of Pakistan introduced their version of university rankings in the year 2006. The HEC of Pakistan publishes rankings for general universities and business schools. Being the first and only ranking system for Pakistani business schools, the HEC (2012) aimed to gradually bring national business schools up to the international level and achieve international visibility. HEIs were ranked based on five broad categories (i.e., students, facilities, finance, faculty, and research) by awarding varying percentages to each category. The initial ranking mechanism was then reformed by adding quality assurance to the

criteria (HEC, 2012). We took the Pakistani ranking system as a standpoint of categorization tool to critically examine how and why new contests are created and consequently changing the national business education field.

Before the creation of the HEC rankings in Pakistan, a sense of good versus bad business schools in Pakistan was primarily associated with traditional qualitative indicators such as reputation, prestige, word-of-mouth, and so on. Business schools may have been good schools, but it was difficult to claim if they are better than others. In other words, they had fewer options for differentiation. The introduction of national rankings in Pakistan's business education field not only provided the much-needed quantification mechanism but also offered a point of differentiation thus influencing the business schools' strategies.

The methodology adopted by the HEC rankings differs significantly from some other international business ranking systems; however, it reconfirms rather than challenges the core features of these ranking systems. First, it constructs an "audit society" in the business education field by focusing on the domestic field settings of Pakistan that were not audited before (Power, 1997); second, it satisfies the domestic consumer pressure and demand for information (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996) about Pakistani business schools. In this sense, the HEC rankings legitimize the symbolic value of business studies and business schools in the field settings of Pakistan.

Method

The aim of our study is inductive therefore we adopted a qualitative analysis approach through interviews with key stakeholders. The method adopted is further explained below:

Research Settings

Adopting a purposive sampling method, cases were selected using defined criteria of the sector, location, number of sites, and rankings. Using these criteria, we chose 10 business schools with good rankings from Pakistan. The launch of HEC (2012) rankings in the year 2006 was the first encounter of Pakistani universities with these systems. The purpose of selecting this location was to capture the views and opinions of the field members operating in the newly introduced ranking environment.

Data

The data for the current study were collected between 2013 and 2014 when the expansion of HEC rankings in the Pakistani HE environment was particularly salient.

For the thematic analysis adopted in the current study, we collected empirical evidence mainly through 23 interviews with the directors of accreditation and ranking bodies (i.e., within the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan), deans, and marketing directors of business schools (Appendix A1). The interview data was also supplemented by secondary data such as internal student surveys, business schools' annual reports, and other relevant sources of data.

Analysis and Coding Process. For the analysis, we adopted the thematic analysis method that is extensively discussed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Using the extracts of keywords, we developed a coding vocabulary (see Appendix A2), which helped in the formation of initial (first-order) codes. These codes were further reviewed and grouped to develop more consolidated second-order codes. Using Nvivo-10 software, these codes and coding vocabulary were developed by generating keywords through "high-frequency words."Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested the use of extracts for discussing or reporting the main theme(s) of the research study. We followed their method by presenting interview extracts along with sources of data to support the main theme of this study (Figure 1).

Findings

In line with our analysis and coding process, Figure 1 summarizes the development of the analytical theme thus providing us with some useful insights into the field formation and institutional change.

The Role of National Rankings in Field-Level Change

Countering the Western Model. The global business education ranking lists, such as FT rankings, are overrepresented by the US and Western European business schools. The Pakistani business schools, just like those in several other developing countries, have not achieved any major rankings in the global ranking lists. The significance of HE in Pakistan has been consistently debated in several forums such as parliament, HEC conferences, and media reports, but the country has endured political turmoil throughout its history, as a result of which education has not been able to prosper as had been imagined by the HE policy makers of Pakistan (Nayyar & Salim, 2005). However, with the establishment of the HEC in the year 2002, there has been eye-catching development and growth in the HE sector of Pakistan. The HEC faced two major challenges. The first was to expand HE by establishing new HEIs and improving student enrolment. In less than 10 years, the HEC (2012) justified its existence as the number of HEIs increased by a 100% and
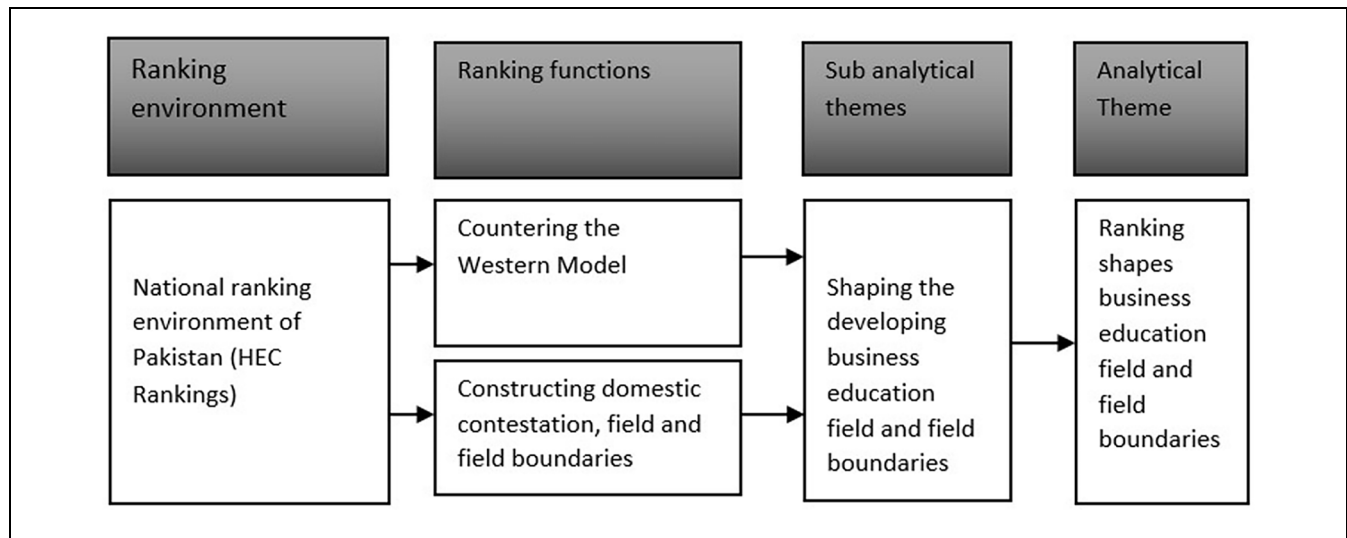
Figure 1. Ranking functions for shaping the business education field.
Source. Developed by the researchers.

student enrolment increased by 400%. Private HEIs have also flourished in the last decade as several specialized institutions such as information technology, engineering, medicine, and business schools have been established (Isani & Virk, 2001). The second challenge was to improve the quality of HE in Pakistan through rankings. The HEC took several measures to improve the education quality, for example, HEC established Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2014), encouraged QECs at HEIs, and initiated rankings for universities and disciplines thus intensifying competition within the Pakistani HE market. An administrative Manager of a business school puts it:

> The impact of rankings is very much there and today business schools compete in these league tables [HEC rankings] and they are forced into these positional wars. (PKH2).

As mentioned earlier, global business schools' rankings are awarded to the business schools from the US and Western European countries and one reason for their dominance can be linked to their selection criteria. Several global ranking systems such as FT and *Businessweek* use international accreditations as a screening mechanism to shortlist business schools for their surveys and assessments (Hedmo, 2004; Johnes, 2018). In this sense, these ranking systems favor business schools that have already established their status of "good schools" by achieving international accreditations. Business schools in developing countries, which have relatively small financial capital, are denied entry to the global rankings due to their inability to meet the minimum requirements for inclusion. For example, the FT and *Businessweek* rankings for executive education define the population using minimum criteria of size,

international accreditations, and turnover. A dean of a Pakistani business school explained:

> "It is nearly impossible for business schools like ours to compete with international schools because of the difference in the economy. The criteria set of international rankings require accreditations from EQUIS, AASCSB and AMBA and an annual trade of over two million dollars to become eligible for international rankings. I am not entirely convinced by judging the standards of education through financial capital" (Source: Interview, Dean-C)

Gieryn (1999) used the boundary-work approach to explain how actors involve in contests and struggle over authority for defining field and field boundaries and to differentiate members of a group from outsiders. Suddaby and Viale (2011) argued that professionals challenge the incumbent order to define the uncontested space, which creates new rules, boundaries, and a new social order in the field. This concept could help us to explain the construction of domestic rankings systems (uncontested space) and the recreation of symbolic boundaries and a new social order. The development of Pakistan's national business education rankings was aimed to counter the Western/ global business education ranking systems, as developing countries have limited access to international transparency instruments. In this sense, governments and local media houses have used their authority to define the uncontested space.

The business schools in Pakistan have set domestic competition as their priority. The main reason for intense domestic competition lies in their limited access to international student segments (Source: Interviews, Pakistan). For instance, in Pakistan, international students account

for less than half of 1% of the total number of students (HEC, 2012), which is very low when compared to developed countries such as the UK, which maintains a good proportion (13%) of international students (HESA, 2013).

Constructing Domestic Contestations, Field, and Field Boundaries. The introduction of local rankings, such as the HEC rankings of Pakistan, further legitimized the local business education field, thus shaping competition and the symbolic value in domestic field settings. The field members, in this case, the business schools of Pakistan, use the HEC rankings to justify domestic competition and symbolic value within the domestic field of business education. A marketing director of a Pakistani business school explained:

> "There are some good business schools in Pakistan, but I guess they are not good enough to be listed in the top schools of the world. The introduction of HEC rankings in Pakistan was a game changer. It is now the number one goal of our institution and I think for many other schools too, to become a top-ranked school in Pakistan. We heavily rely on domestic students and for students, this piece of information is more important because it comes from HEC itself" (Source: Interview, Marketing Director-F).

It has become evident that the HEC rankings are significantly influenced by the ongoing struggles in Pakistan to construct a perception of business studies and positions of Pakistani business schools. These ongoing efforts by the state actors aim to construct comparability and strengthen the Pakistani field of HE. One particular movement was the establishment of the HEC, which later introduced reforms such as QAA, QECs, and rankings at the national level (HEC, 2012), thus standardizing the comparisons across the country. As noted earlier, the international ranking systems have set international accreditations as the minimum criteria for assessment. The HEC rankings also confirm the core features of international ranking systems and are attempting to influence this view by linking the HEC rankings with their QA standards (Source: Interviews, Pakistan).

Before the HEC rankings, the leading business schools in Pakistan enjoyed high status in their domestic market; however, this symbolic value did not justify claims such as the "leading" or "one of the best business schools in Pakistan. For business schools in Pakistan, the introduction of HEC rankings delivered an opportunity to endorse the national view of business education and to support their national status in the local field. Therefore, with the introduction of HEC rankings, they became active in promoting HEC rankings and the domestic business education field along with it, thus legitimizing a new status hierarchy or social order (Suddaby & Viale, 2011; Wallenburg et al., 2019). From the statements made by Pakistani respondents during the interviews and from the institutions" websites, it is evident how field members in Pakistan argue the significance of HEC rankings and their position within them. For instance, a lecturer in marketing explains:

> We have discussed HEC rankings a lot and we made certain changes to our existing research setup so that we can score high on the research component of the HEC Rankings. (PKF1)

Such justification of positional status legitimizes HEC rankings as a means of creating distinctive positions within their local field settings. In a broader context, the justification of domestic rankings (HEC rankings) further legitimizes the practice of rankings in the business education field and increases the proliferation of rankings in developing countries (Green et al., 2009).

The expansion of rankings can be seen both in a vertical and horizontal sense. For instance, global rankings of MBA programs by the FT and the BusinessWeek have a similar ranking mechanism but with a slightly different sets of indicators thus producing slightly different ranking lists. This can be seen as a vertical expansion of ranking systems where different ranking systems offer similar ranking lists. However, there are ranking systems (for instance, national student survey and research-based rankings) that only takes the specific output of the business school into account. These rankings provide a unique aspect of ranking which distinguish them from other ranking systems. This type of expansion can be seen as a horizontal expansion of ranking systems. Business schools, such as in the UK, would only publicize those rankings that have produced favorable rankings. From a promotion perspective, business schools have several options to choose from (e.g., the FT or the BusinessWeek) and/or choose a specialized rankings system, for instance, a national student survey, which captures students' opinions about the universities. In short, business schools, for instance in the United Kingdom, use both vertical and horizontal expansion of the ranking list, such as global rankings, national rankings, research-based rankings, and student surveys to justify their positions and the unique symbolic value offered by these ranking systems. In business schools in Pakistan, options are restricted due to their limited access to these types of international ranking systems. Therefore, the business schools in Pakistan have made their claims to national status by focusing on distinctive local characteristics of the rankings. Elite schools in Pakistan use HEC rankings to create their positions in the domestic field by focusing on the appreciation of their national profiles.

These elite schools are independent universities/institutions with a strong focus on business education. The main problem for a small-scale institution is to construct visibility concerning some of the large public universities that offer various programs in different departments such as arts, social sciences, applied sciences, and so on. For these types of business schools, the inclusion of category-based rankings by HEC is considered key for building a national status (Source: Interviews, Pakistan).

Rankings provide a hierarchical ordering of business schools in the field (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Vernon et al., 2018) and they may not be favorable to all competing business schools. It becomes evident that the average-ranked business schools in Pakistan justify their position by discussing their position within a specific region of Pakistan or on specific elements/criteria of HEC rankings. For instance, one marketing manager commented:

> "We have improved our rankings over the years. Yes, our overall ranking is not as good as some of the leading business schools in Pakistan, but we are one of the leading business schools in the research component. Our research score is higher than most of the leading business schools" (Source: Interview, Marketing Manager-A).

Although field members draw on different aspects of the HEC rankings, it is evident from the case-study findings that HEC rankings provide a means for field members in Pakistan to promote their views on business education and their positions in the domestic field of business education. In this sense, the field members focus on the geographic boundaries of the field to define the set of organizations in the business education field. The field members then use the HEC rankings to justify domestic competition within the geographic boundaries of the field. Therefore, in the process, the local rankings redraw the symbolic boundaries of status (Lamont, 1992) within the geographic boundaries of the field.

Discussion

Building on the findings of our study, we argue that the HEC rankings in Pakistan, which are inspired by the international rankings (QS rankings), can be seen as a response to fill the uncontested space for the domestic market but with its consequences. We introduce the following:

Proposition 1: National Rankings Redraw the Boundaries for the Domestic Business Education Field

The HEC rankings in Pakistan construct a national contestation and can be seen as a symbolic boundary for domestic (Pakistan) and international fields of business education. These boundaries determine who is included and who counts in the domestic and international fields of business education (Wedlin, 2006, 2011). International rankings largely proliferated due to the attention given by the large media houses (Johnes, 2018; Roberts & Dowling, 2002) that helped in developing an international perspective on business education. Similarly, several other categorization systems, such as accreditations systems, take part in the formation of the international field. A majority of these international categorization systems belong to Western countries, which may be perceived as a threat to developing countries as Western business schools predominate in these lists. The HEC rankings in Pakistan were driven by a desire among Pakistani HEIs to redraw the boundaries of business education, largely in response to international rankings as they are perceived to draw boundaries for the business education field that exclude Pakistani business schools.

Proposition 2: National Rankings Create a Contest for Uncontested Space and Redefine Authority in the Field

The limited access to the international rankings led to the construction of an uncontested space for comparing business schools in developing HE settings. Actors such as governments and media houses in developing countries used their authority to define and populate the uncontested space by introducing domestic rankings in the domestic field. The introduction of domestic rankings changes the equation for business schools in the domestic market. With the limited number of international students, they have set domestic competition as their priority. The field members use domestic rankings to construct the public view of business education and their positions in the local field settings. In this sense, the field members legitimize local rankings and their standards and reconstruct the symbolic value in the domestic field. In the current study, we looked into the case of Pakistan to explain how local actors (governments) in developing countries counter the Western model of rankings and shape local competition. This is also evident in several other developing countries such as Nigeria and Kazakhstan, where the governments have started producing local rankings (Hazelkorn, 2011). There is also evidence of media houses challenging the uncontested space (Johnes, 2018). This emerging tendency to counter categorization systems aligns with the credibility contest for expansion (Gieryn, 1999) where authorities attempt to expand the frontiers of the field.

Proposition 3: National Rankings Define and Promote National Contestation by Promoting New Elites for the Domestic Field

The HEC rankings enable Pakistani business schools to be categorized as a different group and redraw the

boundaries of the business education field, which allows them to be included in the "good schools" category. In this sense, the HEC rankings make it possible to reconstruct positions in the field and to determine new elites (benchmark) for the business education field (Bowker & Star, 1999). With the Western model of rankings (international) in focus, several business schools such as Harvard, Stanford, and the London Business School are often referred to as inspirations for the business education field. The new categorization systems, such as HEC rankings in Pakistan, add to the existing inspirations by producing new elites for Pakistan's business education field. It became evident that the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) and the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) are frequently referred to as benchmarks of Pakistani business schools. In this sense, rankings redefine boundaries and elites for the field by constructing new categories. The development of HEC rankings in Pakistan is a struggle to set boundaries between Pakistan and Western countries. The development of HEC rankings is drawn by the desire for a specific Pakistani contestation, a contest where Pakistani business schools can exert influence, and a contest where a Pakistani perspective and criteria are taken into consideration. This allows us to understand the significance of the HEC ranking system and the authority (Gieryn, 1999) that HEC enjoys among Pakistani business schools. The criteria used by the HEC rankings are different from international ranking systems; for instance, establishing QEC is one of the criteria for the HEC ranking system. Considering the criteria used by Pakistani and international rankings, the boundary between Pakistani and Western business education becomes visible. There is an ongoing debate about the criteria of the HEC ranking system and there is a struggle to determine criteria that balance Pakistani demands and perceived international standards. The institutional work in Pakistan, which includes the development of the HEC rankings and the encouragement of Pakistani criteria, can be deemed successful as it brought Pakistani schools onto the list and defined new elites for the business education field.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

The current study presented a qualitative analysis of business schools in Pakistan thus the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts with varying ranking systems. Furthermore, we adopted a case-study approach to familiarize ourselves with Pakistani HE systems rankings and its business school's reactions. A wider study including a larger set of business schools would certainly provide more generalizable and holistic results.

The current study touched upon the idea of authority in the field, in our case Pakistan HEC, and its

consequences for the field. Similarly, prior studies have discussed how media houses started their version of business school rankings (Hazelkorn, 2011). A future study may be attempted to examine the key role of these authorities by looking from an "autonomy of the field" perspective.

Conclusion

Our discussion suggests that ranking systems construct boundaries for the business education field, its field members, and for different geographical locations. Rankings construct hierarchies and differentiate a group of institutions from others, thus constructing a boundary of elite business schools. The boundaries are also set for elites of the ranking system. The criteria and the construction of ranking systems not only determine the elite group but also confirm the supremacy of already prominent business schools in the field. In this sense, rankings are partly constructed on the characteristics of leading business schools, and when they are in place the rankings further promote and confirm the position of already perceived leading business schools. It becomes extremely difficult for other, lesser-known schools, especially from developing countries, to compete for central positions in the field. The anxiety among field members and the struggle for authority and supremacy leads to the defining and construction of an uncontested space such as alternative categorization systems. The emerging categorization systems set new contests, creating an opportunity for the previously marginalized business schools to distinguish themselves and struggle for supremacy in the new categories.

Our study aimed to critically examine and explain how less-developed countries contest the business education field through rankings. To explicitly explain the field structuration process, we took Pakistan's HE as a case of reference to explain and present our findings. The key findings in this regard can be summarized below:

The current study showed how national rankings redraw the boundaries for the domestic business education field. The need for constructing national education boundaries (national rankings lies in its ability to compete in the international arena. This may be attributed to the fact that rankings, for instance, FT rankings, the "turnover" criterion makes it difficult for business schools in less-developed countries to meet their minimum requirement. From Pakistan's HE perspective, their national ranking systems were established to create a national contestation and a response to international rankings to redraw the boundaries for its business education field that emphasize national contests and its elites.

Finally, the current study showed how national rankings create a contest for uncontested space and redefine authority in the field and how these ranking systems

define and promote national contestation by promoting new elites for the domestic field. The HEC of Pakistan used their authority to define and populate the uncontested space by introducing domestic rankings in the domestic field. With the new categorization system (i.e., HEC rankings of Pakistan) comes new elites for the field. Business schools such as LUMS and IBA were well-reputed schools in Pakistan but did not have any promising international ratings. However, in the HEC rankings of Pakistan, they are consistently placed in the top three business schools of Pakistan. These schools have become a source of inspiration for lesser-rated business schools in Pakistan, and these less-rated business schools attempt to mimic the standards and procedures of the domestic elites thus further justifying our theoretical stance of isomorphic pressures exerted by the domestic elites. This

does not necessarily mean that traditional global elites, for instance, Harvard Business School, are not recognized by the Pakistani business schools as top business schools of the world but these global elites tend to be less inspirational as business schools of Pakistan by classifying its belongingness to a different group/ category.

From Pakistan business schools' perspective, their strategies have been redefined to compete at the national level. For instance, business schools in Pakistan have set domestic competition (i.e., to encourage local student enrolment) as their priority rather than international students (a key indicator for international rankings). This deviation in the indicators used by national and international rankings may justify sub-categorization but a more precise universal quantification of business school quality becomes more complex than ever.

Appendix A1.

Institute	Code	Title	Interview date	Interview method
Pakistan respondents				
Institute A	PKA1	Assistant Professor Marketing	17-Mar-14	Skype
Institute A	PKA2	Manager Communications	14-Feb-14	Skype
Institute B	PKB1	Assistant Professor Marketing	17-Feb-14	Face to Face
Institute B	PKB2	Deputy manager marketing	18-Feb-14	Face to Face
Institute	PKC1	Assistant Professor Management	19-Feb-14	Face to Face
Institute C	PKC2	Director Marketing	14-Mar-14	Skype
Institute D	PKD1	Treasurer and Administration Manager	04-Feb-14	Face to Face
Institute D	PKD2	Lecturer Marketing	17-Mar-14	Face to Face
Institute E	PKE1	Director administration	28-Feb-14	Face to Face
Institute E	PKE2	Assistant professor Marketing	27-Feb-14	Face to Face
Institute F	PKF1	Lecturer Marketing	23-Jan-14	Face to Face
Institute F	PKF2	Director administration	13-Mar-14	Face to Face
Institute G	PKG1	Assistant professor Marketing	10-Mar-14	Face to Face
Institute G	PKG2	Administration -Registrar	28-Mar-14	Face to Face
Institute H	PKH1	Senior lecturer Marketing	24-Jan-14	Skype
Institute H	PKH2	Administration - Manager	21-Mar-14	Skype
Institute I	PKI1	Assistant Professor Marketing	29-Jan-14	Skype
Institute I	PKI2	Administration Director	30-Jan-14	Skype
Institute J	PKJ1	Assistant Professor Marketing	25-Mar-14	Face to Face
Institute J	PKJ2	Manager Administration	25-Mar-14	Face to Face
External and industry experts				
External expert	DIR-A	Director	23-Dec-14	Skype
External expert	DIR-B	Director	10-Dec-14	Skype
External expert	DIR-C	Director	07-Jan-14	Skype

Appendix A2.

First orders codes	Key words	Empirical extracts exemplars
A context of rankings (second order codes)		
Love hate relationship	Options, quality, reductionist, well meant, compare, absolute numbers, biases, methodological concerns, methodology	"What rankings do, they turn very complex qualitative information into one quantitative measure, they are incredibly reductionist when it comes to it." (PKC1) "The rankings are sometimes very cruel in the sense that they judge you in absolute numbers. You are either better than others or you are not." (PKB1)
Competition	Compete internationally, level playing field, reputation, competition, accreditations, positional wars	"The impact of rankings is very much there and today business schools compete in these league tables, and they are forced into these positional wars." (PKH2). "Emerging countries are catching up with the developed countries and when the reputation difference among countries is minimized, it would become more difficult for institutions to compete internationally in next 10–15 years or so." (PKI1)
Proxy of reputation	Advocates reputation, reputation, Power of rankings, ranking game, synonymous with rankings	"Ranking advocates your reputation and your brand to stakeholders. So, I think ranking has a direct impact on the institutional reputation." (PKD1) "The power of rankings has increased in the last few years and most Pakistani institutions have been forced to play this ranking game." (PKI1)
Rankings and accreditation relationship	Input, output, process, mutually supportive, reputation, accreditation goal, triple-accredited, positive, quality, unique, triple accreditation	"An accreditation checks quality on all levels and that is input, process, and output. The rankings have more of an output focus." (DIR-B) "I think they are mutually supportive; I think the business schools take accreditation very seriously. It is considered very important for their reputation." (DIR-A)
Significance and power of media houses	Media companies, media houses, visibility, developing criteria, driving the development, quality metric, income generation, dominant, power shift	"The trends in the current market would suggest that these rankings would become more dominant. The media companies are developing the criteria for international rankings from their perspectives so you have to ask yourself whether the media companies actually should be driving the development of this sector." (DIR-B) "I think the power has shifted from HE to Media houses and some goes for research, the publishers are in charge, the editors not the academics." (DIR-A)
A context of reputation		
Series of reputation	Series of reputations, many reputations, not one reputation, stakeholders, different perspectives, students, a proxy of reputation	"The reputation of an institution is not one but a series of reputations. A university can have many reputations like a reputation for research, a reputation for student's future job employability, a reputation for graduate and post-graduate courses and so on." (PKA1).
University and business school reputation	Not the same, weak b-school, strong b-school, harmonious, strong university, weak university	"The reputation of university and business school may not be the same because I can think of one case where there is a very strong business and management school but a relatively weak university, so you have slightly different tension there." (PKH1)
Easy to understand	Not brands, commercial language, more comfortable, reputational factor, long history, a synonym of quality, important, easily understood	"Reputation is not a new word or a new concept, but it has a long history. It is a simple word that is easily understood among people, especially those, that are directly related to higher education." (PKF1) "A lot of my colleagues (in other disciplines) over there would say that institutes are not brands, they don't prefer the commercial language when they associate it with the university." (PKB1)
Significance for students	Market segments, individual offering, country, reputation, dominant factor, parents, student recruitment, quality,	"Our surveys suggest that in most cases reputation is one of the dominant factors that students rely upon." (PKA2) "Reputation would definitely impact your student recruitment. It would impact on the quality of staff and students that you can attract." (PKD2)
Differentiation	Different, core values, rebrand, standardized approach, differentiate, student preferences, recognition, market	"I think there is more of a standardized approach in the West than in Pakistan. The Pakistani schools need to differentiate more clearly." (DIR-A) "So, it is up to the management of the school to identify what a school stands for how it is different and what are the core values, and the important part is to communicate it to their stakeholders." (PKF2)

Appendix A2. (continued)

First orders codes	Key words	Empirical extracts exemplars
Policy, operational and financial change		
Institutional policy	The goal, policies, rankings, benchmark, global race, strategic level, brand image, priority, main objective, strategy, information	"The rankings are considered very important at the strategic level in my department." (PKH1). "Everyone wants to improve their rankings which could help them in building their reputation and brand image." (PKJ2)
Operational change	Research grants, new staff, strategic change, hiring, network, new structure, rankings, accreditation, new roles, quality	"These new positions or roles are influenced by the supremacy of rankings that we see in the business school environment." (PKB2) "It is very interesting for us because we (institute C) have hired 18 new academic staff at our school and around 100 overall at the university level just before the HEC Ranking so partly because of rankings and partly because of the general change in the strategy." (PKC1)
Rankings and financial resources	Rankings, rhetoric, fee, high fee, investment, quality assurance, information, more students, changes	"I think you would find most highly ranked schools with higher fees and average business schools with relatively lower fees than the premium ones." (PKA2) "We have discussed HEC rankings a lot and we made certain changes to our existing research setup so that we can score high on the research component of the HEC Rankings." (PKF1)
Academic life and research culture		
Academic life and rankings	Pressure, productive, determine, barrier, employers, employing, judging, reputation	"I suppose it is a general pressure for example at (institute C) there is definitely pressure on academia to research according to the HEC standards. For universities, research is key to securing good ratings" (PKC1)
Impact on research	Teaching, research output, evaluation system, research ratings, freedom, choices, rankings,	"I started my academic career in the mid-90 and I have written some books and published my work in some good journals. Then we had more freedom, more choice to contribute the way we want to, but rankings have made the research more challenging and complex." (PKD1)
Student recruitment		
Impact on student choice	Target, student segments, target segment, choosing, fee, rankings, options, differentiate, confidence	"Our internal student surveys suggest that rankings were among the top three factors for choosing us." (PKJ2) "They evaluate different options, and they consider rankings for this purpose. It is very likely that they differentiate schools based on their position in the market." (PKH2)
Impact on the student recruitment process	Fee, applications, higher fee, pricing, unsophisticated, rankings, judging, selection process, accreditations, prices, selectivity, paradoxical	"Ranking has a direct impact on the student selection process. For the past 3 years or so, we have constantly been getting good rankings and this year we have seen about 15 per cent more applications compared to the last year and that is encouraging." (PKG1) "Since we got into the top ten business schools of Pakistan, our prices went up and applications went up." (PKH1)
Partnerships of institutions		
Collaborations with academic institutions	Relationships, analyze, rankings, dominate, important, international partners, quality, country association	"If we talk about partnerships with other schools, then yes, I do believe that rankings are very important not only for us but also for our partners as you are considering international partners, that are located in places not well known to us. The rankings that are highly credible either at the national or international level, become a good source of understanding the quality of schools." (PKI2)
The power of negotiations	Rankings, reputation, dominant, less dominant, power, superior recognition, partnerships	"The bargaining power would probably be with an institution that has a superior reputation and recognition among the two partners. The bigger the difference is between the reputations of the two partners, the more power you have during these sorts of partnerships." (PKA2)
Collaborations with industry	Brands, comfortable, alumni, selling point, accreditations, rankings, shorthand information, sell	"We have done strategy workshops with small medium and large companies so, in this case, we are the service providers and I assume the customers in this case are the industries, that would act the same way as our students. I think they probably would research a couple of institutions they are interested in and then decide which one they want to go with." (PKA1)

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