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The management and impact of international rankings on reputation in higher education

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Master of
Philosophy in Manchester Business School

2011

Louise Simpson

Manchester Business School

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Abstract

The University of Manchester, Louise Simpson, Master of Philosophy

The impact of international rankings on corporate reputation management in higher education, 2011

The way the commercial sector creates and manages reputation and measures itself against competitors is well documented. However, there is less attention paid to reputation management in higher education, a service sector that bridges the gap between public and private and drives national and global economies. Universities themselves have not been very interested in proactive reputation management and peer benchmarking, even if they are immensely proud of their 'reputations'; also, there has been no transparent ways of assessing and comparing global university reputation until recently. However, the advent of world higher education rankings has shone a public light on university success.

This study suggests that because rankings are visible and of value as a fast track way of navigating the complex university world for the public, they are being used proactively and strategically by universities to amplify reputation. Whether or not the methodology is perfect, or academics acknowledge them, university leaders know they are the nearest global proxy for reputation in higher education and cannot be ignored. Higher ranked positions are now appearing as strategic goals for universities and as such are indicators of both reputation and corporate success. To test this theory, this study examined whether university senior managers and leaders plan for ranking advancement, and use positive rankings in public relations activities to amplify their profile.

The research found that most universities use rankings as part of deliberate and strategic reputation management. Over half admit to investing in strategies to support a higher ranking, with slightly fewer aiming for a numerical position. Those who were strategic about aiming for a higher ranking, were also more likely to go up in the rankings, which suggests that deliberation and tactics bear fruit. Crossing major thresholds (getting into the top 50) is deemed to be more important than achieving a specific number. Student recruitment was not felt to be affected by falls in ranking, but rises in ranking were likely to result in increased applications from international students and more partnership interest from world leading universities. Thus a fall in ranking is not perceived to be excessively damaging but a rise is very thought to be highly beneficial. Whilst rankings per se may not offer a complete picture of a university's reputation, the public's interest in rankings, if not the rankings themselves, has pushed universities to adopt more competitive strategic and corporate planning and proactive reputational management. In this way, universities become endorsers of ranking, and give the public renewed assurance that rankings are indeed valid measures of reputation.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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The Author

Louise Simpson gained her first degree with the University of Cambridge in English literature (Girton College). After working in international publishing for several years, she then went into university communications, becoming director of communications for Cambridge University. In 2004 she set up The Knowledge Partnership, with David Roberts, a strategic consultancy working with universities to advance their reputation and improve specific marketing or communications activities. She launched the World 100 Reputation Network in 2007 to create a research and network for directors of communications and other corporate directors in leading universities.

As part of the World 100 group, Louise has visited some of the world's best universities, looking at how they manage their reputations and create affinity amongst stakeholders. She organized and chaired the first World 100 conference at Hong Kong University in June 2010 with reputation experts from 30 universities and over 100 delegates. Through 2008-9, Louise was project manager for the HEliX project for HEFCE, creating a new methodology for assessing and improving internal communications in universities, which is being by universities in Australia and the US as well as the UK.

In 2008/9 Louise wrote the business case for the Study in Europe brand for the European Commission, which resulted in the first website aimed at international students planning to study in Europe. In 2011, she was an advisor to the Information and Promotion Network of the Bologna Group, helping them consider how best to promote the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area. She has created two other tools to benchmark university brand and communications – Aurora, a media analysis tool - and WASP, a tool to benchmark websites and their brand messages. She taught communications and public relations for the voluntary sector, as part of the University of Cambridge's Institute of Continuing Education for two years. Day to day, she advises a wide variety of universities on reputation and communications across the UK and Europe. She lives with her family in Cambridge.

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Simpson, L. (2009) Survey of external relations directors and international directors. The world's top 100 universities: analysing their communications and strategies for reputational advancement. World 100 Reputation Network. Summary available at: <http://www.theworld100.com/research/2008/directors/index.html>

Simpson, L. (2010) Rise and fall: managing reputation associated with significant world ranking change. The World 100 Reputation Network. Summary available at: <http://www.theworld100.com/research/2009/riseandfall/W100%20Rise%20and%20Fall%20-%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

Simpson, L. (2011). Aurora: a system of measuring reputational impact in press coverage. The World 100 Reputation Network. Available from: <http://www.theworld100.com/research/2010/aurora/index.html>.

Conference and group presentations include:

Building a world-class reputation through institutional marketing. Australian Universities Marketing, Communications and Development Conference. University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia, 22 September 2011

Reputation and university distinctiveness. September 2011. Kingston University

Lessons in marketing the Bologna Process and the EHEA, Vienna, 2010.

Considering the future of the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association, Prague 2010.

The impact of changes in university rankings. World 100 conference, Hong Kong University, 2010

Why university rankings matter. CASE conference, Liverpool 2009.

The meaning of university reputation and how to amplify it. London Metropolitan University, 2009.

Creating a model for measuring internal communications in higher education, University of Leicester, 2009. Funded by HEFCE.

Europe and its higher education positioning. Is a brand necessary? European Commission, Brussels, 2008

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ABBREVIATIONS

ARWU	Academic Ranking of World Universities
QS	QS (Quarelli Symonds), the publishers of the QS World University Rankings, who published a ranking with the THE, the THE/QS world ranking, before going independently to publish their own in 2010
SJT	Shanghai Jiao tong University, compilers of the ARWU and used synonymously for the ARWU
THE	Times Higher Education, the academic journal that published the THE/QS World University Rankings
USNWR	US News and World Report rankings

PART ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Reputation is a fascinating, but slippery subject. It matters to everyone at an individual level, and of course at an organizational level. But how one measures it, is as complex as it is important. Universities operate in some ways akin to businesses, but in other ways like not-for-profit organizations. Their hybrid nature makes it difficult for them to know what are the most important key performance indicators (to add to their endowments, to expand, to widen participation, to attract students from disadvantaged backgrounds, to put blues skies research before tangible spin-off companies and so on). Thus, reputation is even more multi-dimensional for them, than say a business that knows that profit is the bottom line.

To clarify the structure of this work, here is a short over-view of the chapters and how they relate to one another:

PART ONE: Literature Review

Chapter one sets out to explore the meanings and uses of the word ‘reputation’ and many of the concepts that are used as synonyms. I look at origins, and perspectives of time, and discuss the confusions around ‘image’ and ‘identity’. I examine Barnett et al.’s table of reputation definitions to find large areas of unacknowledged consensus. I then go on to present my own definition of reputation and its allied terms.

Chapter two looks at how reputation is formed, and what the indicators might be of reputation. Models of stakeholder engagement and reputation development are covered, looking at how trust (reputation) is built.

Chapter three looks more specifically at the benefits of a good reputation, the return on investment, and answers the question, ‘Why bother to manage reputation?’.

Chapter four discusses the practicalities of how reputation is management in organizations, with some of the specific tasks and functions explained and discussed.

Chapter five explores the ways reputation is measured in more detail, covering the difference between mapping and measuring, the importance of aligning staff and

stakeholder views. The Forbes, Fortune and RQ methods are included, as well as the personality scales devised by Davies et al.

Chapter six Having looked at reputation mainly in a commercial context, we now turn to the world of higher education. This chapter looks at the cultural context of reputation and reputation management in universities. It then looks at the benefits of having a strong reputation as a university and the ways reputation is built. Finally, it draws together different studies that have attempted to define the indicators that underpin reputation, mainly according to students.

Chapter seven focuses on published university rankings. We discuss their role in accountability and their use in student choice, and we explore how they amplify reputation. We compare the Guardian and Times domestic rankings side by side, and then examine the criticisms leveled at rankings.

Chapter eight is the last part of the literature review. This explores the differences between the main global rankings, and their origins, looking at two world rankings, The SJT's Academic Ranking of World Universities, and the THE/QS World University Ranking (pre 2010) and covers some of the other major educational rankings.

PART TWO: Research Project

The introduction moves on to the research phase introducing my project that explores reputation in 'world-ranked' universities. This section summarizes the findings of the literature review and advances four hypotheses to be explored.

The Methodology sets out the approach to my research project, and looks at the type of universities, and the type of people who responded. It compares these responses with the proportion of universities in the World 100 rankings.

The Findings examine the responses to the survey questions about the impact of ranking.

The Conclusions compare the research findings with my four hypotheses to see what we can learn about rankings and university reputation. I also look at how the findings relate to the emerging model for indicators of university reputation (Fig. 12) and combine the indicators suggested by the survey respondents with these earlier interviews with students on university reputation to make a more holistic model of reputation indicators for higher

education. I then compare these overall 'higher education reputation indicators' with ones gathered for business reputation in previous high profile research.

The **Discussion** concludes the project by looking at some of the main findings the project has uncovered; it also poses questions that remain unanswered in relation to rankings and university reputation. Finally, it looks at where this work sits in relation to existing theoretical commentaries, and suggests areas of investigation that might further enhance our understanding of the construct of reputation in higher education, and its measurement.

1 Reputation: Definitions and Interpretations

This chapter sets out to explore the meanings and uses of the word 'reputation' and many of the concepts that are used as synonyms. I look at origins, and perspectives of time, and discuss the confusions around 'image' and 'identity'. I examine Barnett et al.'s table of reputation definitions to find areas of consensus. I then go on to present my own definition of reputation and its allied terms.

Origins

How reputation manifests itself in higher education, how it is or might be measured, and whether the lessons of reputation management learnt in the commercial world can be applied to higher education are the particular focii of this thesis. But to measure something first requires us to understand what we are measuring, and to explore whether there are common notions of meaning.

Reputation is a concept that like many abstract nouns ('love', 'quality', 'success') is harder to define, than to actually understand. The English word comes from the Middle English *reputen*, from Old French *reputer*, and is based on the Latin word *reputāre*, *to think over*. However, its use probably goes back as far as any known human civilization where 'thinking over' people, considering what they meant or stood for, would mould every human interaction, relationship and hierarchy. And this contemplation of someone's *repute*, their qualities and trustworthiness, is perhaps what differentiates man from animals. It is a supremely human cognitive function, requiring memory and spoken word.

In Ancient Greece Plato, quoting Socrates, spoke of the importance of reputation, using the Greek word *onoma*, or name:

"Regard your good name as the richest jewel you can possibly be possessed of - for credit is like fire; when once you have kindled it you may easily preserve it, but if you once extinguish it, you will find it an arduous task to rekindle it again. The way to gain a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear."

Socrates not only believed in the importance of reputation, but thought he understood how to manage it (appear as you want to be seen as). Sentenced to death as a result of failing to acknowledge the state's religion, amongst other things, Socrates is a very real illustration of the complexity of reputation, of its temporal and geographic fluidity.

Reputation is a social construct. His own views of religion would have been tolerated in

another time, and indeed other parts of Greece, but not in Athens in 399 BC. Thus reputation is not an absolute, but a product of society, time and culture. Arguably, since Socrates was seen by many scholars to have chosen his death as a protest vote against Greek misgovernance, he could indeed be said to asserting his reputation – only to be appreciated by future generations. He chose death over compromising his own personal views. Or, he could arguably have said to have lost his reputation, and therefore been forced to die. Reputations can live on like ghosts and be rehabilitated when different social dimensions are brought to bear on history.

The Socratic notion that reputation is one's good name – what people think of you as a human being - sounds entirely straightforward and comprehensible to us 2000 odd years later and is probably an acceptable definition to the 'man in the street'. But there are however some complexities in the English use of the word – as a term it can be negative or positive. He's got a bit of a reputation...probably means 'don't trust him'. 'I employed them because of their reputation' is a positive expression. Linguistically, it's easy to navigate if you are a native speaker, but the exact meaning depends on the context of the sentence and often the tone. Reputation is both spectrum of quality, requiring an adjective to clarify whether the output is poor, okay or excellent, and a superlative noun meaning both the good and bad end of the scale – 'their reputation is without parallel' and 'his reputation ensured he would never work again'.

The transient nature of reputation, along with the human compulsion to acquire it, is captured by Shakespeare in 'As You Like It':

*Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth.*

Dr Johnson's dictionary has no entry for reputation, but he does use the word itself in relation to Bezoar, a substance thought then to have magical properties:

*BE'ZOAR. n.s. [from pa, against, and zabar, poison, Persick.] A medicinal stone, formerly in high esteem as an antidote, and brought from the East Indies.... Were the real virtues of this stone answerable to its **reputed** ones, it were doubtless a panacea. Indeed its rarity, and the peculiar manner of its formation, which is now supposed to be fabulous, have perhaps contributed as much to its **reputation** as its intrinsick worth.*

His entry highlights the critical difference between reputation, and reality. Reputation is about public perception, which is not necessarily the same thing as the truth, evidence, facts etc. (what Johnson calls 'intrinsic worth').

In 1911, Roget's Thesaurus includes synonyms for *repute* such as 'distinction, mark, name, figure, reputation'. Webster's dictionary of 1913 defines reputation as 'The estimation in which one is held; character in public opinion; the character attributed to a person, thing, or action; *repute*'.

Corporate Reputation, Image, Identity and Brand

Whilst personal reputation might be the warp and weft of every human civilization, and the subject of most Greek dramas and Shakespearean plays, corporate reputation is as an academic study and business concept and something much more recent. I need to follow some of the historical developments of reputation management in order to observe the evolution of its definition.

Academic definitions and managerial explorations of corporate reputation appear in the mid-20th Century with the increasing interest in advertising, marketing and brand, the arrival of The Business School, and the commercial appreciation that there might be significant returns from 'constructing reputation'. The brand became the metaphor for, and the route to, a good reputation, as far as many marketing and advertising directors were concerned.

The word brand comes from the cow herders who marked their cattle with a hot branding iron, but the idea of a sign of quality and manufacture is much older. Brand comes from the Norwegian word 'Brandr' meaning 'to burn'. Scholars say that the bison paintings on the Lascaux Caves in France, going back to 5000BC indicated ownership. Stone seals date back to 3500BC and many of the earliest civilizations marked their pots and bricks with their own mark or brand. The mark was meant to indicate quality, but also show who was to blame if the product was deemed to be faulty. The idea of hallmarks continued with the medieval guilds, such as the silversmiths, before burgeoning into registered trademarks that now proclaim a particular company. Brands are therefore scripts, logos or pictures that denote the manufacturer of a product. They are not the same as reputation, but they are meant to suggest reputation, to amplify good manufacture.

By the 1960s, there was dissatisfaction with talking just about brands, and a desire to explore much wider notions of customer engagement. In one of the earliest academic papers, in 1964 Neale comments: "Communications on what corporate image is, what the businessman should do about it, how to measure it, how to change it, how to use it, how

to design it, and so forth, have all been covered many times.” He then goes on to lament the lack of research in terms of the impact on the customer. Although Neadle doesn't use the term corporate reputation, or try to define it, he talks about company image, company services, product image and advertising image etc, and describes an experiment whereby a pharmaceutical company was able to improve buying behaviour by sponsoring lectures and offering free pamphlets to its target doctors. Corporate image, he suggests, can be boosted by giving something back to customers (besides the actual product), and this additional service support has a beneficial effect on sales.

Yet forty years later in 2005, with far more research in evidence, Chun notes that “the concept of corporate reputation remains unclear”. Part of the problem is that we have failed to agree common meanings for the key constructs of reputation theory. **Image**, **identity** and **brand** are used loosely to mean **reputation** throughout academic literature (Markwick and Fill 1997). And if a word is defined by how most people use it, then we have to acknowledge up front the interchangeable nature of these terms as far as the public is concerned. Yet academics and practitioners in the last 20 years have been keen to offer precise definitions as they struggle, like alchemists, to understand and reproduce the unique components of the successful business-stakeholder relationships, and professionalize reputation management. The definitions, however, are varied and complex and there seems to be a degree of competition in terms of offering up 'better definitions' or simply new ones.

Barnett et al.s' table of definitions

Barnett, Jermier and Lafferty (2006) note that during 2001-3 the number of articles featuring the word 'corporate reputation' was five times larger than the decade of 1990-2000. They created a table to bring together the definitions of corporate reputation that have emerged in the last 50 years, putting them into three typologies – asset, assessment, and awareness.

Fig. 1: Evolving Definitions of Reputation, from Barnett, Jermier and Lafferty (2006)

Cluster: Asset	
Goldberg et al. 2003	An intangible asset
Mahon 2002	(Strategy scholars) A resource for the firm (Social scholars) An asset Financial soundness
Miles & Covin 2002	A valuable but fragile intangible asset
Fombrun 2001	Economic asset
Drobis 2000	Intangible asset
Miles and Covin 2000	Intangible asset
Fortune AMAC: Fombrun, Gardberg & Server 1999	Wise use of corporate assets Quality of management Quality of products or services Innovativeness Long-term investment value Financial soundness Ability to attract, develop and keep talented people Responsibility to the community and the environment Quality of products or services Innovativeness Long-term investment value
Riahi-Belkaoui & Pavlik 1992	Important asset
Spence 1974	Outcome of a competitive process
Cluster: Assessment	
Larkin, 2003	A value judgement
Lewellyn 2002	Stakeholders' evaluation of their knowledge of a firm
Mahon 2002	An estimation of a person or thing
Wartick 2002	The aggregation of a single stakeholder's evaluations (1992 def.)
Bennett & Gabriel 2001	Distribution of opinions
Fombrun 2001	Judgment of firms' effectiveness Aggregate judgments Gauge of the firm's relative standing Overall evaluation of a company over time Opinions of an organization developed over time Affective evaluation Evaluation of a firm Assessments based on perceptions General esteem Regard in which the firm is held
Gioia, Schultz & Corley 2000	Lasting, cumulative, global assessment
Schweizer & Wijnberg 1999	A shorthand evaluation about the stock of information about that firm
Fombrun 1998	Describes the firm's overall attractiveness

Fig. 1: Evolving Definitions of Reputation, from Barnett, Jermier and Lafferty (2006) cont.

Gray & Balmer 1998	A value judgment about a company's attributes
Rindova & Fombrun 1998	Aggregate assessment of constituents of an organization
Fombrun & van Riel 1997	Aggregate assessment of a firm's performance Subjective collective assessment Gauges a firm's relative standing
Post & Griffin 1997	Synthesis of the opinions, perceptions, attitudes
Fombrun 1996	Overall estimation of a firm Compared to some standard
Herbig & Milewicz 1995	An estimation of consistency
Brown & Perry 1994	The evaluation of a company
Dowling 1994	An evaluation (respect, esteem, estimation)
Dutton et al. 1994	Beliefs about what distinguishes a firm
Fombrun & Shanley 1990	Public's cumulative judgments
Bernstein 1984	The evaluation of what a company does
Cluster: Awareness	
Larkin 2003	Reflection of a (firm's) name
Pharoah 2003	Exists in the eye of the beholder Exists in a million different minds
Einwiller & Will 2002	Net perception
Mahon 2002	Includes notions of corporate social responsibility
Roberts & Dowling 2002	A perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects; Global perception
Balmer 2001	Latent perception of the organization
Fombrun 2001	Collective representation of past actions and future prospects Individual perceptions and interpretations
Fombrun & Rindova 2001	A collective representation of a firm's past actions and results
Hanson & Stuart 2001	The corporate image over time
Zyglidopoulos 2001	Set of knowledge and emotions
Miles & Covin 2000	Set of perceptions
Mouritsen 2000	An ambiguous assemblage of hunches
Stuart 2000	A set of attributes that observers perceive to characterize a firm

In all, there are nearly 70 different definitions of reputation sorted for comparison. And the upshot is that Barnett et al. are depressed by these multiple terms, because they feel collective research has made little progress. But this does not take into account that all these academics were writing about reputation from single points of view, that they were not asking their publics the same questions to get similar answers, and that they were in

many ways distinguishing their own research by being different. The summary in fact offers more of a sense of consensus than academic schism, in that the definitions by and large overlap.

The three typologies are all fairly complementary. The **Asset** cluster is based on the notion of what good reputation delivers (thus the questions were perhaps rather different in the first place: what does reputation confer, not what is it?).

The more neutral **Awareness** and **Assessment** categories are virtually identical, with 'Assessment' being *only slightly* more judgmental than 'Awareness'. Dukerich and Carter's (2000) 'Assessments based on perceptions' in the Assessment column is very similar to Bennett and Kottasz's (2000) 'Perceptions based over time' in the 'Awareness' column. Fombrun's 1996 definition of 'overall estimation of a firm compared to some standard' in the 'Assessment' column is hardly a different genus from Balmers's 2001 definition of 'Latent perception of the organization' in the 'Awareness' column.

If one ignores the first cluster (because these are words describing what a good reputation delivers, not what a reputation is), and analyses the second and third tables simply as a list of words, the most commonly appearing nouns are:

Judgement, evaluation, assessment, estimation, perceptions, knowledge

These are similar words, if not identical, and would all work well on a line together in Roget's Thesaurus. Consequently, these scholars lead us to understand that reputation is fairly well understood word meaning either **estimation**, with a critical connotation, or **perception**, encompassing a slightly more random cognitive process. The interesting thing is not that there isn't consensus, but that no one wants to admit there is!

Barnett et al.'s table simply proves that corporate reputation is a construct that derives from a collective process, that requires both awareness, and then assessment. You could also add that it requires articulation for others to know what the assessment is. If the assessment is positive, it becomes an asset for the subject (e.g. the university, the students, the parents etc.). There are no incompatibilities here; simply the descriptors differ as to the time line of the reputational process. The awareness comes first in the receiver (e.g. a member of the public), the assessment is second based on what the receiver then thinks, and the output (asset/liability) is the measurement of that assessment by the transmitter of reputation (e.g. the organization) is third. The reputation is perceived or filtered by the public, and judged by them, but 'owned' by the organization in the sense of whether it is an asset or liability.

Time perspectives

There are also only slight differences in emphasis as to whether reputation is forward or backward looking. Most agree with Fombrun and van Riel (1997), that reputation is the product of historical assessment. They describe reputation as 'a collective representation of a firm's past actions and results that describes the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders. It gauges a firm's relative standing both internally with employees and externally with its stakeholders, in both its competitive and institutional environments.' The importance of the net image of the company or organization is also captured by Yoon *et al* (1993). Corporate reputation is formed in all instances when the company is in interaction with its stakeholders and reflects the history of its past actions. Gray and Balmer (1998) see corporate reputation as evolving as a result of consistent performance, reinforced by effective communication. Contrastingly to Fombrun, Gibbs and Knapp (2002) view reputation as a predictor of the future rather than a summation of the past and say that 'reputation can be considered as the repertoire of expected behaviours held by an institution.'

Reputation is a construct thought to be based on past behaviours, which also points to future behaviours. Good past actions indicate good future actions, poor reputation in the past points to poor reputation in the future; and therefore reputation is both historic and predictive. Future predictions and past summations are entirely mutual.

The main academic differences revolve not around defining reputation per se, but distinguishing it from, and contextualizing it with, two closely related terms – identity, and image. Selame and Selame (88) say **corporate identity** is 'the firm's visual statement to the world of who and what the company is – of how the company views itself'. Brand identity guru Wally Olins (78) defines identity as 'the tangible (physical) manifestation of the personality of a company'. Everything an organization, does, makes and sells, everything it says, writes down or displays should contribute to the construction of its identity. Davies *et al* (2001) use the word identity to mean specifically the views of the staff, as opposed to, the view of the public – a more honest sense of staff feedback and character, rather than imposed identity.

There is even more disagreement over what 'image' means in academic circles. Most practitioners of PR use corporate image to mean the agreed public presentation of their company by their staff and as perceived by their stakeholders. It thus unhelpfully conflates brand and reputation! Corporate identity tends to mean their agreed style of presenting themselves through the use of graphics, logo, colours etc.

Scholars present far richer perspectives, that don't necessarily advance consensus. Kennedy (77) uses 'image' to mean the internally agreed notion of a company held by its employees. This is probably more corporate than Davies's definition of 'authentic' identity. Barnett et al conclude that corporate image is 'the impressions of a firm' held either by internal or external stakeholders, and corporate reputation is 'the judgements by observers'. These are slender differences – is my impression of McDonalds different from my judgment of McDonalds? Presumably, impression suggests less evidence and less confidence than judgement, but I can equally hear someone saying 'My image of McDonalds is that it is quick and cheap' or 'McDonalds has a reputation for being quick and cheap' and meaning the same thing. The difference is perhaps that 'image' is a 'first person' notion, and 'reputation' is a third person notion – based on a larger number of people. This goes back to 'reputation' being a collective, or aggregate, assessment based on evidence, and history. You can have an image of something after one visit. You can assess reputation only after several visits, and talking to others.

Others define image in the context of reputation as a 'summary of the impressions or perceptions held by **external** stakeholders' (Bromley 1993; Davies and Miles 1998). Fombrun and van Riel (97) place image as a component within reputation; they suggest that identity means the perceptions employer and managers have of a company whereas image is the perception those of the outside of the company have of it. Both unite to create 'reputation'. Davies et al agree with this (2001). Perhaps reputation has a higher moral authority than image, if image is taken to mean 'packaging'. Wei, however, argues that image is above reputation in a hierarchy because the products everyone 'sells' are similar. What makes them different is the packaging, the imagery. He goes so far as to suggest that the image is a collective fusion of the zeitgeist, rather than a representation of a company's soul: 'What I am driving at is the necessity to reach out and define corporate image in the eyes of the public, and through the scripts of culture. Again, I would term such image as "collective ethos," because it is less about a particular, individual corporate self, more about a general, collective social self.'

The problem with agreeing on any definition of 'image' or 'identity' is that the meaning clearly changes with the context with which the words are used. Image can mean external perceptions when used on its own, and it is pretty close to the word reputation, but with the adjective 'corporate' in front of it, it tends to mean 'devised image', and is virtually indistinguishable from the term 'corporate identity' or 'company brand'. Similarly, on its own, 'identity' is more likely to mean the innate character of a person. But used with the word 'corporate' in front of it, it turns into the constructed identity of the marketing department rather than the inner soul of the employees. Image can be both the

transmitted image, as well as the received image (i.e. 'What image did the company create?' is just as valid a question as 'What image do you, the public, have of the company?'). The word reputation cannot be used substitutionally in the same questions with such ease. Reputation is far more clearly about the third party opinion.

Thus to conclude, there are many definitions of reputation because, like happiness, or love, it is an abstract noun that means different things to different people. And of course the scholars' function is to find difference not similarity. Some scholars think of image, identity and reputation as separate, some use them as part of a mutual hierarchy, whilst others use the terms interchangeably (as I would guess do the public). Scholars are much more likely to disagree over the meaning of image and identity than reputation. The definitions of reputation cohere around the notion that it is a judgement made of a company of its activities by the public and its staff. The public view is felt, on the whole, to be more important than the staff view, as they are more objective, greater in number, and are potential buyers. The staff, however, may be better informed about the 'intrinsic' value of what they are making or helping to deliver.

My own definitions

Now I reach the stage where I have to put my own views on the line, and define how I will use some of these contentious and ethereal terms in this thesis. I will reach for simplicity, and acknowledge that I am more influenced by how these terms are used in the sectors from which I come (organizational public relations, university and business, and commercial publishing) than how academics use them. I think the terms also naturally divide into three categories: Public, Management and Staff.

Public terms:

Reputation is, in short, what other people think of us. To expand, it is an accumulated and shared opinion of a company, person or organization based on experience, information or 'word of mouth' (a hybrid of both experience and information, mediated by a third party). Critically, university reputation is based on relationships rather than products. I include the staff view within public in measuring reputation but only when they are speaking in an 'unattributed fashion' and not in a corporate capacity.

Image has been confusingly defined by many academics, and given meanings ranging from reputation to corporate identity to customers' views. For me, and for I believe the ordinary public, image is synonymous with reputation although it differs very slightly as it means the impressions of a company by individuals – not a composite assessment. For example, the image *I* have of this company is a good one, but *their* reputation is

poor. Hence 'image' is a noun that belongs to the receiver of reputation, whereas reputation is (grammatically) assigned to the transmitter. It's more helpful to keep image to mean reputation, than to impose definitions on it that don't get used in the management world. Image also has a pictorial dimension, and a sense of being something a step removed from reality. In physics, an image is a representation of an object created by a lens or mirror by manipulation of light (for example the projection of light on to the retina of the eye is an image of the scene facing the viewer).

I will use image to mean a person's perception of reputation, rather than a mass notion of reputation.

Management terms:

Reputation management, corporate communications, communications are all synonyms for the management process of agreeing messages, and putting these forward to their key stakeholders in order to advance their cause. Such communications take many forms, and must be co-ordinated and integrated. Public relations, media relations, speech making, choosing the style of a company office, would all fall under reputation management.

Corporate brand, Corporate identity/ Corporate image/brand positioning – these are virtually interchangeable words that express the behavioural, product, graphic and verbal identity constructed by an organization to define their style and character with target audiences. Corporate brand implies a greater focus on graphics than the other two terms, but is also used to mean corporate identity. My preference for the term in the university world - that means chosen messages, behaviour, look and feel - is corporate positioning. This suggests that the experience is strategic and high level, that it is about creating a position relevant to the market the organization occupies (rather than simply a distinctive brand or identity) and requires senior management leadership (not just a graphic design or marketing led approach). For all organizations, the ideal is to create a corporate positioning that would be mirrored by their reputation. I.e.

How an organization wants to be thought of = **corporate positioning**

What the public think about that organization = **reputation**

Brand has two meanings that are rather different, depending on usage. Firstly, and originally, it means the 'easy to understand' precise and controlled graphic label to denote a company or organization. Secondly, we have a more nuanced concept,

whereby brand means both perceived and amplified brand image - the company's corporate identity fused with its reputation, what makes the company what it is – from management controlled aspects such as customer service, behavior, chosen products etc. through to stakeholder evaluations, press coverage, feedback, customer feedback. In this sense, the concept is much closer to reputation and but has a more measurable, fiscal value. We talk about a powerful brand, a successful brand, a weak brand, which implies it is both a management and a customer construct. The sentence usually makes it clear which one is being referred to – for example:

a) Brand meaning a graphic marker to symbolize the company:

'The yellow arches of McDonald's is a brand that many under 5's know at a glance.'

b) Brand meaning the amalgam of reputation and corporate identity, closely akin to business success:

'The value of the McDonald's brand has dropped 10.4% between 2000 and 2004, to \$25bn (14.08bn [pounds sterling])', according to The World's Most Valuable Brands, published by The Economist (Food & Drink, 2005).

Companies, and organizations, are on the whole striving to align their corporate identity with their reputations. By doing so, they create a strong brand.

Thus, where tactical business behaviour (corporate identity) matches public perceptions, there is likely to be a strong and successful 'brand'.

Staff terms:

'**Identity**' (organizational identity) is the hardest word to define. As I have said, it has many meanings for both practitioners and academics alike. 'True' is an adjective often applied to identity, as if we need reminding that identity is natural rather than a constructed concept. It has a strong sense of unconsciousness, of innate behaviours. Identity is something akin to 'soul' – the real personality rather than the constructed or reflected identity. Some argue that identity is a mixture of reputation and brand, but this would not deliver a soul necessarily and it doesn't then encompass the 'reality' component that identity implies. Identity in a corporate context has to be about all the staff, not just the management. Employee identity should, but may not, contribute to brand and reputation. Identity encompasses the actions, history, culture, beliefs, and morality of the employees. It is how staff behave towards the customer on a daily basis. It is the closest thing a company has to a soul. In modern business cultures, identity is articulated in documents

such as mission statements, and charters of values and beliefs. Unfortunately, these are of such uniform nature, that they are not usually a testimony to identity but management correctness.

To conclude, it seems useful to define 'identity' as what staff think of an organization and how they really behave (this is what it is really like), as distinct from corporate image or corporate identity, which is a management understanding of what they want to be seen to be by the customer and how they want their staff to behave.

2 What forms reputation? What are the indicators of reputation?

In chapter one I explored the definitions of reputation, and concluded that although there were many subtly different definitions, most revolved around the notion of corporate reputation being the public's view of a company. In chapter 2 I now look at theories as to how reputation might be formed, its indicators, as well as some of the problems with conceptualizing it as a construct.

Hall talks about the competitive advantage of reputation (Hall 1992) and it has been described as an 'intangible asset' (Grant 1995). Aaker (1997) and later Davies et al (2001) make things more 'tangible' by anthropomorphizing reputation, suggesting consumers evaluate companies like people and bestow on them human characteristics. But before I look at different ways of measuring reputation, I need to look at how reputation is actually formed, how it behaves, and whether there are any common indicators underpinning reputation, allowing us to measure it.

A convergence of views

As reputation is about what other people think of us, not what we think of ourselves, it is 'epistemic' – based on knowledge. But what does that really mean? If I speak to a single person, will they convey the reputation of a university? Is it just their opinion? No. They may or may not have a direct opinion, but they will see 'the reputation' of the university as 'what others say about it'. They may actually disagree with the opinion. Someone might say: "Cambridge University has a reputation for being expensive, but it has the most generous bursary scheme in the country, and you only have to pay an 8 week room rent." Reputation can be based on what one person thinks, provided that they are basing their views on lots of other people's. As Helm (2005) puts it: 'reputation is defined as a single stakeholder's perception of the estimation in which a certain firm is held by its stakeholders in general'. Cambridge may or may not be expensive, but if it has a reputation for being expensive, then the perception exists and the perception is a 'truth'. This can be very hard for universities to understand. I once reported to a senior leader at another university that her staff thought that there were limited development opportunities for staff at the university. She got quite cross with this, and began citing all the opportunities that existed. This was fair enough, but she missed the point that her staff didn't know about them. Because the reputation differed from the reality, she was not prepared to acknowledge it, and set about trying to challenge it.

The point to make here is that reputation is about net views – an accumulation of multiple stakeholders. It includes employees, councilors, politicians, MPs, press. And although one person can express their view of what constitutes a reputation, to test it with accuracy, I would have to speak to as large a number of people as possible.

Reputation formation

Most academics (and practitioners in my experience) define corporate reputation as being what external audiences think of companies and organizations. This is logical, since commercial companies depend for their existence and profitability on customer sales. Public organizations such as state schools, hospitals, and governments rely on a very wide public for their support. However, most organizations will know that only some publics will matter to them, those who are potential buyers, critics, enemies, advocates, investors etc. And it is those publics who will be most important as a target for reputational effort.

Lewellyn (2002) states that any reputation research needs to ask some preliminary questions: reputation for what? reputation to whom? And reputation for what purpose? The 'for what' will usually determine 'the 'who'. The 'for what purpose' is nearly always, in the university world, to improve recruitment or specific engagement (business, alumni, media) which will down-the-line improve recruitment. Much reputation research is about finding out what people do or don't know about you. The absence of knowledge is revealing. Universities will focus on the audiences who are pertinent to their futures – potential students, researchers, faculty, businesses, politicians. All of these key audiences tend to be grouped under the rather ungainly title of stakeholders. The word implies that these people have a stake in the organization. That of course is not always true, since to many it will not matter one iota what the university does. Rather a stakeholder is someone whom the university hopes will think positively of them, whether they have a relationship with them or not. *Key stakeholders* tend to be those they want to do business with in some way. Bernstein (1985) developed a model considering communications as an interaction with public audiences, in different industries and countries, through a deployment of critical media. This reminded practitioners of the need to engage with people, in the way that they want to be engaged with. And effective public relations are about dealing with people as individuals, or at least as groups with shared interests, not companies, or public masses. This now looks a bit dated in the era of web and social networking, which shows that models are unlikely to work for ever, because communication is subject to rapid change and new technologies.

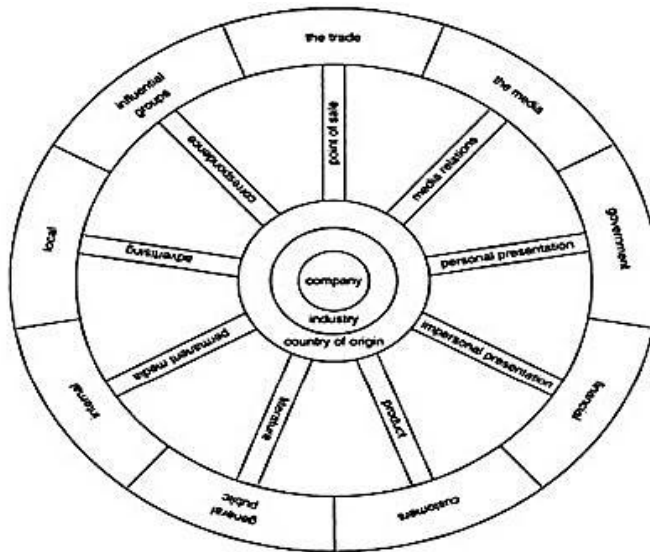


Fig. 2 Bernstein’s model of corporate communications, 1984

Morgan and Hunt (1994) developed a model of relationship marketing, i.e. relationships with stakeholders that advance reputation, that puts ‘trust’ at the core of relationships, which in turn leads to ‘commitment’. They defined ‘commitment’ as the participant’s intention to stay in a relationship and put effort into this relationship.

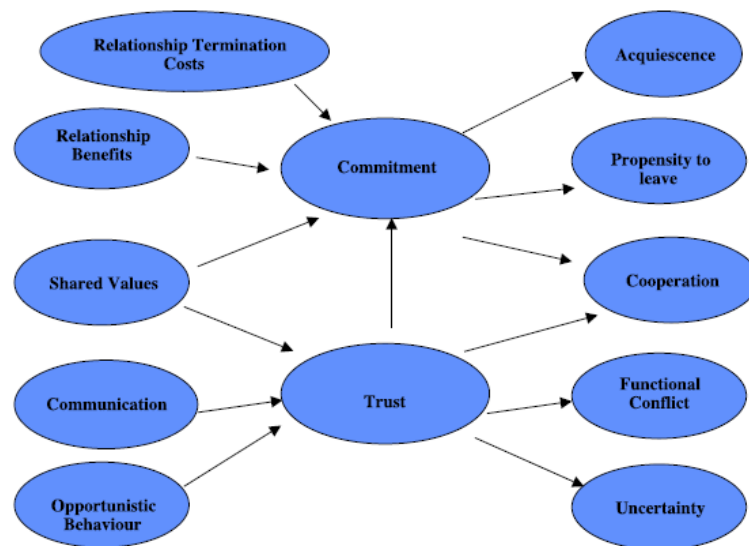


Fig. 3 The Morgan and Hunt model of relationship marketing

Other models look at reputation as a developing relationship, with specific stages of increasing commitment, which is particularly helpful with universities, where reputation tends to be based on narrow groups of people engaging, rather than the wider public’s buying. Money and Hillenbrand (2006) explain reputation as a causal framework, a

process over time with antecedents and consequences, which explains definitions that cover both perceptions and assets. The 5As of Brand equity (developed by Keller, 2003 and based partly on Aaker, 1996) scopes reputation through five phases 1) Awareness, 2) Association, 3) Attitude, 4) Attachment and 5) Activity. Briefly, Awareness is “Are you familiar with the brand?” Association is “Do any mental images that come to mind when thinking of the brand? E.g. Golden Arches conveying McDonald’s”, Attitude is “What are your impressions concerning the brand’s quality? value? etc.”, Attachment is “Do you like the brand?” and finally Activity is “Did you purchase the product or service?” I have developed this into a model I use in my own work, ADMIRE, which creates a slightly more memorable acronym but still shows the processes of engagement and evaluation that are core to reputation development in universities, with ‘meeting people’ being a critical part of the journey to being regarded as memorable and reputable amongst significant stakeholders:

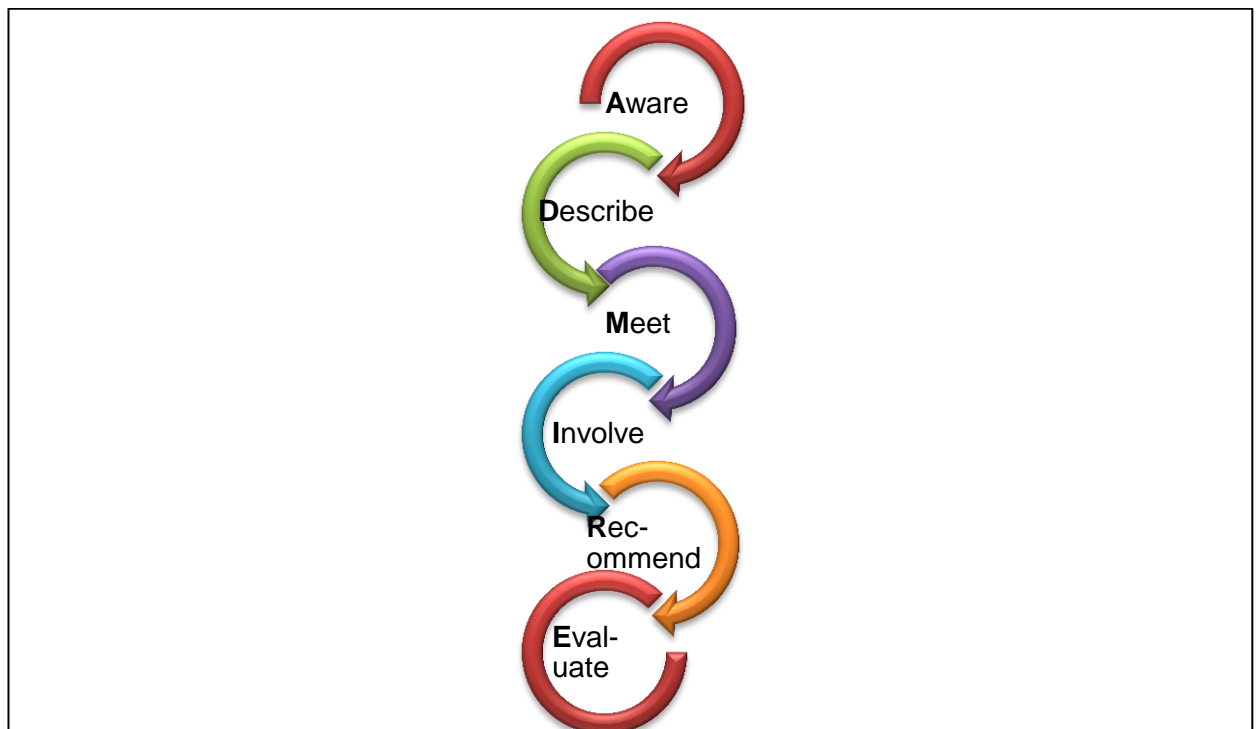


Fig. 4 My model of reputation formation, ADMIRE

With universities, I believe reputation is mainly fostered through face to face encounters, and it is interesting that Macmillan et al. (2005) looked at the Morgan and Hunt model and suggested that for non-profit organizations, ‘non-opportunistic behaviour’ was most likely to determine trust. Thus, organizations that seek to give back, rather than take (or ask for money) are more likely to be regarded as trustworthy, reputable. I would say this is true in

the university world where any relationship needs to be advanced from a point of view of co-production and mutual benefits rather than simple opportunism.

Internal stakeholders

Many reputation management experts (Abratt 1989; Fombrun 1996; Lloyd 1990, Kennedy 1977, King 1991, Gray and Balmer 1998), (and indeed managers who would think this is just common sense) argue that there is a link between internal reputation (what employees think of the company they work for) and external reputation (what the customer thinks of the company).

There is evidence that the more employees advocate their company, the more likely the customer is to think well of the company. The more the company is a service organization – and universities are supreme examples – the more likely internal opinion will influence external opinion.

Gaps between promise and delivery will cause reputational damage (Davies and Miles 1998; Hatch and Schultz 2001). Davies and Chun (2002) give different words to internal reputation (identity) and external reputation (image) in an attempt to draw a useful circle around the two concepts that are, as they and many others would agree are pivotal to reputation. There is no denying the logic that if a company has staff who believe in it, and feel part of it, it is more likely to do well. Thus we see stores such as John Lewis, where employees are share-holders, are highly successful and have survived the worst of the global financial crisis. Their business profits were up 20 per cent in 2010, and business commentators, such as Jon Henley in *The Guardian* (2010), related this directly to its partnership approach.

Rosa Chun (2005) defines **corporate** reputation as ‘an umbrella construct’, referring to the cumulative impressions of internal and external stakeholders. The internal view is as valid and related to the external view. Staff are a hugely important part of forming reputation, because their view is perceived to be the most genuine one. If staff don’t believe in the claims of the managers, then this will usually seep out to the public, either directly or indirectly. ‘Word of mouth’ is also regarded as the most powerful form of marketing, and has added relevance in these days of viral connectivity (Hoffman and Novak, 2000). The concept of internal marketing – i.e. getting your employees to believe in your product – is said to be most vital in the service sector, where the product is, to a large extent, the performance of the employee (Greene, Walls and Schrest, 1994). Universities have the additional problem, unlike most service sector organizations, that they are very choosy about with whom they associate. Many (if not all) are selecting their

customers, and turning thousands away. If students are not so much their customers, but their employees, chosen with the same sense of 'can they do this work, will they stick it, will they deliver something in return' etc. It is not simply a financial transaction, since universities are measured on the engagement of their students, and the quality of them.

Commercial organizations often take this a step further, and choose employees who not only believe in the brand, but look the brand. Airlines and fashion stores are probably the most obvious example here. A much publicised case came up in 2009 against Abercrombie and Fitch, an all-American look and feel high end clothing retailer, which employs models on the door and inside the store. Riam Dean, who was born with her left forearm missing, claimed she was forced to work in the stockroom of the US firm's London store because she did not fit its strict "look" policy. Ms Dean was awarded £8000 for unfair dismissal but the panel said her claims of direct disability discrimination were "not well founded".¹

Indicators of reputation

What we want to be, what we say I are, and (most importantly) what we do will help form our reputation, but it can only be evidenced by other people's good opinion. And by working backwards, by knowing what people value in a person, or an organization, which leads to them thinking it has a strong reputation, we can identify these reputational drivers, or indicators, and then seek to emulate them.

However, any research in this field suggests that our own professional viewpoints tend to bias the options we put in front of people to frame a dialogue about what shapes reputation. Thus the graphic design expert sees reputation in terms of design and tangibles. Alvesson suggests culture shapes reputation (1990); Olins (1978) and Selame and Selame (1988) suggest design and tangibles; Wartick (1992) says public relations and advertising are most likely to shape reputation.

There are according to reputation academics (as yet) no agreed definitive drivers of reputation and this is explored in further detail in the section on measuring later. Suffice it to say now, that each stakeholder group will have their own priorities within a given sector. The more granular they are, the less likely they are to overlap with other people's definitions. And this is what makes creating a definitive measure the Holy Grail of reputation management. However, there are common threads that allows one perhaps to build up some kind of basic list of agreed principles, or possibly to rely on a much broader definition – such as describing reputation as the 'willingness to recommend'. One of the

¹ <http://www.gm.tv/articles/37018-riam-dean-wins-case-against-bercrombie.html>

earliest continuous methods of measuring reputation is Fortune's America's Most Admired Companies, which started in 1983, mapping American companies, but changing to global companies in 1995. The indicators appear to have great stability and are the same now – bar a few wording differences and the one addition of 'global competitiveness' - as they were at the start (Brown and Turner, 2008). A journalist commenting on the rankings after two years notes how much change there is within them, and also how the most influential factor according the voters is 'management quality' (Sellers, 7 January, 1985):

The reputations of individual companies often rise and fall with their industries' health, but the chief lesson to be drawn from this year's survey is clear: good managers build golden reputations. Respondents overwhelmingly rated management quality as the most important attribute in gauging corporate reputations.

Given that the people who responded to the survey are the managers (FORTUNE polled 8,000 executives, outside directors, and financial analysts in 1984), this vote placing management at the centre of reputation might be felt to be rather hubristic, although it could be argued that all things flow from managers. In another year, a journalist for Fortune (Reese, 1993) looked at the relationship between reputation and financial results, with multiple regression analysis:

The survey data were plotted against 12 financial measures, including profits, assets, and return on shareholders' equity. The measures that correlate most closely with reputation turned out to be, in order of importance: ten-year annual return to shareholders, profits as a percent of assets, total profits, and stock market value. By contrast, total assets and a single year's earnings growth don't seem to get much respect.

Thus, it might be that managers are very important in driving reputation, but the most important reflection of reputation is (to this group) the annual return to shareholders.

- Quality of management
- Quality of products or services
- Innovativeness
- Long term investment value
- Financial soundness
- Ability to attract, develop and keep talented people
- Responsibility to the community and the environment
- Wise use of corporate assets.

Fig. 5 Fortune's 8 key indicators for most admired companies (1983), which have remained virtually unchanged up till today

Fombrun et al. (2000) built on Fortune when they devised a reputational measure called the RQ (reputation quotient) with Harris Interactive in 2000. This, they claimed, could be used with any stakeholder group, rather than just the business leaders surveyed by Fortune. This has six key drivers – Workplace & environment; Emotional appeal; Products and services; Vision and leadership; Social responsibility and Financial Performance. Their first report presented the top companies with the best reputations as being: 1 Johnson & Johnson; 2. Coca-Cola; 3. Hewlett-Packard; 4. Intel; 5. Ben & Jerry's; 6. Wal-Mart; 7. Xerox; 8. Home Depot; 9. Gateway; 10. Walt Disney.

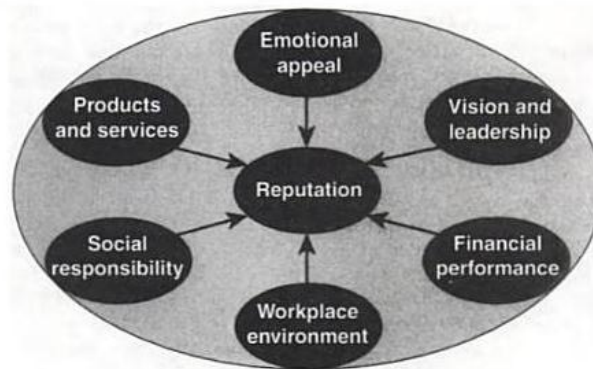


Fig. 6 The Reputation Quotient (Fombrun, Gardberg and Sever, 2000)

The fact that Fombrun split with Harris Interactive, and the company now has a slightly different way of measuring reputation, confirms that methods go in and out of favour, as do devisers of measures. The methodology was also criticized by Bromley (2002) for implying it is based on an arithmetical quotient (i.e. a ratio) when it isn't, and for applying the same model against different stakeholder groups, and for basing the final score (the ranking) on the sum or average of score. Bromley and Wartick (2002) both make the point that different stakeholders have different views about different factors – and thus a common measuring system is likely to be flawed.

This has not stopped people trying. In 2005 Helm led an experiment to find the 'characteristics of reputation'. Interviewees were asked to describe the characteristics of firms that had good and bad reputations. She identified 10 indicators for a business's reputation, based on focus groups and literature review. It is not clear whether her interviewees thought the characteristics were indicators of reputation, or factors causing a good reputation. In fact, they probably don't distinguish between the predictive and summative nature of the indicators. However, what her research argued was that even when the stakeholders changed, and the products changed, the words for reputation

remained the same. And the overlap with her work, and that of Fombrun et al (1999) is striking.

Fortune, Fombrun and Helm's list are very similar, and collapse down into two main areas:

Quality of product (includes value for money, credibility of advertising claims, innovation, and leads to corporate success, financial performance etc.)

And:

Behaviour of the company (treatment of employees, customer orientation, commitment to charitable causes, management)

Thus reputation is not just about what the company produces, but what it is like strategically, socially, morally, intellectually.

The Reputation Institute, a consultancy specializing in reputation management, also chaired by Charles Fombrun, sets out seven drivers for reputation in 2010: Products/Services, Innovation, Governance, Workplace, Citizenship, Leadership and Performance in Measuring the world's most reputable companies in 2010. Their press release, (Reputation Institute, 24 May 2010) states:

Statistical analysis shows that each dimension accounts for over 12 percent of the variation in reputation. Top scorers Google and Sony performed well across dimensions, with Google rated among the top five on all seven dimensions and Sony among the top ten. The results confirm that a balanced reputation platform is what earns trust, esteem, admiration, and good feeling from consumers.

Five of the drivers are similar to the original Fombrun-Harris 2000 list behind the RQ, but now 'innovation' and 'governance' make an appearance. Innovation is a sign of the fast-moving IT world, where being reputable means producing new things as much as doing things well, but it is also on Fortune's original 1985 list. It is no surprise that Sony and Google have ousted Coca Cola and Johnson & Johnson – computer technology is the main focus of the world. The introduction of 'Governance' is also interesting, and a post-'Enron' awareness that strong leadership alone is now no longer enough – there has to be an ethical framework for managing the leaders. The introduction of 'governance' as a component of reputation seems to capture the zeitgeist of a more ethical age, epitomized by the spectacular crash of The News of The World in July 2011. Rupert Murdoch's British 'Red Top' newspaper - the most popular in the UK - was devastated by the public turning against it over the issue of phone hacking, showing how dependent reputation is on

governance and public opinion. Rupert Murdoch was seen to fail to lead his newspaper, and Rebekah Brook failed to lead the editorial team appropriately. It has also brought into question the whole issue of ownership of news media, and the independent media governance of the media. As James Kirkup writing in *The Telegraph* indicated (15 July 2011): 'The Deputy Prime Minister said the Government would review laws on what constituted a "fit and proper" owner for broadcasting firms. Anyone found not to meet that standard can be forced to give up their stake in a company'.

Thus looking at these four lists (Fig. 7), developed over 15 odd years, we can conclude that there are some things everyone agrees are key to reputation in business (products, services, management, financial soundness), and some things that vary according to which community you ask (Long-term investments, global competitiveness).

The five things that occur with regularity in these reputational lists are:

- Financial soundness
- Social responsibility
- Quality of service/product
- Leadership and management
- Innovation

Thus when we come to look at university indicators of reputation, we can expect there to be some similarities, and some differences, not simply because universities are different to businesses, but because reputation varies according to audience and context, as Bromley reminds us (2002).

Fortune's Most Admired Companies (1985)	Fombrun et al (2000) Reputation Quotient	Helm's characteristics of reputation (2005)	Forbes/Reputation Institute's World's Most Reputable Companies (2010)	CNN/Fortune's Most Admired Companies (2011)
1 Quality of products or services	1 Product and services	1 Quality of products	1 Product/services	1 Product/services quality
2 Innovativeness		2 Value for money	2 Innovation	2 Innovation
3 Responsibility to the community and the environment	2 Social responsibility	3 Commitment to protecting the environment	3 Citizenship	3 Social responsibility
		4 commitment to social or charitable causes		
4 Wise use of corporate assets.	3 Financial performance	5 Corporate success	4 Performance	4 Use of corporate assets
5 Long term investment value		6 Financial performance		5 Long term investment
6 Financial soundness				6 Financial soundness
	4 Workplace environment	7 Treatment of employees	5 Workplace	
	5 Emotional appeal	8 Customer orientation		
7 Quality of management	6 Vision and Leadership	9 Qualification of management	6 Governance	7 Quality of Management
8 Ability to attract, develop and keep talented people			7 Leadership	8 People Management
		10 Credibility of advertising claims		
				9 Global competitiveness

Fig. 7 Common themes in some of the main reputational measures

Reflective or formative?

As well as noting that the indicators for reputation are not fully agreed on, it is worth also recording other academic divides in thinking about reputation. One of the main ones is whether the indicators of reputation are formative (i.e. they form reputation) or reflective (they reflect an existing reputation). The question percolates through academic papers between the 90s and 2000s when academics began trying to create models for measuring reputation in a formative way for the first time – i.e. working out what the characteristics of reputation are, rather than simply things that reflected having a good reputation (like share price, media coverage or sales). This has importance because if the indicators of reputation lead to reputation, then it can be manufactured. If they only reflect it, they can't.

Academic experts disagree in great detail over whether reputation is formative or reflective and whether their measuring systems are also formative or reflective. Many such as Helm advocate that indicators such as product quality and financial acumen lead to reputation; a minority argue that reputation is reflective, suggesting indicators such as product quality are a result of a firm's good reputation (Bollen and Lennox, 1991). Helm accuses the RQ (Fombrun et al, 2000), of being formative in its construction but with indicators that underpin the dimensions being in her view reflective and thus flawed. She explains that with reflective measures, there is an expectation that indicators can be correlated – i.e. they have impacts on one another. With formative measures, the indicators are not expected to co-relate, because different stakeholders value things differently, and the indicators are created on the basis of multiple stakeholder opinions. Care is taken with formative models to ensure the indicators don't overlap and to ensure the public view is upheld. They therefore allow for a whole range of people to express opinions that are taken into account, rather than just a minority (e.g. the business community). Proponents argue that formative measurement systems are therefore more flexible, empirical and authentic, because they capture reputation as a multi-dimensional state, and that reflective measures are based on a more singular view of reputation, which leads to certain expected outputs.

These academic debates are more likely to obscure than to clarify our understanding. In practice, and from what stakeholders tell me in interviews to do with university reputation, reputation is both formative and reflective as a construct – i.e. we expect companies we admire to do certain things, and we also conclude that companies who behave in certain admirable ways will have a good reputation as a result. The two cannot be segmented. It would be a bleak world if the indicators of reputation were only reflective and there would

be no point in anyone trying to strive for it. And as they do, we can assume that reputation is formed as well as reflected. Moreover, whilst Helm takes issue with reputation mappers not being clear about whether their methodology is formative or reflective, the reality is most measuring systems are both – practitioners compile indicators of reputation that are thought to form reputation and reflect reputation, and the distinction remains purely and unproductively academic.

Reputation is, to use a classical metaphor, Janus-like. It looks forward as well as backwards. A good share price, indicates a company that will do well next year. There is also an awareness of what a company plans to do, how ambitious it is prepared to be. Thus when stakeholders are interviewed about a university, they will often be very positive towards it if they know it is ambitious. That is an attribute they admire, and are prepared to think better of it for having strong leadership. A sense of where an institution is going in the future contributes to reputation. What I can however say is that the past is what matters most in the public's mind because it is certain, unlike the present. CEOs know they will be judged more on the activities and the actions of their employees, not their Annual Report aspirations. Reputation is related to actual experience of a company, or product, whether direct or indirect. Because people form views of what a company has done, as opposed to what it looks like, or what it says it will do, reputation is mainly based on past actions.

Other ways of classifying reputational measures

There is also interest in classifying indicators of reputation into affective and cognitive ones, where affective is used to cover responses that are based on emotion and cognitive where responses are more logical and rational. A similar division could be made between personal, experiential measures (what we have experienced ourselves) and indirect secondary measures (what others have said). It could be said that university rankings are the ultimate cognitive reputational measure – factual, based on expert opinion, and not relevant to emotional affinity. Whereas a study of student experience at university would be more likely to probe emotional responses to the environment of the university, the warmth of the tutors, and the ambience of fellow students. The caveat here is that affective measures and experiential measures can become confused with personal perception; they are less likely to connote reputation as the agreed definition of 'what others think' and instead become 'what I think'.

3 The return on investment

Having examined definitions of reputation, components of reputation and some models for capturing input and output of reputational engagement, I consider the benefits of a good reputation as far as the transmitter (the organization) is concerned, and how it acts as a bank of good will in times of trouble.

Most people know that a reputation is hard to build up, quick to lose, and when lost, can be disastrous. Shakespeare devotes Othello to this subject:

Cassio: Reputation, reputation, reputation! O! I have lost my reputation. I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation!

Iago: As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound; there is more offence in that than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most false imposition; oft got without merit, and lost without deserving: you have lost no reputation at all, unless you repute yourself such a loser.

Whilst Cassio equates reputation with his deepest and more sacred part of himself, his very soul, the villain, Iago sees it as something much more meretricious, neither gained nor lost through merit. Their view of reputation reflects their characters but also reminds us that reputation is a perceptual construct (Fombrun and van Riel, 1997).

Despite the precariousness of human reputation, organizations are able to hang on to reputation longer than their performance sometimes deserves. Conversely, a good reputation often manifests slowly, a few years after the good work that went into building it. Thus, reputation is a lagging indicator – like unemployment, corporate profits, labor cost per unit of output, interest rates. The information may have changed by the time I get to hear about it. Organizational reputation has resilience because it aggregates past action, and is the cumulative experience of many people. Unlike Cassio, whose good name is lost by the opinion of one influential person (Othello), organizational reputation is based on multitudes of stakeholders (Yoon et al, 1993). But whether it is deserved or not, commentators are agreed reputation brings great value to individuals, organizations and businesses.

How is the value of a good reputation understood and perceived to be of use to a company or organization?

Trust and loyal customers

Reputation, as we have seen earlier, tends to be associated with the quality of the product, and the conduct of the organization. It has a moral frame to it as well as an economic one (Lydenberg *et al*,1986). **Gray** (1986) says that a good reputation engenders trust. If the public believe something is reputable, they will trust the organization. Trust promotes affinity, and in the university world leads to increased applications by students and staff.

Market share

People are more likely to buy the products they trust. Reputation increases market share (Shapiro, 1982, Dick and Basu, 1994).

Referral/Word of mouth recommendation

Gladwell (2003) discusses the concept of 'the tipping point', the point at which casual referral turns a small product into an overnight success. Similarly, universities rely on word of mouth marketing to make their institutions successful. This is much cheaper, and more reliable usually, than advertising, because reputation is third party endorsement, and therefore objective.

Repeat buying, brand loyalty

A good reputation not only leads to repeat buying, but faster buying. Investors do not have to spend so long checking out the fabric or quality of the product if they trust the label. A university that is known to be reputable is one that a parent might not have to spend so much time researching on behalf of their offspring. Moreover, research shows that reputable charities attract greater giving. Success breeds success.

Entering new markets and diversification

Companies with strong brands can often transfer to new markets on the strength of their existing brands. (Porter, 1985) Partners of influence are more likely to be attracted to a reputable company. (Shefrin and Statman, 1995).

Financial success and brand equity

Many commentators demonstrate that whilst reputation is an intangible asset, it is one that has an economic value. It has been shown to relate to product quality and price (Shapiro, 1982; Hall, 1992, Fombrun and Shanley, 1990). An article in Bloomberg Business Week (9 July 2007), looking at the value of reputation states:

But a more sophisticated understanding of the power of perception is starting to take hold among savvy corporations. More and more are finding that the way in which the outside world expects a company to behave and perform can be its most important asset. Indeed, a company's reputation for being able to deliver growth, attract top talent, and avoid ethical mishaps can account for most of the 30-70% gap between the book value of most companies and their market capitalizations.

Reputation bestows brand equity and elevates share price. Brand equity is the value that a company realizes from a product with a recognizable name as compared to its generic equivalent (one might, for example, measure the value of Twix, made by Mars Inc., the chocolate bar, compared with other caramel chocolate bars). This is similar to but not the same as corporate reputation, as a company may have many brands, with different equities, both to extend and protect their reputation. It is very useful if one brand becomes 'toxic' for the company name and other brands to be different.

A good reputation signifies historical success (Yoon *et al*, 1993) and investors are attracted to reputable firms because they are less risky and generate satisfaction as well as economic return. (Fombrun, 1996; Helm, 2007). PR Week reported that in 2001 Bell Pottinger worked with economists MMD to investigate reputation in Fortune's most admired companies and concluded that there was a 'very strong' correlation between value and reputation. The Turnbull Report (guidance for listed companies on the London Stock Exchange) regards management monitoring of reputation as important as financial risk (Financial Reporting Council, 2005).

Risk and crises

Loss of reputation is regarded as one of the most critical risk factors for a company, according to Aon's Global Risk Management Survey. (Aon, 2010). Companies that are known to be reputable, are more likely to survive disasters as they build up a bank of trust with stakeholders. Poor service is likely to be excused as an exception by airline passengers with a company they trust. (Ostrowski *et al*, 1993).

Better staff

Hiring good staff is another benefit of a reputable company. Prestige is as important as pay and conditions for many people. A reputable company also enables staff to 'trade up' to a better or equivalent company in the future. As part of Hill & Knowlton's 8th Annual Corporate Reputation Study, 527 MBA students at the top 12 international business schools participated in a survey on how corporate reputation influences where they choose to work. Overall, corporate reputation mattered greatly in determining career

choice, with 73% of those surveyed saying corporate reputation is either an "extremely" or "very" important factor when deciding where they will work.

For organizations, it is clear that reputation is an asset that advances the bottom line, results in better and easier staff hire, brings in sales, reduces marketing spend, and allows for market diversification and defence against times of crisis. Its management should be, as Bernstein (1984) says, 'as crucial as resource management and therefore needs to be the responsibility of the chairman of chief executive officer'.

4 How organizations manage reputation

I now look at the way organizations manage and build reputation, and some of the specific marketing and PR functions that are involved in the task.

Because reputation confers strong direct and indirect commercial advantages, companies invest time in managing their reputations - i.e. trying to create the ideal reputation that they want the customer to have of them.

The people in an organization who are charged with protecting and amplifying reputation deal with the stakeholders, any specific audience that an institution or business depends on for its reputation. In a university, the stakeholders tend to be: students, press, business, funding councils, parents, schools, potential students, other universities. The manager given day to day responsibility within the university or organization is generally called the director of communications. The Vice-chancellor however is the final reputation manager, just as Balmer and others remind us that the CEO is the real reputation manager. Reputation management, in short, is effective stakeholder engagement to confirm or amplify reputation. A more apposite term might be reputation creation, rather than reputation management, as the role is chiefly concerned with how to build reputation for the future based on specific communications strategies and past reputation.

Because reputation management requires a sense of vision, internal connectivity, and external agendas, it tends to be tightly managed at the top. Davies and Miles (1998) studied 14 major companies in 1998 and discovered that reputation management was a senior function, which mainly covered managing corporate values and public relations. Interestingly, very few people would call themselves a director of reputation, even if that was their job. Instead the word 'communications' is substituted for reputation, because it is more customer facing (who would want to be dealing with someone only interested in their company's reputation, rather than the service needs of the customer?), and because in reality everyone is a reputation manager if they work for an organization. In universities, the function of reputation management is based in the office of communications, but it goes across the whole university management in reality. The paradox of reputation management is that to admit you are doing it stops you from doing it well. It looks self-serving, which of course it is. The best reputation management is about balancing public good with internal benefit. Thus reputation management relies on giving something 'over and above' the product to the customer in order to do well as a company.

There are several major components of reputation management that are deemed necessary for commercial or organizational success identified by scholars and practitioners.

Leadership

Gaines-Ross (2003) shows that the chief executive is instrumental in the shaping of corporate reputation and can account for half of a company's corporate reputation. Her research observes five factors that contribute to a ceo's reputation: credibility, integrity, internal communication, motivating and inspiring employees and good management.

Leadership processes to support reputation include defining vision, values, and strategy. However, these will only build reputation if what is said, is actually done. If an organization fulfills its promises, it will have a good reputation. This is the definition of credibility. (Herbig and Miewicz, 1993). All of these are about identifying what the organization stands for, and where it is going. These are recognized by Astley and Fombrun (1983) and Bernstein (1984) and many others as being key to business success. Whilst many of these expressed 'credos' are outward facing, they will fail if they do not connect with and engage staff. Kennedy (1977) suggested that corporate policies are much more important than advertising or press campaigns, since employees act as spokespeople.

Brand positioning

Commentators and practitioners agree that a business or organization has to create a strong character to be noticed, employing traditions, differences and shared culture (Albert and Whetten 1985; Hatch and Schultz 1997). Creating a sharp and focused sense of a company that can be articulated to the public so that they will buy the product, or engage with the organization, is otherwise known as the brand positioning. Focus is critical to reputation:

The most powerful concept in marketing is owning a word in the prospect's mind. You burn your way into the mind by narrowing the focus to a single word or concept. Ries and Trout (1981)

Other reputational positioning devices include the concept of being the first, being the best, being the expert.

As Ries and Trout (1981) assert, positioning a brand must involve consideration of competition, who provide the frame of reference within which a brand strives to locate itself in a unique but valued space. Universities often struggle to be different, to position themselves, as they tend to converge around similar academic offerings and appeal to the

same customers (middle classes) but they are increasingly preoccupied with defining and asserting their uniqueness for competitive advantage. Many claim to be different in the same way. Martin et al 1983, call this the paradox of uniqueness. We all like to be different, but we often express these differences in the same way, and indeed choose the same points of difference, thinking they are special.

In a university world, staff are antagonistic towards centralized, top down corporate identity, believing it is too rigid, superficial and consumerist. The more academic a UK institution is, the less likely it is to be bothered about or observant of any imposed 'corporate identity', although this is changing somewhat as UK universities begin to enter a more competitive market with higher and more diverse fees. They recognize that a fragmented and diverse culture with different and conflicting ambitions is less likely to be attractive to stakeholders (funders, alumni, students).

Organizational identity, culture and staff engagement

Olins (1978) and Bernstein (1984) acknowledged that co-ordinated and consistent internal communications is critical to one's corporate image. Academics talk of reputation being linked to culture and organizational identity. This is particularly so in a service industry however (Davies, et al, 2004). Barney (1986) notes that having a distinctive culture leads to competitive advantage, and defines this to mean 'values, beliefs, assumptions, and symbols that define the way in which a firm conducts its business'. Such a culture must be valuable, rare and imperfectly imitable (i.e. not easy to copy), however, to lead to economic advantage.

Organizational identity and culture are often used interchangeably, although culture appears to be the more organic habits and behaviours of staff, and organizational identity more about management rules and specifications as to how they want to organize the workforce. Arguably, a large organization can have a vast array of different cultures within – in a university there would be the culture of academics, then a separate culture of professional staff, and another of students etc. Then there are often separate cultures within Schools, Departments and Colleges. Downey (1986) states that culture (staff behaviour?) comes from organizational identity (management ordinance?). Others say the opposite – that culture informs identity. (Abratt 1989; Swales and Roger 1995). A non-executive university, such as Oxford or Cambridge, where all members have a say in major decisions, is heavily swayed by culture to inform strategy, but arguably an executive university (with an empowered senior management team) is more restrictive, and expects staff to conform to management decisions more rigorously.

Hochschild 1983 and Smircich 1983 note that culture can't easily be changed unlike corporate identity. In that sense, corporate identity is more likely to be a management construct than culture. Managers can try to create a new identity, but they can't easily change the culture of the university without employing entirely different types of people.

Van Rekom, refers to Whetten's assumption that a good corporate identity must express the central nature of an organization... He then asks how identity can be aggregated when so many people do different jobs and have different points of view. This is the same problem as aggregating external viewpoints to create a coherent notion of reputation. He and other researchers look at how diverse, large companies can be interviewed to establish central principles that inform all their work, or top level reasons for doing things ('means to an end'). This allows an organization to find homogeneity in diversity. He argues that it is perfectly possible to find a central set of values and means to an end that all employees recognize and are working towards to be a success.

Stakeholder engagement and strategic alignment

Stakeholder engagement is about impressing those who matter to ensure they have a positive reputation of you. In a more commercial environment, this might be called stakeholder marketing. The job of a reputation manager would also be to know which stakeholders have the most power to influence others. Professional analysts, media, investors, business gurus would be on the list of key stakeholders for organizations. One of the laws of good marketing is to segment your audiences – i.e. only compete for the business you can win. Similarly with reputation management, you should align yourself with people who are interested in you and are interested in what you do. The Tudors were masters of reputation management, creating dynastic links and working their political mastery to win power and control their own religion. This chimes with the advice given by Fombrun and Astley in 1983 when they urge businesses to adopt a more holistic approach to corporate strategy and make alliances over and above immediate specific operational needs to win influential friends:

“A true understanding of organization strategy formulation and implementation requires that we move beyond the focal organization to an appreciation of the network of relationships in which any single organization is embedded. It requires an awareness of the emergent collective order that characterizes the operating domain of all organizations, and in particular, the relationships between business, labor, and government organizations.”

Good reputation management also understands that some stakeholders have more weight and influence than others, and these need to be prioritized. Since reputation is

both historic and forward-looking, it can be generated by interaction with stakeholders, since reputation is to some degree a function of expectation (Graves and Waddock, 2000).

Building corporate identity/the brand

Once an organization has decided what it is and where it's going (and experience suggests many in the university world don't answer these questions with conviction), the job of the reputation manager is to help it express some of these elements of organizational identity through corporate identity. By which we tend to mean graphic elements (e.g. brand), as well as agreed messages, and publications (these days most importantly external websites that are aimed at an external audience).

Bernstein (1984), Olins (1978, 1989), Dowling (1994); Selame and Selame (1988) have all described how visual symbols are used to define management effort and ambition.

Whilst corporate identity started as a word meaning graphic identity, in recent years, reputation managers and theorists have stressed that a good corporate identity should not be seen simply as a logo however, but should be a total and integrated expression of personality, culture and organizational identity. (King 1973; Chun 2005).

Marketing

Allied with many of these disciplines, marketing, the practice of bringing products to the attention of the marketplace, is closely allied with reputation management as well as sales. Ries and Trout (1981) produce a definition of marketing that is virtually indistinguishable from reputation management:

Marketing is an organizational, functional set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders.

Marketing covers strategic elements (understanding the market) as well as operational elements (product packaging, customer relationship management, store placement etc.). Marketing decisions generally cover product, price, place (distribution) and promotion. These are known as the 4 P's of marketing, a concept developed by E. Jerome McCarthy, but originally known as 'the marketing mix' developed by Borden (in his 1953, American Marketing Association presidential address). In 1993, Robert F. Lauterborn proposed a four C classification to better reflect mass marketing: consumer, cost, convenience (reflecting internet marketing) and communication (includes advertising, public relations,

face to face sales, viral advertising etc.). (Schultz, D.E., Tannenbaum, I.S. and R. F. Lauterborn (1993)) Consumer marketing normally uses the 4PS, but Blythe (2005) introduces the 7P approach – product, price, promotion, people, physical facilities and processes. However the marketing mix does differ from the conceptualization of Bernstein (1984) who argues for the centrality of country of origin and industry in shaping reputation. His more peripheral elements do though reflect those of the mix.

Reputation is built up for universities using both perspectives as all aspects of the mix can be evident from advertising, pricing, where the service is delivered and sold, which products are developed or dropped, to on line through viral marketing, where word of mouth can lead to considerable recruitment advantage. However press and media relations appears to be more important to University reputation/marketing than other elements.

Media relations and crisis communications

This is the mainstay of most communications offices, and is chiefly done through events, press relations, web and paper publications, and public affairs. Whilst companies tend to focus on critical messages and three or four big themes (campaigns), public sector and universities tend to adopt a more ad hoc scatter gun approach (to their detriment).

Crisis communications is also a key part of reputation management in terms of dealing with the media.

Bricker (2006) notes that it is difficult to compensate for bad news with good. Preventing the press from running negative stories, countering accusations, or creating responses to known enemies are all part and parcel of public relations. Most good press handling requires a factual and thorough understanding of the situation. Journalists respond best to facts delivered plainly by the most senior person, who has the capacity to handle inaccurate information and dismiss it evenly and with convincing wisdom.

Internal communications, or staff engagement

This is a fairly modern concept, and although managers agree to the importance of staff engagement, they will rarely give it the same priority, staff attention or budgetary power as external relations. Staff usually need to both know what is happening, and inform management of their own point of view and expertise. It needs to be two way, up and down, to be useful. Staff also want to know what are the priorities, the critical messages, and the political context. Common sense would suggest that if staff think highly of a company, but the public don't, there should be attempt to align the two viewpoints.

Similarly, if the public think very highly of an organization, but the staff don't, that may well indicate a reputation on the verge of collapse (e.g. Enron). Whilst the gap between internal and external views can create complexities in reputation, some researchers have shown that it is not always a bad thing – for example if staff think worse of an organization than the public then the company is unlikely to want to ensure the public think the same way as staff. Chun and Davies have also shown that alignment is not a necessary condition for commercial success (Chun and Davies 2006). Indeed they suggest that the ideal situation is where staff in service organizations feel more positively about their employer than their customers as their emotional attachment can flow outwards and positively influence the views of customers (Davies, Chun and Kamins, 2010). Davies and Chun (2002) suggest through an empirical study of shops that managing image (corporate image) can be achieved in part by managing identity (what they call 'staff views').

However, most reputation researchers show that monitoring the gaps between what staff think and what the public thinks is essential for preventing reputation crises (Dowling 1994, Foley 2000). Both views can be valid if one believes that it is essential for the more tangible aspects of a service to be well understood outside of the organization. In the university world, internal surveys are still rare and not shared with external providers. Universities differ also from most service providers. Most 'customers' will not return and repurchase. The main challenge in the UK is not to promote loyalty, more to ensure a steady supply of (potentially) new customers. However, the UK HE sector is moving towards being interested in loyalty too, because loyalty creates word of mouth referral, and is the best and cheapest form of advertising. They also see that the US model is becoming more relevant – with alumni being one of the main sources of private funding.

5 Measuring reputation

I now look at the ways reputation is measured in more detail, covering the difference between mapping and measuring, and the importance of aligning staff and stakeholder views. The Forbes, Fortune and RQ methods are included, as well as the personality scales devised by Davies et al.

If you can't measure it, you can't manage it, so the old adage goes. Although no one thinks that the concept of reputation can be distilled and produced to order like medieval alchemy, many think that reputation can be better understood and earned through business acumen and intelligent public relations. Finding out what people think of us, and comparing it with the reality of what we know we are, can be instructive if sometimes painful. Image gaps can avert disaster or predict new business opportunities. From a reputation manager's point of view, measuring the effect of their communications strategies allows them to justify their job, argue for resource, and use resource wisely. A communications campaign that didn't change perceptions was one that won't be repeated.

However, how can something as nebulous and emotive as reputation be measured, especially when it is subject to the passage of time, cultures and geography? Van Riel shows that how we measure relates to who we are (van Riel et al. 1998). Since there is no standard measure for reputation, the measures themselves are controversial, as this section shows.

Indicators of reputation, or reputation itself?

One of the things to note up front is there is a difference between measuring reputation, and measuring the indicators of reputation. Many studies measure some of the drivers of reputation, rather than reputation itself – a) because there is no agreed definition of reputation b) because reputation is a multi-layered and abstract concept, and c) because reputation is an aggregation of other people's perception. Unless we simply ask – score this university's reputation on a 1-5 scale - we tend instead to deconstruct reputation and ask people to measure indicators of reputation. Of course, for the public, the indicators are also the reflectors – what makes John Lewis a good company are things that they have experienced as well as things they look for in a good company. Reputation is both reflective and indicative.

Mapping or measuring?

There is also a difference between measuring and mapping. Measuring is about finding a time specific answer to the question, how great is our reputation at a given point, or span in time? Mapping answers the antecedent questions, who are our most important stakeholders? Which reputation matters to us? Who and what do we want to measure? It helps define benchmarks – peers, rivals or partners – whom you may wish to compare yourself against. Mapping would also weight reputation from organizational and audience perspectives. For example, a university might want to be seen as international, only giving weight to international audiences, rather than regional ones in a study. Therefore, mapping should ideally be done before measuring, as it explores audiences and measures you might include as a reference point before starting to measure.

Mapping corporate reputation

The importance of understanding what the customer thinks of the product in order to produce a better service, and ultimately a more successful company is considered by Meyer and Schwager (1997). They look at instances where direct contact with customers greatly enhanced the success of new products and company products. They call specific and regular customer dialogue touch points and advocate ‘customer experience management’ in favour of ‘customer relationship management’. The former being about discovering what the client thinks about the product, the latter about what the company knows about the customer. In the university world, this would be known as stakeholder research – interviewing stakeholders about their understanding of, and agreement (or not) with a university’s beliefs, goals and mission.

UK universities are increasingly undertaking this research, but it is costly, and does not always yield new insights when repeated. They cannot afford to do it very often, they say. Unlike the business-customer relationship, university stakeholders may have very little interest in or expectations of a university unless they are actually studying there. However, the practice of customer relationship management - i.e. relations with potential students - is highly refined in most recruiter universities – i.e. the ones that need to work the audience to get the brightest students. The selector universities – those overwhelmed with applicants – are still rather nonchalant when it comes to staying in touch with their applicants before they have decided to show up for the first term. Their reputations are so strong that they can be relaxed about relationship management. In this sense there is an inverse sense of reputation – the more we care about you, the less confident we are of our own worth; the less we care about you, the more confident we are that we are great. In this way, universities operate in a different way to businesses.

Chun (2005) insightfully suggested thinking about reputation in three areas: 'A how others (the customers) see us', 'B how we see ourselves' (what staff think I are) and 'C what we say we are' (what our marketing, advertising, literature says we are). Chun argues that all three combine to create reputation. In a university world, this is a useful paradigm for mapping reputation, and I have used it for several years as a director of communications for a university and as a reputational consultant. However, the truth is in the university world that the most important circle of this Venn diagram as far as managers are concerned is the first: what do outsiders think of us? B is important, but not given much management time or budget. Internal communications comes way down the scale of measurement compared to external communications. And C – expressed strategy, values, our marketing literature and graphic identity – is important but is not necessarily very different to another university, and is regarded warily as marketing 'guff' by academics! Of course the public are very likely to take notice of circles B (i.e. staff) and C (information), and therefore they are intrinsic to reputation and feed in to circle A.

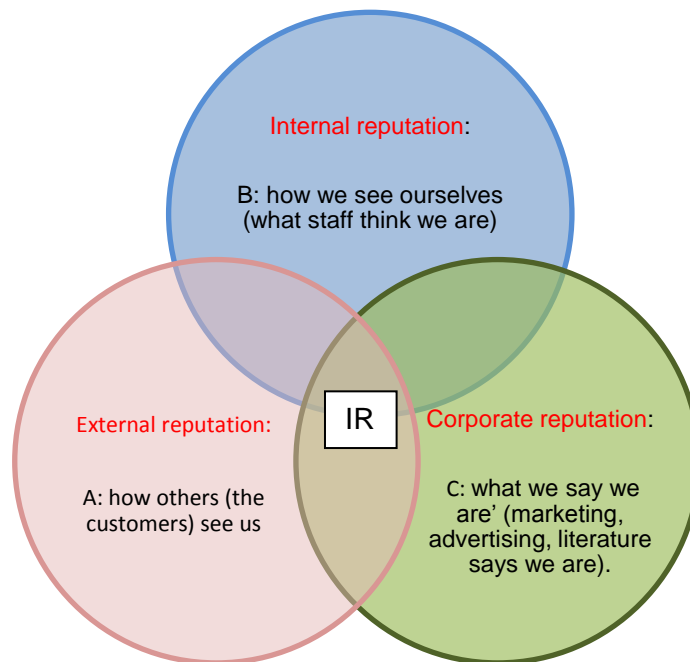


Fig. 8 Chun's mapping of reputation, with my annotation of the convergence as IR = ideal reputation. Getting all three circles to overlap entirely is what I advocate as the ideal of reputation management, IR.

Chun also defines three different schools of thinking about reputation in the literature published since the 1980s:

Evaluative: where reputation is measured in terms of external fiscal success. (Rindova and Fombrun 1998).

Impressional: where reputation is measured in terms of the emotional impression a company makes on its (often individual) external audiences (more closely allied with brand affinity). (E.g. Balmer 1997; Bromley 1993; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al. 1994).

Relational: where reputation is measured in terms of the aggregation of mixed and interdependent internal and external opinion (Davies and Miles 1998; Hatch and Schultz 2000).

Mapping reputation is subject to trends and the way of mapping is often a reflection of the person who is measuring - thus the economist sees reputation as economic success, the marketer as a brand known, admired and bought by their audiences, and the PR manager as good press coverage in the right papers. The human resources director would value reputation in terms of whether staff were happy and fulfilled by their company and whether their company could attract good future staff. In that sense the unifier here is that reputation is an acknowledgement of success by those whose opinions we value in order to justify our own self-worth or role. This doesn't help us with objectively measuring reputation, except in as much as each way of measuring must have validity for the organization being measured.

Small scale stakeholder surveys

These are probably still one of the most useful ways of measuring reputation. Stakeholders (a small group of valued customers/engaged clients or other influences) are asked to discuss a company, to comment on its quality, service, reliability, and reputation, usually with a market research agency. The survey can be online, on paper, by phone, face to face, or through a focus group. Views are aggregated by the interviewer and fed back to the company. The advantages are that the surveys are usually detailed and lengthy, and allow the respondent to carefully consider their impressions of the company. The disadvantages are that the views still have to be aggregated by the interviewer, and may be hard to synthesize into something that could be called a 'measure' as opposed to a set of findings. When questionnaires are used, stakeholders can of course be forced to choose a number or a statement to correspond to their feelings, which has the advantage that it can be turned into more digestible data, which allows for future benchmarking.

Media measures

Davies and Miles (1998) found that of 14 major companies they assessed in a research project, very few measured reputation. Of those who did, most chose to look at column inches of press reporting, number of media mentions, or advertising value equivalent (AVE). One could either argue that this reflects the fact that most reputation management functions are focused on media activity – thus the measure is an expression of their domain of responsibility; or one could argue that companies realize that media portrayal is the closest definition of their reputation. It is the mirror the world holds up to them, and they can influence the reflection but not fully control it.

Media measures offer fairly crude assessments of positive and negative coverage, and usually cannot assess the full nuanced picture of media coverage in a cost effective way. In my own work with universities I have created a framework, Aurora (Simpson, 2011), that looks at tone, reach (i.e. how many readers the paper has, as measured by Alexa.com) and editorial prominence (degree to which the university is featured in the article). Universities find it useful because it compares their results with other world ranked universities, since reputation measures are more useful if they are comparative with a peer group.

Polls and rankings

Ranking polls are one of the most common forms of measuring reputation and seem to be popular with publishers and readers. But the very fact that there are so many is not only due to the complexity of reputation, but also reflects the desire for the measuring company to project their own business profile through the act of compiling a list. And as we know, it is human nature to enjoy a list, especially if we come near the top rather than the bottom. Business, PR and media companies will continue to create their own ways of measuring reputation because it throws glory on themselves and creates good 'PR'. The company that measures reputation by the very act of doing so is saying that have the power to influence reputation.

Some surveys simply aggregate available data and in this way are measuring proxies such as 'financial success' more than reputation.

Fortune, World's Most Admired Companies

Fortune is a global business magazine published by Time Inc.'s Fortune Money Group which specializes in lists of global companies. It publishes a 'Global 500' each year, which aggregates factors such as earnings per share, balance sheet, total return to investors, to create a list of America's most successful companies. In 2011, the top US companies were: 1 Wal-Mart Stores; 2 Exxon Mobil; 3 Chevron; 4 General Electric and 5 Bank of America. This is fiscal success, not reputation.

More interesting is Fortune's annual survey of World's Most Admired Companies, which describes itself as creating a list of the most reputable companies. This has been conducted by the Hay Group since 1997, based on an earlier survey called America's Most Admired Companies, that goes back to 1984 (with data collected in 1983). The sampling frame changed from American to World companies in 1995. It therefore predates Fombrun's reputation quotient (2000). In 2011, the list was sponsored by CNN, and the top 5 are: 1. Apple, 2 Google, 3 Berkshire Hathaway 4 Southwest Airlines and 5 Procter & Gamble.

Again, they are all American, so one has to look at the methodology here: 673 companies from 32 countries were surveyed but it is not clear what the response rate was (how many were American who replied?). To arrive at the top 50 Most Admired Companies overall, 4,100 executives, directors, and securities analysts were asked to select the 10 companies they admired most.

They chose from a list made up of the companies that ranked in the top 25% in last year's surveys, plus those that finished in the top 20% of their industry. Last year's list informs this years, and presumably last year's voters are to a certain extent this year's.

They also measure the companies in specific sectors on nine reputational attributes:

Innovation
People management
Use of corporate assets
Social responsibility
Quality of management
Financial soundness
Long-term investment
Quality of products/services
Global competitiveness

Fig. 9 Fortune's 8 key indicators for most admired companies (2010)

Other business rankings: FT and Fortune

The Financial Times' used to create a list of 'World's the most respected companies' rankings based on 8 factors: (1) Strong and well-thought-out strategy; (2) Maximizing customer satisfaction and loyalty; (3) Business leadership; (4) Quality of products and services; (5) Strong and consistent profit performance; (6) Robust and human corporate culture; (7) Successful change management; and (8) Globalization of business. It surveyed 4000 leaders to capture this data. However it stopped this in 2005 and now only produces a Global 500 list, based on market capitalization, which presumably appeals to their readership, and is less costly to produce.

Forbes (2011) works with the Reputation Institute to create The World's Most Reputable Companies survey. In 2011 they invited 48 000 consumers companies to measure 100 companies (it is not clear how the original 100 are chosen, but they appear to be ones nominated from another survey, the RepTrack System, which looks at the largest companies in the world). They are asked to rank them on seven dimensions that Fombrun (2000) devised as well as a score out of 100, they say represents an average measure of people's feelings for each company. The scores were statistically derived from calculations of four emotional indicators: trust, esteem, admiration and good feeling. This sounds rather

confusing, since many would regard trust and esteem as synonymous, and admiration and good feeling likewise. However, at the end of this, they came out with Google as the number one company in 2011, and found that perceptions of what they term enterprise but I would call management (workplace, governance and citizenship) trumped product perceptions (products and services plus innovation) and performance (financial performance and leadership) in driving reputation.

Many reputation academics point out the weakness of assessing a company's reputation on one measure e.g. financial success, press coverage or strategic endeavours: Caruana (1997); and Fryxell and Wang (1994) are critical of the use of single measurement items to measure such non-financial attributes. Others point out the weakness of asking a single constituency to assess reputation (Fombrun, 1996) given that reputation is an aggregation of many views.

The brand equity scales

Brand equity is the power a brand has. How recognizable is the name? What does the brand name add to the value of the company? This can be measured by looking at the difference between the actual company value, and its balance sheet (Kerin and Sethuraman, 1998).

Many reputation researchers have attempted to link brand equity to the reputation of the company by ways of measuring specific elements that contribute to both. Keller and Aaker (1998) developed three dimensions of 'corporate credibility', corporate expertise, trustworthiness and likability in order to try to establish a link with successful brands. Corporate credibility is linked to corporate reputation by Keller (2000).

Caruana and Chircop (2000) developed 12 items for a corporate reputation scale based upon the five elements of 'brand equity' from Aaker (1991) in order to measure the reputation of a beverage firm in Malta. The 12 items tested with over 120 consumers were:

- (1) quality of the product;
- (2) advertising levels;
- (3) sponsoring activities;
- (4) conduct factory tour;
- (5) long-established tradition;
- (6) highly regarded employment with firm;
- (7) well-trained employees;
- (8) well-known products;
- (9) strong management;
- (10) cost of advertisement;
- (11) soundness of company;
- and (12) profitability.

Echoing Fombrun (2000), Chun (2005) points out the limitation of the brand equity scale: the constructs themselves can be interpreted differently by each respondent, and often the respondents are from the same typology (e.g. customers of the product).

Wide-scale polling

For commercial brands, it's very important to know whether customers do or don't recognize your name en masse, in other words awareness, something Keller (2000) sees as a key component of brand equity. There are a number of ways to assess awareness. For example, the Brandweek Buzz Report by YouGov is a weekly consumer perception report that analyzes the most talked about brands based on:

- Buzz:** If you've heard anything about the brand in the last two weeks, was it positive or negative?
- Willingness to Recommend:** Would you recommend the brand to friends, family or co-workers or tell them to avoid the brand?
- Index:** Overall brand health score, average of six underlying indicators of brand health (Impression, Quality, Value, Reputation, Satisfaction and Willingness to Recommend)

YouGov interviews 5,000 people each weekday from a representative U.S. population sample. Respondents are drawn from an online panel of more than one million individuals. A score can range from 100 to -100 and is compiled by subtracting negative feedback from positive. A zero score means equal positive and negative feedback. Arguably an organization that one is unaware of has no reputation.

Multi-dimensional measures

Whilst some of the methods measured above have been useful, others have suggested that they fail because they don't recognize the multi-dimensional nature of reputation and they asked people to mark reputation on a single scale – e.g. from poor to excellent. Studies that attempt to relate brand to reputation are also said to be flawed by Hardy 1970 and others who say there is no link. Others say there is (Keller 1998; Keller and Aaker 1998).

The difficulty is that, as mentioned earlier, reputation like the word love has lots of meaning to lots of different people. It is not linear. It is not simply a measure of 'success'. It has moral implications.

Various researchers moved to multi-dimensional measures with semantic or Likert scales:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Other methods used include Bernstein's cobweb method, Fishbein (1975) models, multidimensional scaling, and open-ended questions. The Kelly Repertory Grid (KRG), developed by George Kelly (1955). These can also be used to identify the factors to be assessed.

The Reputation Quotient

Fombrun et al. developed their complex **reputation quotient** in 1999/2000 which included 20 items, analysed in six dimensions to measure internal and external stakeholder views. Based on the focus groups and pilot study, he found that the people justify their feeling about companies on one of 20 attributes that can be grouped into six dimensions. The first dimension, emotional appeal refers to good feeling and degree of trust the company inspires in people. Second, products and services refer to the perception of the value, quality, innovation and reliability of the company's products and services. Third, vision and leadership captures perceptions of a clear vision and strong leadership. Fourth, workplace environment refers to the perception of how well the company's managed, how it is to work for and the quality of its employees. Fifth, social and environmental responsibility captures perceptions of the company as a good citizen in its dealing with communities, employees and the environment. Finally, financial performance describes perceptions of the company's profitability, prospects and risk.

The reputation quotient (RQ) has been used to study various companies, and was developed into a trademark in 2004, co-owned by Harris Interactive, the American polling company, and Charles Fombrun. Harris created a rank of 'the most visible and reputable brands in the US, although it appears that RQ is less prominent in its methodology for its 2011 iteration, which seems to have been superseded by Equitrend, a new tool that scopes Buzz promote score (BPS), which assesses the volume and sentiment of brand conversations on social media panels, and word of mouth – the degree to which customers are making good or bad comments about a product. Again, we can perhaps conclude that reputational measures continue to be subject to the trends and appetites of

the companies who use them. There is no single measurement methodology that is returned to across continents, countries and years.

Net Promoter Score (NPS)

This was first developed through Reichheld's book (2006) *The Ultimate Question*. NPS is based on the fundamental perspective that every company's customers can be divided into three categories: Promoters, Passives, and Detractors. By asking one question — How likely is it that you would recommend [Company X] to a friend or colleague? — you can track these groups and get a measure of your company's performance through its customers' eyes. Customers respond on a 0-to-10 point rating scale and are categorized as follows: Promoters (score 9-10) are loyal enthusiasts who will keep buying and refer others, fuelling growth. Passives (score 7-8) are satisfied but unenthusiastic customers who are vulnerable to competitive offerings. Detractors (score 0-6) are unhappy customers who can damage your brand and impede growth through negative word-of-mouth. To calculate a company's Net Promoter Score (NPS), you take the percentage of customers who are Promoters and subtract the percentage who are Detractors. This is a system I have used for measuring staff engagement in universities. The more willing they are to promote their own university, the more engaged they are in their institution, and the more they admire it.

Personality scales

Other scales have looked at qualities of companies to personify their reputation. Aaker (1997) created five dimensions for what was called 'brand personality', and her scale has since been used to assess the saliency of a brand among US companies. Using the same personification approach, Davies et al. (2001) developed the Corporate Personality Scale, to measure a firm's reputation from both internal and external points of view simultaneously, and examine gaps between various stakeholders' views of a firm. The scales are fairly similar with Davies et al. introducing 'machismo', which could be seen to be a synonym for Aaker's 'ruggedness', 'ruthlessness', which is harder than Aaker's ruggedness. Enterprise is a bit more business facing than excitement, although it could lead to excitement, and agreeableness is probably a more honest word than sincerity. (Can a company really be sincere, which requires an openness that might be counterproductive in sales endeavours?). The major new concept is 'informality', which may reflect a new trend in business to consumer relationships that was not evident in the 90s.

Aaker's personality scale (1997)	Davies et al.'s personality scale (2001)
Sincerity	Agreeableness
Excitement	Enterprise
Competence	Competence
Sophistication	Chic
Ruggedness	Ruthlessness
	Machismo
	Informality

Fig.10 Comparing Aaker's and Davies' personality scales

The inventory asks respondents (both staff and customers) to assess the entity's personality, imagining the firm has 'come to life' as a human being. This is interesting, but perhaps less successful in the university world where the product (knowledge or graduates) and the customers (mainly young people) are so similar. However, it was used to develop the Manchester Business School corporate identity in the late 90s (Davies and Chun, 2009).

So to summarize this section, we can see that there are many ways of measuring reputation in the corporate world; methods change slightly as consultants and media fall in and out of favour. Fortune offers us the most fixed model of measuring companies with a scale that has not changed since 1983/4; the personality scales have attempted to combine two key stakeholder groups – staff and customers but present difficulties in being applied to organizations; and the Net Promoter Score offers perhaps the most simple and effective way of capturing the multi-layers of reputation by simply asking how likely someone is to recommend the organization. Next, I move into the world of higher education to see how reputation differs and is measured.

6 Reputation and higher education

Having looked at reputation mainly in a commercial context, I now turn to the world of higher education. This chapter discusses the cultural context of reputation and reputation management in universities. It then looks at the benefits of having a strong reputation as a university and the ways reputation is built. Finally, it draws together different studies that have attempted to define the indicators that underpin reputation, mainly according to students.

The culture of universities

Before looking at how to measure reputation in universities, it is important to look first at why reputation matters, and why universities might be different or similar to other commercial organizations. Education is regarded as critical to society, and knowledge economies, providing graduates with a premium in higher earnings over their life (Levy and Hopkins, 2010). Money spent on education is an investment in human capital, as Nobel Laureate Becker (1975) explains:

People cannot be separated from their knowledge, skills, health, or values in the way they can be separated from their financial and physical assets. That is because they raise earnings, improve health, or add to a person's good habits over much of his lifetime.

Therefore the reputation of a university also reflects the reputation of the economy and the country itself. Firstly, in practical terms, universities add substantially to the national balance sheet and are a major export source. In the UK, universities are meant to be worth about £5.3 billion as a gross export, employing 1 per cent of the UK's total workforce, and generate £59 billion of output. The amount students spend outside universities was also estimated at £2.3 billion in 2007/8 by UUK (UUK, 2009).

International students bring enormous dividends to the country, and add to the highly skilled workforce (Report by Price WaterhouseCoopers LLP for the Royal Society of Chemistry and Institute of Physics, 2005). In an era when the battle is for brains, universities are central to perceptions of the quality of the country. The commitment to investing in higher education is one of the key measures of the OECD (2010) when assessing countries.

Education is also an intangible product that can only be really evaluated by the user. It is not easy for the user to know what they are 'buying' before they enrol, and therefore reputation is even more important. It is neither cheap nor easy to trial in advance. One's higher education is also an entry into different forms of society, and unlike most other

experiences, stays with us for life. For the universities themselves, as numbers proliferate (there are over 150 in the UK now), reputation is one of the key ways of differentiating themselves and securing their future.

Universities are large communities of academics, managers, staff and students, often heavily state subsidized with some of the oldest dating from medieval times when church, state and society required a scholarship and teaching to be formalized. Academics have observed a close connection between high reputation and age of foundation. (Ries and Trout, 1981). Reputation is a product of accumulated experience and wealth. Because reputation is based on past experience, it stands to reason that the oldest institutes will have the strongest reputations. Reputation is based on socially shared impressions so age matters. (Bromley, 2001; Sandberg, 2002).

Although universities use marketing in the UK, they are not subject to classic market forces because the state intervenes in the number and type of students they take in, and the research they do. Formally, UK higher education institutions are actually private institutions established as charities providing a public benefit. The move towards higher fees (announced in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review) in England will, however, create real marketing pressures and force some differentiation in price and image. However, the cap at £9000 and the dramatic reduction in public funding appears to be creating another fixed market, as most universities have opted to charge the maximum price permissible, and say they cannot afford to discount because of the cut to the public subsidy. The market looks as though it will continue to be one dominated by admission tariffs for domestic students, rather than price if all or most universities cluster around the same price point. However, a study by HEPI (2011) believes that universities that can't attract 'straight A' students, will be forced to charge much less than £9000 because they won't be able to fill their places. Reputation will determine price if demand for places weakens. Meanwhile, the postgraduate and international markets will continue to show prices variations, whereby the more reputable universities can and will charge more.

Because universities aren't subject to traditional market forces, they have (until recently) a fairly passive interest in commercial branding wisdom and defy concepts of organizational (top down) cultures. The word *universitas* means a corporation, a community of scholars and teachers, and whilst they have a common purpose, they are also composed of strong minded individual thinkers who naturally focus on their own research interests rather than corporate goals. This creates some interesting tensions between corporate strategy and institutional culture and identity is not welded to the creation of products or consumable outputs, but ideas and teaching. In many ways, universities are more like cities than

companies with their complex social layers and many different typologies of people with different roles to play. Universities can offer different sub-brands to students, as Helgesen and Nettet (2007) showed in a study which demonstrated that students can view the university brand differently from the departmental one. Universities with colleges (Oxford and Cambridge are prime examples) also introduce a third brand elements that sometimes challenges the strategies and development of the separate and integrated parts. And then universities also cluster around different typologies depending on their age and research status: the UK sector splits between the pre-92 universities, typically research intensive, non-executive structures, and the post-92, often more focused on teaching, and managed much more centrally.

Reputation management in higher education

Universities have only in the last twenty years employed people to manage their reputations but arguably they have always been conscious of building it. The press office began at the University of Cambridge (where I worked) in the early 1990s as an offshoot of the development office. It was then moved to the vice-chancellor's office, in an acknowledgement that it had a core university role. It was first called the information office (only for handing out information), then became the press office (implying the information was for the press and not the public), and then was modified to be called the communication office (acknowledging a wider stakeholder base).

The lead reputation manager in a university or company is normally given a title such as Director of Communications. Some will also be responsible for wider marketing and fundraising. Verinder (2007) showed that only a third of PR professionals are on the senior management team of colleges and higher education institutions in the UK. However, Dolphin (2000) suggests that PR directors in top British industries are similarly unevenly represented in senior management strategic roles – some are at board level, some not. This may however have changed in the last ten years, as public relations directors attract increasingly high salaries.

Marketing and communications directors in UK higher education institutions are now normally in one of the highest salary brackets and do specify a report to board. For example, the job advert for the Director of Marketing and communications for the University of Surrey (April 2011) was handled by Perret Laver, a top executive search firm, and the job advert emphasizes the seniority of the role:

S/He will be motivated by working in an autonomous environment and comfortable communicating at board level, with a record of executing effective,

*complex marketing and communications strategies. The job holder will have the credibility and strength to build the profile of the marketing and communications functions internally whilst making a powerful impact on the external face of the University. An essential element will be their strength as a people focussed leader capable of inspiring internal customers as well as direct reports.*²

It is interesting that Surrey uses the word 'customers' here, which indicates the shift from students being seen to be members of the community to customers, as higher fees come in. The student is not so much a 'buyer' as a share-holder. They are making a future investment in a university when they join. They are also involved in a one off purchase. Only a few are likely to transfer to Masters or PhDs and become repeat buyers. Their maximum 'purchase' of a programme is likely to be three at the most, but one on average. Reputation is critical to their decision making because they are investing much more time and money in their contract with a university than they would with a consumable product. It is also worth reminding ourselves that unlike a company selling a product, the top universities are selecting students. In the top universities, the process is more like recruiting staff, than selling. And as far as the student is concerned, the harder it is 'to get in', the more reputable the organization. Therefore traditional marketing and advertising do not work in universities. The best universities describe themselves as selectors, rather than recruiters as they are overwhelmed with highly qualified applicants.

Unlike commercial companies, say, universities don't define success (exclusively) in terms of the number of applicants wanting to do business with them. Applicants have to add to their reputation, and reputation is measured in terms of the quality of applicant. Universities with low admissions criteria are the ones that have insufficiently strong applicants. Conversion rates are also important – i.e. of those who are made an offer, how many accept it. British universities look at UCAS points and predicted A level grades. US universities look at SATs scores, and also whether applicants are in the top 10 % of their school class. British universities also strive to have a social and ethnic mix, with some pressure from the government to widen participation. Therefore students from low achieving schools, and with deprived circumstances, are looked on favourably because they add to the reputation for inclusivity and liberal values. The modern battle is to get the best brains from the widest socio-economic mix nationally, if not internationally (here often only the richer students travel abroad).

² http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/jobs_jobdetails.asp?ac=83898

The benefits of having a strong reputation in higher education

Whilst marketing functions and corporate identity might be a developing function in universities, reputation is highly regarded and well understood by both the university and the users of higher education (parents, students, staff). Just as Kuhn and Alpert (2004) noted that business to business purchasing was much less motivated by brand, than deliverables and quality of product, universities and their 'customers' are also more interested in reputational quality than reputational 'brand amplification'.

The annual Higher Expectations Survey conducted by OpinonPanel and The Knowledge Partnership since 2007 of 12,000 new undergraduates showed that reputation was the third most important factor in terms of student choice:

1. Course or departmental factors
2. Location
3. Reputation

This study also showed that reputation was much more important than financial factors. When parents are asked 'what are the most important choice factors?', they put reputation ahead of everything else (Roberts and Thompson, 2007).

Nguyen and Le Blanc (2001) acknowledge that large organizations, including higher education institutes, can have multiple reputations. The higher your reputation, the more likely you are as an institution to attract partners of choice and funding (business, public, research etc.). Prestigious donors like to give to prestigious universities. Fombrun (1996) and others show that a better reputation allows an organization to win contracts on more favourable terms. Credit ratings (such as Standard and Poors) are linked to research and reputation. Here is their explanation for credit rating Australian and New Zealand higher education institutions (Standard and Poors, 1999) with my bold marking of key points.

*Standard & Poor's analysis of the credit strength of both public and private higher education institutions focuses on an assessment of an institution's revenue sources and diversity, demand profile, on-going financial performance, debt position, and management. The relative importance of these factors varies between public and private institutions. Greater focus is placed on demand issues for private institutions because for them **student numbers** are the major*

*determinant of financial performance. The importance of demand factors, however, can vary between different public universities, too. This depends on whether government funding is determined purely by student demand, or whether funding is based on student load targets in an environment of excess demand for tertiary places. Another important factor for publicly funded institutions is the **revenue generated from tuition paying students** relative to that from government funded students. Standard & Poor's considers that the most creditworthy higher education institutions have the potential to achieve a credit rating in the 'AA' range. These institutions will generally be characterized by **their flagship status, high academic reputation, unusually high demand for admission, wide student geographic draw, and strong financial profile**. For public institutions, credit strength is enhanced by **operation in a funding environment that largely insulates their finances from changes in student demand**.*

Thus student numbers, revenue from students, flagship status (i.e. research excellence and other unique selling points), academic reputation, high demand for admission, students from different areas, and strong financial profile are all key elements that underpin credit worthiness. The higher the credit rating, the lower the interest on loans.

There are other benefits to having a good reputation. Reputation attracts notice, and therefore universities with strong reputations are much more likely to feature in the media. There is perceived to be a virtuous circle between reputation and ranking. If you have a good reputation, you get a high ranking. Staff are attracted to work for the best companies, often at lower costs. Reputation is therefore part of the employee package. Organizations with better reputations can charge more for student fees (Davies et al, 2003) or ask for better grades. Whether higher prices or academic grades are the most desired currency (universities of course are hungry for both), the reputable university is much more empowered. Fombrun and Shanley, 1990, concluded that: 'favourable reputations may enable firms to charge premium prices'. Students cannot easily repeat buy, but loyalty tends to deepen if they are engaged with a reputable university. Loyalty leads to brand endorsement, which leads to free marketing. Bloomberg Business week shows that in a subject such as Master of Business Studies, which is widely available as an academic programme, there is a strong correlation between reputation and price.³

³

http://www.businessweek.com/bschools/blogs/mba_admissions/archives/2008/10/business_school_2.html

Reputable universities can draw on a well of loyalty and survive crises. Cramer and Ruefli (1994) remind us that a company's reputational capital can be drawn down in a crisis of credibility. The recent press criticism of the London School of Economics, and acceptance of Libyan money from the Gaddafi Foundation meant that the director, Sir Howard Davies, had to step down to protect the LSE from further harm. Simon Jenkins writing in The Guardian observed the paradox of British universities being forced to adapt to market forces, but being castigated for doing so:

To be fair, what happened at LSE is nothing more than an extreme version of the predicament facing all British universities. They have spent the past quarter century sacrificing scholarly independence to sell their souls to business and government. They were told to do so back in 1988 in Margaret Thatcher's notorious white paper, written by Lord Baker, which declared its policy was to "bring higher education institutions closer to the world of business".⁴

Whether the LSE crisis does long lasting harm to the institution remains to be seen, but Griffin et al (1991) noted that the impact of poor publicity is moderated by source credibility, responsibility and history, and response tactic:

Confronting today's negative publicity in a positive and timely manner should not only benefit accused firms immediately, but also provide insulation against whatever tomorrow might bring

LSE's top level and swift response would seem to be in line with this theory.

Reputation lends resilience to an organization. Consumers are said to be more satisfied with a reputable product or company, and less likely to complain if things go wrong (Dowling and Roberts, 2002). If students are satisfied, then they are also more likely to recommend the university. Reputable universities can attract better students, from further afield. They can also limit particular students from coming by raising admission grades. Student enquiries are also more likely to translate into student enrolments. Roberts and Thompson (2007) show that there is a strong correlation between the ranking of HE providers of business studies and average admission grades. Students are also much less likely to drop out at a prestigious university. This is partly because they are also more suited to study, having achieved higher grades, so it is hard to separate out the quality of the student from the quality of the reputation. However, universities with better reputations

⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/03/lse-gaddafi-libyan-dictator-universities>

are also more likely to attract students to stay on for Masters degrees and higher research. Helgessen and Nettet (2007) concluded that the more favourable a student's perception of the reputation of their higher education institute, the higher their loyalty.

Marketing costs are less onerous for a university with a good name. Roberts showed that there is an inverse correlation between rankings of a university and size of its marketing budget (Roberts 2003). A good reputation drives customer choice. Customers believe organizations put their good name on the line if they fail to deliver. This is called a contract guarantor by Sabate and Puente (2003) and a performance bond by Milgrom and Roberts 2004. Students are much more likely to form strong alumni groups with reputable universities, and give more generously. Reputation deepens loyalty (Basu and Dick, 1994), which leads to greater support, affinity and giving. For the student, a reputable university does not need 'selling' to parents of loan guarantors. It can lead to a better career as employers look at where students have gone to, as much as, or possibly more, than their subject or grades (Roberts and Thompson, 2007). Top universities have the smallest proportion of students that fail to find work in their first year.

Building a reputation in higher education

To build a reputation in higher education, or to measure it, one has to work out what the indicators are of reputation. Bob Sevier (1994), a US marketing consultant with a background in higher education, advanced six effective ways of building reputation in universities and colleges:

- Admissions selectivity
- Academic quality
- Image building (marketing and branding)
- Co-branding (big name partnerships)
- Big time sports,
- Endowment

Admission selectivity is echoed by Nobel Laureate Gary Becker (1975) who said that students contribute to social capital and this underlies the public contribution to universities: The best students are said to be attracted to the best universities. The ability to attract the best students is one of the critical indicators of domestic rankings for Universities, such as US News and World Report, The Times and The Guardian. Student admissions criteria do not feature in the world rankings where the focus is much more on

the quality of the academic faculty. World universities probably have such a high level of student quality that it is hard to use this as a basis for differentiation.

Roberts (2003) showed that academics regard research quality as the key characteristic of the most admired universities, and it is also seen to be a key factor in world rankings. He goes on to list factors that are key reputational drivers in UK undergraduate choice, based on a survey of 12,000 new undergraduates. These are listed in the table (Fig. 11).

When Sevier uses the term 'image building' in his third indicator, he means reputation. He says in exercises to test college choice students reveal four choice factors: image or reputation, location, cost, and the availability of a specific major (programme of study). And when asked to choose among their top four reasons, they invariably choose image. Bizarrely, the quality of tuition does not appear to be a choice factor, perhaps because at this age there is a lack of awareness of its importance, or of the fact that it can differ so much from one institution to another.

Brand in terms of graphics and straplines appears to play less prominent a part in student choice than 'reputation' in its pure form. McKnight and Paugh show that top students are more drawn to the university name whereas less qualified applicants take more note of slogans. (1999). Certainly co-brands appear to attract students and businesses to work with universities as well as specific partnerships – such as the Cambridge-MIT partnership which draws together scientists from both eminent universities.

Big time sports is perhaps the only concept that is largely American rather than international, and would perhaps not be a key reputational consideration for many European, Australasian or Asian universities. Having said that, the Oxford and Cambridge boat race is the biggest rowing event in the world, and attracts 7.3 million and considerable commercial sponsorship. Its demise however is eagerly anticipated by many as a symbol of old-fashioned elitism (and perhaps more importantly, but less openly said, unfair brand advancement). It is interesting that Treadwell and Harrison (1994) refer however to the poor performance of athletes being a negative in terms of reputation.

Endowment however is critical to all universities, and wealth appears to be a reputational indicator, as it allows universities to attract the best staff and students (through more generous scholarships, for example). This is however far more a preoccupation for US universities, in a society that has a tradition of giving because of much lower taxes –i.e. the individual is expected to pay back.

There have been other studies of image/reputation in relation to universities which have added other indicators. Arpan et al. (2003) make it clear that most studies have been based only on one university, and are therefore limited in how much they add to the debate. Studies based on only one university are limited because it only offers views of the group attending or considering that university – i.e. they may be a highly selected group based on intelligence, or a group that attends a certain university because it is local and cheap. Their own study looked at more universities from an undergraduate perspective, but still limited it to just the US, and came up with a reputational model that involved three key factors:

- 1 academic rating

- 2 athletic rating

- 3 news coverage

Together they concluded that these made up a global image in the eyes of students. They also looked at public chosen by random telephone number selection in a state in the US and noted that the public would also include the opinion of friends and relatives in how they assessed image.

Combining seven research projects (Fig. 11) that scope elements of university reputation, We can start to see the extent to which researchers agree and disagree over what constitutes reputation. They also seem to be some missing things here, unless they are subsumed elsewhere. Teaching is not mentioned as a discrete item. Sung and Yang (2008) might be hinting at 'employment prospects' with 'this university looks like a university with strong prospects for future growth' but this sounds more like the university growth not the graduates, and because it is adapted from Fombrun and Gardberg (2000), it appears to be about the institution not student. However, the prospects a student has on leaving university is beginning to become one of the key definers of reputation, especially since fees are to go up in the UK. Each summer the statistics for graduate destinations are commented on by the UK press, alluding to universities and their courses that fail to lead to careers with graduate salaries (Patten, 2011).

Fig. 11 Indicators for reputation in higher education from diverse research projects and studies – horizontally banded in typologies

Sevier (1994)	Treadwell and Harrison (1994)	Bryant et al (1996)	Theus (1993)	Arpan et al (2003)	Sung and Yang (2008)	Roberts (2010)
		Overall educational quality		Well managed Commitment to academic excellence		Research reputation
Admissions selectivity				Most students are intelligent	Prestigious place to go	A prestigious place to go
			Interpersonal communication			
	Diverse student body		Diversity of students			
Academic quality	Academic excellence		Excellence of faculty	Nationally known or excellent professors		Reputation for course, department or lecturer
	Faculty research has a national image			Nationally known academic programmes		
Image building (marketing and branding)	Uni has a national image		Institutional visibility			
			News coverage		Media coverage is very positive	
Co-branding (big name partnerships)						
Big time sports,	'problems with athletes' academic performance'	Relative emphasis on sport	Athletic prowess	Committed to athletic excellence		
Endowment			Extent of endowment	Good resources/ equipment/library/transport	Stable, financially sound	
	A well regarded business school					
	Students form close friendships	Friendliness of the students	Campus morale		Friendly	
		Existence of a family atmosphere/family related values on campus			Warm uni puts student care as top priority	
		Image of a party-school image				

Fig. 11 Indicators for reputation in higher education from diverse research projects and studies – horizontally banded in typologies (cont.)

Sevier (1994)	Treadwell and Harrison (1994)	Bryant et al (1996)	Theus (1993)	Arpan et al (2003)	Sung and Yang (2008)	Roberts (2010)
					Practical	
	Graduates are proud of their education	Family connections to the school				University recommended by family
	Uni makes cultural community contribution		Service to the community	Socially responsible		
		Ranking of school and colleges, departments, majors	Third party rankings and ratings		Highly ranked	Strong in league tables
			Prestige		Prestige	
		Size of the university and its classes	Size of the institution			
			Location of the institution			
			Regional bias			
			Appearance of the institution			
			Scope of offerings			
					Acquaintances think highly of it	Recommended by teachers, families, careers advisors
				This university has strong prospects for future growth		

The critical importance of rankings over experience

Sung and Yang's work is also interesting because it looks at the relationship between student affinity (they call this supportive attitudes), reputation and prestige. Interesting that they separate these two words out, (i.e., reputation and prestige), which many would regard as synonyms. They measure reputation and thereby define the word by adapting five of Fombrun and Gardberg's quotient measures – i.e.

(a) this university puts student care as the top priority;

(b) this university looks like a university with strong prospects for future growth;

(c) this university is well-managed;

(d) this university is socially responsible;

and (e) this university is financially sound.

Prestige is differently defined as:

(a) This university is looked upon as a prestigious school in society overall;

(b) I think my acquaintances think highly of this university;

(c) this university successfully retains a prestigious place in various university ranking systems;

and (d) media coverage about this university is very positive.

The items were adopted from Mael and Ashforth's (1992) organizational prestige scale. In essence, they are separating out experienced reputation from the word of mouth/third party endorsements sense of reputation. We could define this more broadly as 'rankings' versus 'student experience', but these are my words, not theirs. Sung and Yang find that amongst the student body they survey, higher reputation and external prestige resulted in students being more supportive. This is perhaps not a surprising result, but what was revelatory was that external prestige (i.e. rankings, positive media and endorsements) were four times more influential than what they call reputation in the sense of experienced student satisfaction (the indicators nominated by Fombrun as linked to business reputation). Rankings, as my research explores, are hugely influential with students, and actually more important than factors to do with their own personal comfort at university or the university's management or ethical stance.

If we attempt to aggregate these words appearing in Fig. 11, and remove the overlapping ones, we can start to see a picture of the elements of reputation important in higher education, at least from a student point of view:

Management	
Culture and heritage	
Campus	Institutional character
Location	
Resources and facilities	
Diverse student body	
Student experience (sport, clubs, residences, colleges)	
Business school status	
Admissions selectivity	Academic profile
Diversity of students	
Flagship programmes	
Famous academics	
Excellent research	
Well known departments	
Media profile	
Community liaison/outreach	Public prominence
Partners of influence/co brands	
Prominence in public life	
Employability	Employability
Rankings	Endorsements
Alumni affinity	

Fig. 12 Reputational indicators (aggregating previous student research into university choice and reputation shown in Fig. 11)

Those highlighted in green concern the experience one has of the university in its corporate whole, which I've called institutional character, those highlighted in purple indicate academic profile, blue indicates media, brand, community profile and public relations, pink indicates employability and grey are the indicators that are all specific endorsers – and in a sense cover all the above too. There is always an argument for whether the endorsements should be kept separate from the measures because of the overlap of the sets. I have added employability based on the work I have done with students in recent open day interviews, where it emerges as a key choice factor for universities in the UK post 2012, when fees are going to be £9000 a year. Teaching, I am assuming, is included in the student experience, but should it be under academic profile

as a separate category, despite the lack of academic evidence in the literature review? It is included in some of the national rankings but not all. There are as many questions as answers still.

An emerging reputational model based on aggregating previous HE

But I begin to work out what drives reputation for universities, at least from the student perspective, since the work of the academics above were mainly based on student interviews (rather than academic, management or business perspectives). But there are of course problems with listing these measures, since public prominence and endorsements will be amplifications of the factual aspects of institutional character and academic profile. Does one double count them or separate them out? Do I assign numbers to these elements and then weight them. If a weighting is applied, what would it be? All these are questions for further research but also remind us of the limitation of any scoring method that attempts to capture a construct, biased by the interviewer, the interviewee, the words used and their interpretation, and the mood of the person (Churchill, 1979). But in relation to this particular project, the question is, how do these reputational indicators reflect the indicators used in rankings, which are now one of the most common ways of benchmarking universities (Dill and Soo, 2005)? Are rankings already capturing the above type of facets of university, or something entirely different?

7 University rankings, and their relationship to reputation

Having looked at indicators of university reputation based largely on student interviews, I now look at how university rankings measure reputation. I discuss their role in accountability and their use in student choice. I compare The Guardian and The Times UK domestic university rankings with the reputational indicators mentioned by students. I move on to look at the degree to which rankings amplify reputation, and I conclude by examining the criticisms leveled at rankings, from both external observers and university staff.

In previous chapters I showed that rankings have been used to evaluate commercial reputation since the 1980s (e.g. Fortune's Most Admired Companies 1984-2011, Forbes The World's Most Reputable Companies 2011). The university world has been slightly slower to join this trend, but now rankings (league tables) have become increasingly common as a method for measuring the quality of universities at a domestic level. The UK has a wide variety of domestic rankings, including those driven by the media: The Times Good University Guide, The Guardian Guide, and those driven by the government (the National Student Survey). In the US there is the US News and World Report, which has long reflected on national rankings. International rankings have only developed in the last eight years, in response to the globalization of higher education. Students, researchers and businesses want to know how a university in China compares with one in the Netherlands if these are all options for an association of some kind.

Accountability

Rankings meet the needs of many and on a variety of levels. Consumers and research partners want a factual way of assessing the relative worth of universities. Bearing in mind that most universities are reliant on public funding (even private institutions like Oxford and Cambridge) rankings play a role in public accountability (Gormley and Weimer, 1999). Public funders want to see that money is well spent, or justify different allocations that might otherwise look unfair. Moreover, the rise of league tables seems to coincide with the rise in word of mouth and advocacy marketing. Rankings are also very much in keeping with today's preference for third party non-commercial advocacy, preferring to take their hotel recommendations from Trip Advisor, or read the product reviews by other buyers on Amazon, rather than trust the claims of marketing. People want opinions and factual analysis, not spin. Leagues tables respond to this 'objective' need and the internet distributes, consolidates, and makes permanent such data.

Rankings as aids to student choice

At a very basic level, rankings provide an insight into the quality of a product that is expensive, likely to be a one off buy, and hard to sample in advance. Students able to travel more easily across the world want to know which university to choose to guarantee the best experience, and the best future career. Whilst McManus Howard (2002) suggests league tables are used to confirm decisions rather than lead decisions for students, this is likely to change as more students get used to using rankings, and have higher costs to pay for their education. Many students appear to use rankings to create a consideration set from which to then choose their final university. Higher Expectations (UK study of first year students by OpinonPanel and The Knowledge Partnership, 2007) shows that the use of rankings is rising with 50% of UK students saying they had referred to at least one.

In 1995, over 40% of American first years reported that national college rankings were either somewhat important or very important in choosing which college to attend (McDonough et al., 1998). They also showed students and parents regarded rankings as expert opinion. Other studies (Griffith and Rask 2007) show rankings influence student choice. Rankings also help students choose universities that are not in their cultural frame of reference, and they force universities to deal with third party opinions to tackle poor performance.

And as universities become increasingly expensive (a university education is likely to cost around £50-80,000 in the United Kingdom from 2012, depending on the rate of interest and speed of repayment), the public are likely to refer to rankings, and cross reference several types of ranking before entering into a debt of this size.

Comparing rankings with student reputational indicators

Most university rankings are not measures of reputation per se (i.e. they don't ask the public what they think are the most reputable universities) but are instead quantitative scales chosen by the publisher as ways of capturing the aggregate quality of universities. The Times Higher World ranking uses reputation however as one of its indicators and is then a hybrid of fact and perception, which Dill and Soo (2005) believe is flawed. But given that most university rankings compile data by government agencies to regulate universities and are not intended to convey reputation as the primary motive, the question now arises: are university rankings using indicators that are similar to the reputational ones that students choose? I.e., to what extent are they are proxy for reputation?

To answer this, I looked at two popular British tables, The Times Good University Guide, and the Guardian, comparing their indicators in Fig. 13 with those derived from the reputational indicators from student interviews aggregated in Fig. 12 above.

Fig. 13 Comparing the Times Good University, with the Guardian Guide, and the reputational indicators based on student choice

Times Good University Guide 2012	Guardian Guide 2012	Reputational indicators based on student choice (from Fig. 12)
Student satisfaction	Student satisfaction	Student endorsements
Research quality		Excellent research
Entry standards	Average entry tariff	Academic profile
Student-staff ratio	Student satisfaction with teaching	<i>Not specifically mentioned by students</i>
	Student satisfaction with feedback	
	Staff student ratio	
	Value added score	
Services and facilities spend	Spend per student	Campus profile
Completion		<i>Not specifically mentioned by students</i>
Good honours		<i>Not specifically mentioned by students</i>
Graduate prospects	Career after 6 months	Employability

The Guardian uses data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the National Student Survey, published by the Higher Education Funding Council (Hefce). The compiles also add in figures on drop-out rates, fees post 20-12 and student numbers. Most of their indicators are self-evident apart from ‘Value added’, which is a comparison of

students' individual degree results with their entry qualifications – given as a banded score out of 10. This helps to show the effectiveness of teaching at an institution – the extent to which a department helps students to exceed expectation.

When we compare the Times and Guardian with Fig. 11 and 12's reputational indicators based on student interviews about reputation and choice, we can see that some of their indicators are fairly similar and map on to indicators to do with academic and to a certain extent campus profile. The rankings are good for information on teaching, good honours, and completions, which the students in the interviews (Figs. 11 and 12) about reputation were less likely to mention. The rankings also provide a good indicator of employability. Factors that might be thought to reflect rather than form reputation, such as media profile, brand prominence, endorsements, and of course rankings, are absent from the rankings. Softer subjective factors such as culture (music, sport) are absent from the rankings, as is anything about the location of the university, although arguably these would be wrapped up in student satisfaction. So I can say that these two rankings have some elements in common, but also measure some very different things. The Times favours universities that attract top students (measuring research and completions). The Guardian favours universities that add more value, and have good teaching. Both to some extent encapsulate reputation in terms of academic quality and student outcomes but they focus on things that are quantifiable and objective rather qualitative and subjective. Because, as Fombrun and Shanley (1990) put it, there is a danger of reputation scales creating indicators that are not conceptually distinct, and demonstrate empirical relatedness. Thus the factors in rankings avoid assessments of public image, profile, and alumni affinity – all things that could be said to be described as the amplifiers of reputation rather than the academic elements, and which are inevitably hard to disaggregate. The parts that are highly factual, and numerical are included, leaving the other bits that overlap and are rather blurred. The public, it appears, look for both the facts and the blurring bits (the word of mouth endorsements, the visuals, the sense of place) when forming a view of reputation but the rankings stick to what the gathered quality assurance facts say, rather than perceptions, and they acknowledge this freely.

The impact of rankings on reputation

The next relevant question to ask is, to what extent does a change in ranking impact on a university? It appears a lot. If a university goes up the ranking, it can choose better students, which in turn allows it (possibly) to go further up the ranking. Monks and Ehrenberg (1999) showed that a one unit increase in US News and World Report corresponded to a 0.4% decrease in acceptance rate (students have less chance of

getting in), a 0.2% increase in yield (more applicants) and a 2.8 increase in average SAT scores (harder to get in). Meredith's (2004) research also showed increases in rankings resulted in higher selectivity and students with higher grades).

Rankings also have a halo effect, whereby the actual sign of going up the ranking becomes a metaphor for the positive attributes of the brand more widely. Students and parents are attracted to big names for higher education, and rankings play a part in establishing brand hierarchies (Karabel, 2005, Stevens, 2007). Students choose on the basis of quality and prominence (Rindova et al, 2005) and rankings are an indicator of prominence. Students themselves feel that attending a well ranked university adds to their own personal worth. Those who are influenced by rankings are more likely to be conscious of a university's reputation (McDonough et al. 1998). Domestic rankings in Britain appear to be used by high achieving candidates. 2007 research by Roberts and Thompson shows that users of league tables are likely to be: high income students and high achievers. Asians are more likely to value rankings than white students.

As Sirgy (1982), Levy (1959) and Rogers (1951) have shown, consumers are influenced in their buying decisions by the need to enhance their own image (self-concept) through the consumption of good as symbols. In other words, choosing a university (as a student, academic changing jobs, or business wanting a collaboration) which is prestigious, and rated by others as prestigious, enhances one's own self-image.

Thus, although rankings use indicators that are only partly indicative of a total picture of reputation, the effect of rankings is to amplify reputation.

External ranking criticism

But whilst the outside world finds rankings rather useful, it is also easy to see why they rile. Rankings are criticized for various reasons: the negative impact of poor rankings is noted by Bowden, 2000), many question the weightings, and what is being weighed (Clarke 2002, Page 1999). Student quality is often a reflection of intake policy not the quality of the university, say Gormer and Weimer 1999. Some rankings try to measure added value but they are often only a small part of the total score (Dill and Soo. 2005). World rankings favour research intensive universities to the detriment of those that specialize in teaching, technology, distance learning, or community education (Salmi, 1999).

Research and teaching are often quite separable processes, and separate skills and research orientation has been shown to have a negative impact on student satisfaction (Astin, 1996 and Pascarella, 1994). Graduation rate is not necessarily a robust measure,

as it can be controlled by the institution by lowering grades (Rosovsky and Hartley 2002). Macleans and UNSWR look at alumni giving as a measure of student satisfaction, but this may be compromised by the social background, the type of programmes offered and the size and skill of the fundraising office (Ehrenberg, 2002).

Employment measures in the UK only look at whether students have found a job six months after graduating, a time when some students may be considering further study, and with no consideration of the labour market. (Smith et al. 2000)

Some researchers show that input measures, such as faculty salaries, size of library etc. (Terrenzini and Pascarella, 1994) have little impact on students.

Graham and Thompson (2001) argue that reputational scores in the USNWR correlate with research grants and graduation rate – i.e. there is simply a duplication of scoring. Those contributing to reputational surveys for rankings are likely to be influenced by the halo effect, (Clarke 2002) rather than base their responses on a deep knowledge of the quality. The three world rankings look at universities, but they don't distinguish between the Schools or programmes so the information is felt to be useless to postdoctoral students.

Rankings do not necessarily guarantee a good student experience. Pike 2004 found that rankings were a poor predictor of student experience across 14 institutions.

Internal ranking criticisms

Alongside these criticisms from experts on reputation and higher education metrics, academics do not appreciate rankings. Only one institution can be top, and even being top means there is only one way to go. Once the indicators of a ranking have been created, one has to accept these indicators, and work to do well in them – even if you think they are not the right indicators! For those who are not top, or nowhere near the top, their university is exposed as being less good than another institution. In a study of 50 top business schools in the US, Corley and Gioia (2000) found that academics:

characterized the rankings process predominantly as a game where the players face a field that is not always level and where the rules are not only ill-specified but also subtly changing.

Academics are increasingly being measured by their senior management in terms of whether the university has gone up or down in the ranking. And if the measures rankings employ do not reflect the excellence of the university, then the exercise appears particularly callous or superficial.

My own recent work (to be published autumn 2011) with academics has revealed that older academics do not use rankings in making decisions about career change and are able to determine quality hierarchies through their own subject knowledge. Younger academics, however, refer to rankings when they talk about a university with a strong reputation, as a verifier. Citations of other academics are one of the main verifiers of quality in a university they are considering moving to.

And although the majority of academics are still inclined to dismiss rankings as distortions of reality, I propose that university managers are increasingly using them because they know that the outside world values them and they therefore result in tangible benefits (better students, more alumni giving, better research partners). Finner (2007) quotes the example of a president of Arizona State University, who is promised a \$10,000 bonus if he can raise his university ranking. Gormely and Weimer (1999) suggest rankings are a report card for universities. They are also felt to help with expanding higher education as marketing competitiveness is felt to be useful for driving up academic quality (White Paper on higher education, Dfes, 2003).

8 An overview of world university rankings

Before I look at the extent to which universities themselves acknowledge and prepare for rankings, it is important first to understand the differences between the main global rankings, and their origins. This Chapter looks in detail at two world rankings, The SJT's Academic Ranking of World Universities, and the THE/QS World University Ranking (pre 2010) and covers some of the other major educational rankings.

The two main world rankings at the time of this research were the Academic Ranking of World Universities (known as the SJT after its compiler, Shanghai Jiao Tong University) and the World University Ranking (better known as the THE/QS ranking after its compiler The Times Higher Education and QS). The two world rankings were started around the same time, the SJT began in 2003 and the THE began in 2004 with partner organization QS. Since the research was conducted, the THE has split from the QS ranking to form a third ranking and methodology.

They use different methodologies and metrics with the main difference being that the THE attempts to measure reputation, as well as statistical data, whereas the SJT just looks at statistical data. Can a measure of quality include reputation, or should quality be taken to reflect reputation?

The SJT Ranking: Academic Ranking of World Universities

The SJT Ranking, officially known as the Academic Ranking of World Universities, was initiated by the Chinese in their attempt to be internationally competitive in higher education. If they were to be the best, they needed to know what the measures of excellence were. As their devisers Liu and Cheng (2005) explained:

In order to find out the gap between Chinese universities and world-class universities, the Institute of Higher Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University (hereafter called the Ranking Group) has tried to rank research universities in the world by their academic or research performance based on internationally comparable data that everyone could check.

For the SJT ranking, research is the most vital factor. 60% of the score is based on citations/publications with a heavy leaning towards scientific journals. 10% of the result is based on income – per capita performance, which tends to disadvantage younger universities and the final 30% is related to top awards – Nobel Prizes and Fields medals which again favours institutions strong in science and mathematics. This is called Quality

of Education, but the fact that an institution attracts people who go on to win Nobel Prizes may not actually reflect on the quality of normal undergraduate or postgraduate education. Younger universities are also unlikely to have alumni who have gone on to win Nobel Prizes. In terms of scoring, the highest institution in each category is awarded 100, and then the remaining institutions are calculated as a percentage of that score.

SJT Academic World Ranking of Universities		
Criteria	Indicator	Weight
Quality of Education	Alumni of an institution winning Nobel Prizes or Fields Medals	10%
Quality of Faculty	Staff of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	20%
	Highly cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories	20%
Research outputs	Articles published in Nature and Science	20%
	Articles indexed in Science Citation index-expanded and Social Science Citation Index	20%
Per capita performance	Per capita performance	10%
Total		100%

Fig. 14 The weightings for the oldest world university ranking, the SJT Academic World Ranking of Universities

In 2005, the social sciences citation index was added to make up for the perceived scientific bias of the ranking and a weight of 2 is assigned to articles indexed in SSCI to compensate for the bias against humanities and social sciences. This is the only change to have been made to the methodology since 2004, which makes it easier for universities

to prepare for this particular ranking. The THE/QS split has made these other two rankings more volatile.

THE/QS World University Ranking (pre 2010)

The World University Ranking published by the British Times Higher Education and QS before 2010 (THE/QS) uses both qualitative and quantitative indicators to rank 600 universities. For the Peer Review, they survey approximately 6000 academics from six continents, and use three years of data, asking them to nominate leading universities in the fields in which they are considered experts. This apparently led to some nominating their own institutions, and therefore this has been disallowed since the 2007 ranking! In 2004, this Peer Review accounted for 50% of the total number of points for each university, but then in 2005 they introduced an employer survey to assess the employment rate of current graduates. About 3000 recruiters were asked to identify the 20 best universities from which they prefer to recruit graduates. THE/QS metrics are as follows (pre 2010).

THE/QS ranking		
Criteria	Indicator	Weight
Reputation based on academic opinion*	Survey of academics evaluating in specific research areas	40%
Reputation based on employer opinion**	Survey data of recruiters	10%
Teaching quality	Staff student ratios	20%
Research outputs***	Citations	20%
Seriousness of globalization	Number of international students	5%
International staff	Number of international faculty	5%
Total		100%

***Academic opinion** = In 2009, responses from 9386 academics were used to evaluate universities in specific research areas

** **Employer opinion**= Employer surveys were conducted in 2009 with 3281 organizations, regarding the top 20 universities with the most qualified graduates

*** **Research outputs**= Measures international research impact. The survey looks at the number of citations in the Thomson Scientific Database (2006-2009) or Scopus (2007-2009)

Fig. 15 The THE/QS World ranking criteria (pre 2010)

The criteria for the THE/QS are very different in comparison to the SJT, with 50% of the score based on reputation – what other people think are the best universities. Only 20% of the score is based on research outputs, and a teaching element is introduced with staff student ratios being awarded 20%. This makes the THE/QS ranking a mix of both fact and perception.

From 2010, THE have partnered with Thomson Reuters to provide all the data and analysis for the rankings. While the final weighting is not yet known, more data variables will be measured and a higher number of academics will be surveyed.

The new THE ranking 2010

When THE split from the QS ranking, it set out to consult more widely with academics as to how the rankings should evolve. They came up with the following elements:

Teaching — the learning environment (worth 30 per cent of the overall ranking score)

Research — volume, income and reputation (worth 30 per cent)

Citations — research influence (worth 32.5 per cent)

Industry income — innovation (worth 2.5 per cent)

International mix — staff and students (worth 5 per cent).

THE 'reputation-only' ranking 2011

The THE also published in 2011 a separate reputation ranking based on a survey of 13,000 academics (using data they had gathered for the 2010 reputational elements of the main survey). This revealed that Anglo-American names dominate THE World Reputation Rankings and that Japanese universities have a strong global standing (Morgan, 2011). The rankings suggest that the top six - Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Cambridge, University of California, Berkeley, Stanford University and the University of Oxford - form a group of globally recognised "super brands", getting many multiples of the responses that universities lower down the table receive. UK universities do better on reputation than on actual performance, which the THE says prompt 'concerns that the nation is "trading on reputation" that could be damaged by government policy'.

If we take four universities at random and look at them across these four rankings, we can see how much variance there is, and how wide it is outside the top 10.

Institution	THE 2010 ranking	SJT 2010 ranking	QS 2010 ranking	THE 2011 reputational ranking
Cambridge	6	5	1	3
Illinois	33	25	63	21
Rutgers	105	54	Not in	71-80
Aarhus	167	98	84	Not in

Fig. 16 Comparing the four university world rankings available in 2010/11

Of the 12 UK universities in the THE Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings (2011), eight have higher rankings in the in the other three fact-driven rankings, suggesting that their reputation is better than a factual assessment by these other data-driven measures. Cambridge rises from sixth in the World University Rankings to third in the reputation table, while the London School of Economics - which has seen its reputation take a battering in recent weeks - rises from 86th to 37th. The University of Manchester is 87th in the overall rankings but in the 61-70 bracket on reputation alone) and the University of Leeds is 168th overall but in the 81-90 reputation bracket. In the THE press release a comment from Sally Hunt, general secretary of the University and College Union, said the UK had "a proud international reputation", but added that "in the global market, we will soon get found out if I think we can trade on reputation alone". Reputation can be seen to sugar coat reality. However, whether the overall rankings present a better view of reality is a moot point.

Other Rankings

There are several other higher education rankings evaluating universities.

QS

The original partner to THE continues to publish a world ranking, with data produced by themselves and Scopus, and a number of media partners including US News and World Report, the US magazine which is known for ranking domestic US universities and colleges. The methodology is not greatly different from previous years:

1. Data gathered directly from over 2000 universities in 130 countries around the world.
2. Data on citations and papers for each university produced from Elsevier's Scopus Database.
3. A global survey of academics will collect at least 200,000 data items
4. A global survey of an estimated 5000 employers.

To many Americans' outrage, and quite a few Europeans too, QS put Cambridge University top of its ranking in 2010 and 2011, which gave it plenty of press coverage. Rankings for publications are of course an important vehicle for PR, and therefore change is necessary to get news coverage. The SJT by contrast is happy to put Harvard first every year since it started in 2003.

CHERPA-Network

The European Commission put out a tender for developing a multi-dimensional ranking, and this was won by The CHERPA-Network – the Consortium for Higher Education and Research Performance Assessment. This is a European network of research centres and Universities. Their website states:

"In the project, a design for a global ranking of higher education institutions will be developed which avoids the flaws and deficits of existing international rankings and which should provide a valid, fair comparison of institutions. The design will follow the "Berlin Principles on the ranking of higher education institutions" which stress the need to take into account "the linguistic, cultural, economic and historical contexts of the educational systems being ranked".

The multi-dimensional rankings are meant to look at teaching as well as research, and develop indicators for each type of institution. Such an approach sounds laudable, but may fail by being too complicated to actually use. The main advantage to a ranking is that

it gives the reader a clear list of who is the best. If the reader has to apply himself to this multi-dimensional approach, he or she may just lose interest!

HEEACT – Performance Ranking of Scientific Papers for World Universities

A ranking from Taiwan based on scientific citations.

Ranking Web of World Universities (Webometrics)

This looks at 12,000 universities and ranks them by their web presence. Of the top 30 universities, 21 are American. Cambridge is the only European institution, ranked 22nd. They state their methodology as follows:

Webometrics Ranking is measuring the volume, visibility and impact of the web pages published by universities, with special emphasis in the scientific output (referred papers, conference contributions, pre-prints, monographs, thesis, reports, ...) but also taking into account other materials (courseware, seminars or workshops documentation, digital libraries, databases, multimedia, personal pages, ...) and the general information on the institution, their departments, research groups or supporting services and people working or attending courses.

Global University Ranking

A Russian ranking that pools the universities assessed as excellent by the SJT, the THE/QS, HEEACT and Webometrics. Experts then assess the universities against measures:

- Academic performance
- Research performance
- Faculty expertise
- Resource availability
- Socially significant activities of graduates
- International activities of the university
- International opinion of foreign universities.
- The expert opinion is then combined and a new average score produced.

US News and World Report

A very well-known ranking used by Americans to determine university and college choice. My earlier research (Simpson, 2009) has shown that this is still the ranking of choice by

top US universities, which suggests that their recruitment is very focused on domestic students. Peer review constitutes 25% of the score.

Forbes College Rankings

Produced in 2008 and 2009, Forbes is focused on graduate success as measured by salary and status. The ranking places 50% of the score on student ratings of their professors and alumni success (based on the *Who's Who in America* publication) They also look at pay scales (self-reported by alumni), student debt etc. The self-reporting causes concern for some.

G-Factor

A ranking of university and college web presence, the G-Factor methodology only counts the number of links from other university websites relying solely on Google's search engine. The G-Factor is an indicator of the popularity or importance of each university's website from the combined perspectives of the creators of many other university websites. It therefore claims to be a kind of extensive and objective peer review of a university through its website – in social network theory terminology, the G-Factor measures the centrality of each university's website in the network of university websites.

The Leiden Ranking

This is from Leiden University's Centre for Science and Technology Studies and is based exclusively on bibliometric measures. It ranks only European universities on the basis of scientific publications.

CHE

This is a German ranking and rates universities according to different branches of studies. As it only applies to German speaking universities, it has no international comparator relevance.

The Financial Times Business School rankings

These are, arguably, the most prestigious business school rankings, and have been running since 1999. They produce 5 rankings through the year reflecting different programmes, relating to MBA, EMBA and Master in Management programmes, as well as non-degree executive education courses. There is also a ranking of top European Business Schools. This is hugely important for business schools that tend to market themselves very much on their ranked position. Ambitious international students, who take up many of the MBA courses, are often prepared to travel to any country to get to the

'best' MBA programme to enhance their career prospects. The London Business School devotes its home page graphic to its number one positioning in the FT ranking (September 2011). Controversies abound as to how different measures are weighted. For example, American universities score more highly for having international study weeks over Swiss schools that offer the chance to speak three languages. Students are apparently prone to exaggerate their leaving salaries, which boosts the rankings. A blog on the FT website reveals other criticisms:

*The FT criteria is likely to encourage business schools to 'play the game'. For example the criterion of salary increase is likely to mean that business schools discriminate in favour of young people operating in industries that award large salaries. So if you are a government employee say from the finance ministry working on exceptionally high level finance policy and are in your 40's already at the peak of your salary earnings you become a drag on the business school's league table standing despite the fact that such a candidate might add enormously to the cohort of students.*⁵

Ranking comparisons

If we look at the top 10 universities by the SJT rankings, Fig. 17, we can see that there has been much stability over the last three years, with the same universities in the top three places. Harvard has appeared as number 1 in all the rankings, except the new QS ranking, which a cynic might say has something to do with newsworthiness. If rankings are to attract readers, then there has to be some variation to make them newsworthy. The new THE ranking changed the world order lower down, rather than higher up, bringing in many new universities, but essentially there is fairly strong consensus on the top 10, apart from University of California Berkley, which the SJT places more highly than the other two.

⁵ <http://discussions.ft.com/bused/forums/mbaapplications/rankings-controversy>

University	Country	THE/QS2008	THE/QS 2009	QS 2010	THE 2010	SJT 2008	SJT 2009	SJT 2010
HARVARD University	United States	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
University of California, BERKELEY	United States	36	39	28	8	3	3	2
STANFORD University	United States	17	16	13	4	2	2	3
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	United States	9	9	5	3	5	5	4
University of CAMBRIDGE	United Kingdom	3	2	1	6	4	4	5
California Institute of Technology	United States	5	10	9	2	6	6	6
PRINCETON University	United States	12	8	10	5	8	8	7
COLUMBIA University	United States	10	11	11	18	7	7	8
University of CHICAGO	United States	8	7	8	12	9	9	9
University of OXFORD	United Kingdom	4	5	6	6	10	10	10

Fig. 17 Comparing the top universities in the SJT rankings with their position in the other ranking

Readership comparisons

If we look at the audiences for the rankings using Alexa.com, the internet site that measures readership of websites, we can see that the QS ranking gets a much higher level of reader than the SJT/ARWU ranking (Fig. 18). It is not possible to compare the THE as that doesn't have data for just the world rankings, but includes readership of the whole magazine. The reader profile is the same: based on internet averages, topuniversities.com is visited more frequently by **males** who are in the age range **18-24**, have **no children**, are **graduate school** educated and browse this site from **school**. According to this data, the QS ranking is about seven times as well read as the SJT ranking. In terms of what they define as reputation, the number of sites linking to each, QS has about 1.5 the number of sites linked to it as ARWU/SJT. It is not surprising that the QS site is more high profile given that it is managed by a large commercial organizations that promotes MBAS. The ARWU remains a unit of a university in China, with no doubt a much smaller advertising budget. However, it is interesting that its reputational measure is actually much stronger than the readership figures imply.

Ranking website	Traffic rank (a measure of site popularity, the closer the number to one, the more popular the site)	Reputation (their measure of sites linking to it)	Time on site (minutes)
QS ranking	23,200	1237	4
ARWU (SJT ranking)	156,128	845	3.5

Fig. 18 Comparing the relative popularity of the QS and SJT rankings by web traffic

Rankings as indicators of reputation in higher education

If we look at the three world rankings and combine all the indicators of reputation, Fig. 19, what do we see? The only indicator that all three agree on is research output as measured by citations. Teaching attracts agreement from the SJT and QS, as well as research, but in different proportions.

Indicator	THE	SJT	QS
Teaching –	30% (15%reputation, 15% PhDs and staff student ratios, income per academic)		20% (staff student ratios)
Research	30% (10.5% volume, income and 19.5%reputation)		
Research influence (citations)	32.5%	40%	20%
Industry income	2.5%		
International mix	5%		10%
Alumni quality (Nobel/Fields prizes)		10%	
Faculty quality		40%	
Income (Per capita performance)		10%	
Reputation			50%

Fig. 19 Comparing the indicators of three world rankings

However, if we roll up some of the categories into larger headings, putting Faculty quality under research and amalgamating the two income headings, then six categories emerge:

Indicator	THE	SJT	QS
Teaching –	30%		20%
Research	62.5%	40%	20%
Income	2.5%	10%	
International mix	5%		10%
Alumni quality (Nobel/Fields prizes)		10%	
Reputation			50%

Fig. 20 Comparing the main areas of indicators in three world rankings

Whilst the QS ranking appears to be the only one that includes reputation, THE actually has two reputational scores under teaching and research, which combine to contribute 34.5% of the whole score. Only the SJT uses ‘factual’ measures rather than reputational ones in its ranking. The SJT is alone in measuring distinguished alumni (only very high profile scientists and mathematicians count though). So, there is little agreement over what rankings ought to measure to scope quality in higher education, and how things should be weighted. As Tryon put it in 1957 in relation to psychology:

After fifty years of psychological testing, the problem of discovering the degree to which an objective measure of behaviour reliably differentiates individuals is still confused.

However, it is clear that these rankings matter, because they are visible, easily accessible, and the only clear commentary on university reputation. And because universities know that the public use them, they are going to take note of them, and publicise them.

This concludes the literature review, with my look at reputation in both commercial and university worlds, and the many ways the construct is measured.

PART TWO: RESEARCH PROJECT

A Research Project to examine the importance of ranking in relation to reputation management for World 100 universities

9 Introduction

I now move on to the research phase with a project that explores reputation in 'world-ranked' universities. This introduction summarizes the findings of the literature review and advances four hypotheses to be explored.

Based on the literature review, it appears that:

- There is a reasonably clear definition of reputation, which is the public's awareness and assessment of an organization.
- There are many different ways of measuring reputation, which present different indicators (factual and personality based), models and weightings.
- The most enduring is the Fortune method, aimed at business stakeholders, influencing Fombrun's esteemed RQ, with personality scales (Aaker, Davies et al) providing a more human notion of reputation for wider constituencies more interested in affective/subjective outputs more than objective/cognitive ones.

In terms of higher education,

- The above reputation definition also holds good but the public have much less exposure to discrete university reputation than to wide scale commercial products.
- Reputation matters enormously to students and universities because education is expensive in time and money, and is a lifelong investment (i.e. the effect endures beyond the experience, unlike most commodities)

- There is no single, applied method of gauging 'reputation' in higher education that is used across all universities or with the outside world.
- Rankings measure academic quality (with an emphasis on teaching at national level, and research at global level). They seem to be one of the most important determinants of student affinity by ambitious students (those going beyond local universities) and are becomingly more widely used by students in making university choices.
- The world rankings attract criticism as well as enormous interest; their measures are very different; and academics and countries are working on ways of creating rankings that acknowledge wider definitions of excellence, rather than just research excellence.
- In view of the dissimilarity between the world rankings, and the measures they use, the following research approaches the subject of how people use the rankings, rather than looking at whether they are the right kind of measures to capture academic quality or reputation. This also comes from the belief that whilst all measurement systems are flawed, the very fact that they are used and publicised means that they have relevance. I know they have relevance to students, but not (seemingly) to academics. The question remains, to what extent?
- Universities think rankings matter to their reputation, and to what extent do they prepare for rises and falls, do they have strategies for rising up the rankings, and which is more impactful on their reputations? Given that the measure is in place (whether good, bad, average), what impact does it have on reputation from the perspective of the university?

Based upon the foregoing discussion I was interested to explore a number of ideas.

These can be posed as four hypotheses:

- H1 That rankings are judged to be important by universities centrally, if not academics individually, on the basis of public prominence.
- H2 That rankings change university behavior and policy at a corporate level, and are one of the most important key performance indicators for senior management.
- H3 That rankings are critical in university reputation management.

- H4 That global rankings impact on international markets and reputation more than local.
- Finally, it was also interesting to test whether corporate notions of university reputation from directors and leaders correspond with the emerging reputational indicators put forward by students (see Fig 12). I can then compare these higher education indicators with those posited for business reputation.

10 Methodology

The Methodology now sets out the approach to the project, and looks at the type of universities, and the type of people who responded to the survey.

A survey was written to explore the usage of world rankings, in conjunction with a group of directors of communications from world ranked universities, who approved the methodology. The universities were University of Leeds, University of Manchester, King's College London, University College London, the University of Warwick, the University of Glasgow, the University of Hong Kong, and the University of Helsinki. The questionnaire (Appendix) was uploaded onto a site aimed at top universities (www.theworld100.com) in late 2009, but actively promoted in a series of emails in the spring of 2010. These were directed to the leaders (VC, President etc.), directors of communications/external relations (if they had one) and international directors (or similarly named equivalent – e.g. PVC for international relations) of all universities in the top 200 world rankings, which was the sample frame.

Who responded

There were 49 valid responses to the survey. Of those who chose to describe their role, I can see that the majority were Directors of Communications, or similar, followed by academic leaders.

Job title	No responses	As %
Marketing/Comms Director	10	20%
Academic Leader	6	12%
International Director	5	10%
University Leader	5	10%
Research Director	3	6%
Not Given	20	
Total respondents to questions	49	

Respondents' world ranking

Respondents were reasonably representative of the rankings, with 18 of the 31 who gave their institution in the top 100 of the 2009 THE/QS ranking.

2009 THE/QS Ranking bands	No unis in each band
1-50	6
51-100	12
101-150	5
151-200	5
201+	3
Not Given	18
Total respondents to question	49

Which world region were respondents from?

48 respondents were happy to indicate their world region. There were no responses from Africa, Central and South America, and the Middle East, which accords with the lack of world ranked (top 200) in these regions. As a percentage, there were most responses from Asia, followed by the UK, Europe, North America and Australasia.

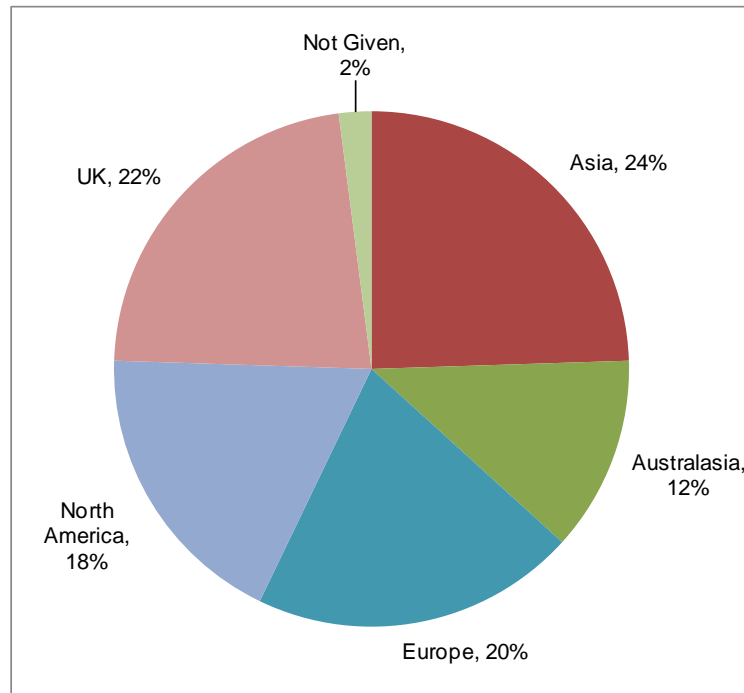


Fig. 21 Survey respondents by region

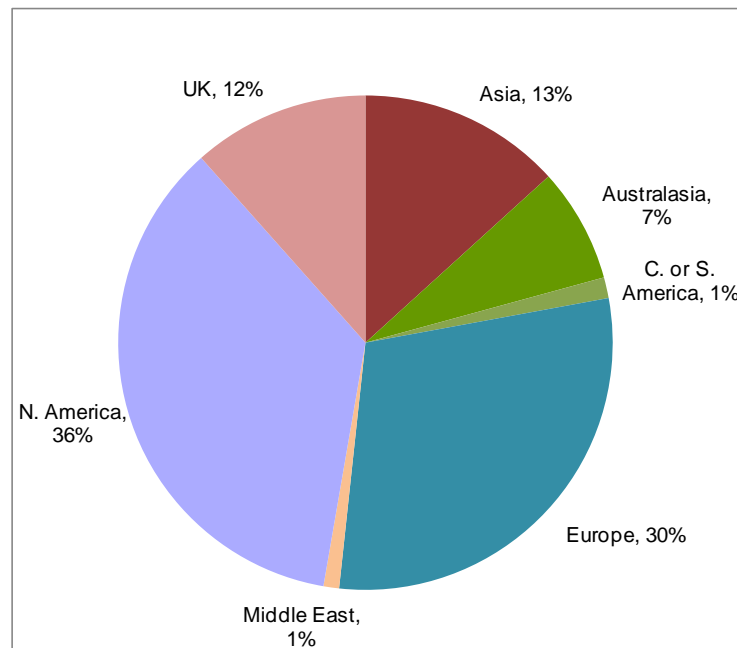


Fig. 22 Universities in the Top 200 by region

When we compare responses with the proportion of world-ranked universities by region, we see that there was a much higher response rate from Asia, the UK and Australasia compared to their world ranking proportion, and a lower response rate from North America

and the rest of Europe. It may perhaps be obvious that the more responsive countries have either a close affinity with the Times Higher Education as a journal (known to be read in Australasia, the UK and Hong Kong) or the Chinese university that produces the SJT table (Asian universities would think highly of the Shanghai Jiao Tong University perhaps). The American and European audiences perhaps have little affinity with either the THE or the SJT as an organization. Previous research also suggests North Americans as a group are less responsive to world ranking research – either because they dominate the rankings and lack curiosity because they already excel, or because they are more interested in national rankings and domestic recruitment. The lack of European response may also reside in the European Commission's documented dislike of world rankings (the current European ranking project is exploring a multidimensional approach) and a lack of affinity with the THE, but also may be to do with the survey being in English.

11 Findings

I now examine the responses to the survey questions about the impact of rankings.

Rises and Falls

I asked respondents to analyse their change in ranking from 2008 to 2009. Answers showed that almost a third had fallen in the THE/QS and risen in the SJT. UK universities however were more likely to have fallen in the THE/QS and not changed in the SJT.

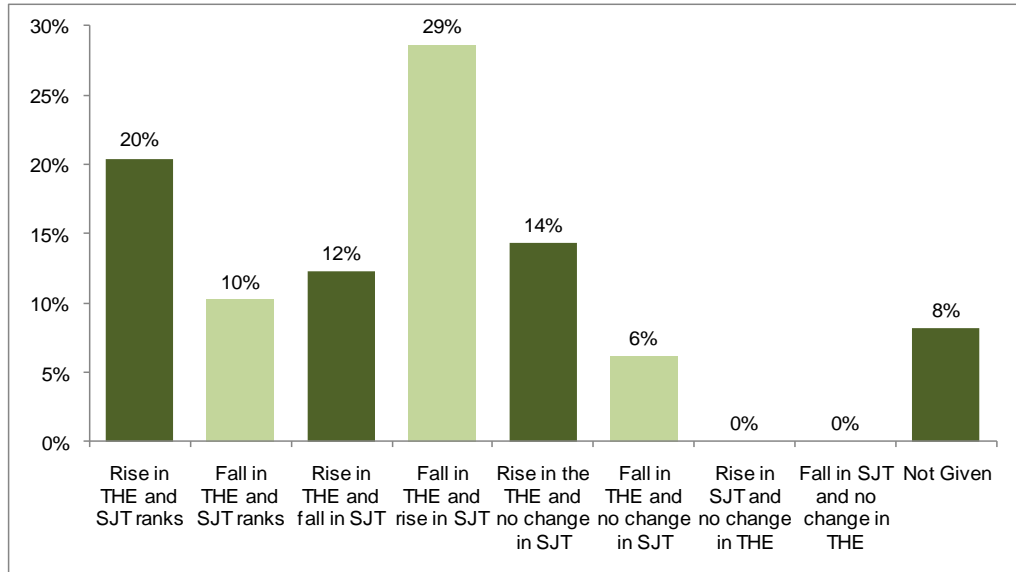


Fig. 23 Summary of respondents by their changes in THE/QS and SJT ranking

In terms of numbers of responses, I recorded the following changes:

- Rise in both 10
- Fall in both 5
- Rise in THE/QS 23
- Rise in SJT 24
- Fall in THE/QS 22
- Fall in SJT 11

Ranking preferences

When universities were asked which ranking they preferred, the THE/QS was favoured rather more than its Chinese rival. However, 83% of Australians preferred the SJT ranking.

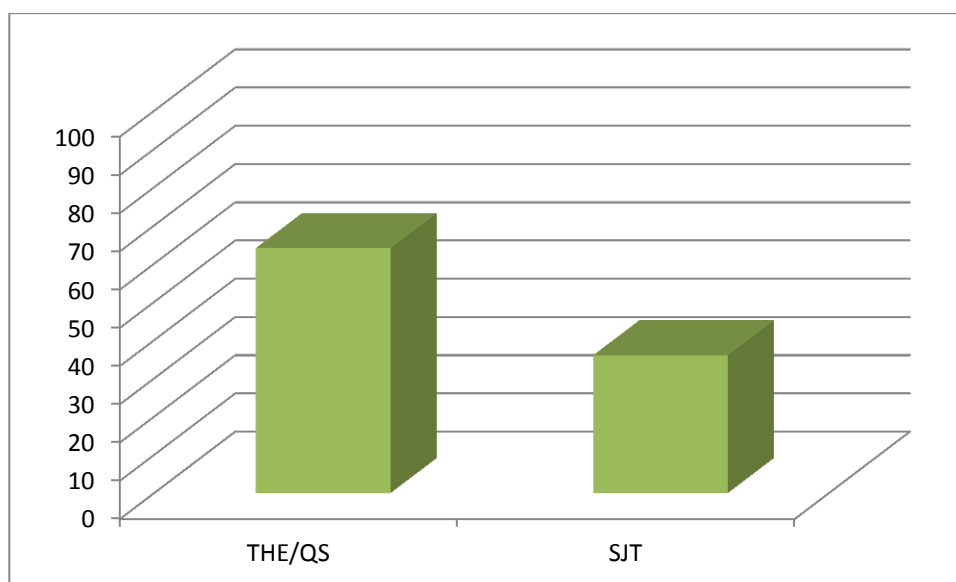


Fig. 24 Respondents' preferred world ranking

Was this preference to do with the fact that the respondents, are interested in and responsible for reputation, which the THE/QS measures, or was it reflective of the wider view of university senior management? It is not possible to tell from this data. However, there were strong regional variations, as seen with the Australasian universities preferring the SJT.

Preference reasons

For those who stated they prefer the SJT, the most popular reason was robustness (67%) followed by 'more prestigious'. The majority who prefer the THE/QS do so because it is 'the most well known' rather than more robust, although 40% still scored it as 'more robust'. Interestingly for those who prefer the THE/QS, 30% say it is because it has more impact on staff and students. Perhaps this is not surprising given that the THE/QS is in an international journal, whereas the SJT is publicised only through the ranking website of the publishing university – i.e. it is perhaps less well known outside academic circles. Of those who prefer the SJT, only 8% said it was because they felt it had most impact on students and staff.

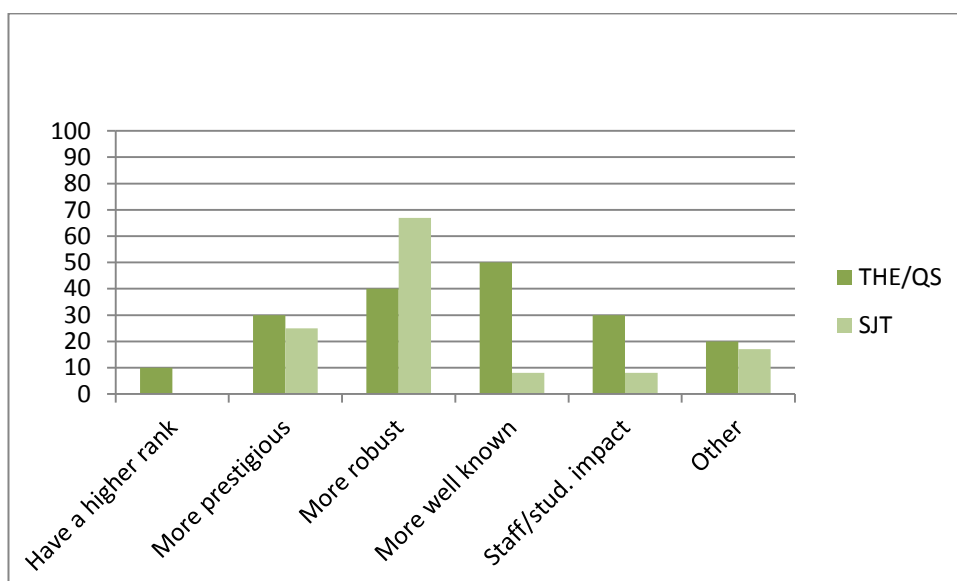


Fig. 25 Respondents' reasons for preferring one ranking over another

Other reasons for preferring the THE/QS ranking included:

Reflects social sciences/humanities.

SJT favours science.

Local media is only interested in THE/QS ranking

Other reasons for preferring the SJT ranking included:

Focus on research performance.

Internal perception.

I guess those two are both equally important to us. However, the academic performance of the uni matters more in our institution.

Cause of ranking falls: THE/QS

Few were willing to say why they might have fallen in the THE/QS, and when reasons were expressed they were all different but included notions of student satisfaction, and the role of reputation. There were some who commented that the methodology was so opaque that they would not be able to tell why they had fallen. Reasons for falling included:

Student satisfaction survey results

Changing methodology...too much reliance on reputation.

Hard to know since the methodology is so opaque, and microscopic changes at the top can result in major changes.

The fall was slight (3 places) and could be explained by better performance of other universities.

Cause of ranking falls: SJT

There were no given reasons for falls in the SJT. Comments included:

No specific reason. Differences are small, so this is considered to be a normal fluctuation.

One new institution joined the rankings and we fell 1 place.

Preparing for ranking results

The largest ranking changes in the SJT were around 40 places, although most institutions reported a change of between 1 and 3 places.

The changes in the THE/QS were more dramatic, with some moving well over 50 places. Changes between 10 and 30 were also relatively common. (The Editor of the THE world rankings after splitting with QS commented recently that the violent fluctuations in rankings were one of the drivers to their deciding to change their methodology this year, as it was felt to discredit the actual score system).

Had the University management team anticipated the fall in your rankings?

Of those who fell in the SJT and the THE/QS none had anticipated the fall. Some felt they had gone down just because another university had done better – rather than it being a reflection of ‘poor performance’.

One respondent said of their THE/QS fall:

“How could you? Reputation is the biggest weight and you have absolutely no ability to influence this, given you don't know who is doing the ranking.”

With little or no evidence that senior management teams had anticipated the fall in either rank, there appears to be no contingency planning. However, we must also bear in mind with all these responses that complete transparency over such a sensitive issue may not be possible.

Have you publicised your rise in the world league tables?

Of the 18 universities who responded to this question, 13 said yes, and 5 said no. Of the 14, 9 said they had publicized it in a *strategic* way. Those who gave more detail about how they publicized ranked positions mentioned corporate publications, press releases, websites etc. Many said they had used ranking positions in their regular stakeholder communications and speeches, both internally and externally. One reported using their rank strategically for international recruitment; another said it was part of their key performance indicators and part of their culture of promoting research 'aggressively'.

Best ways of measuring reputation

Is a high/improving world ranking the most critical/important externally awarded accolade/reputation metric for your University?

The great majority (over three quarters) said no to this, but proffered a range of other metrics including: research awards/funding/output, patents, Ph.D. students and international partners as being the most important. Many of these alternatives are already represented by the world rankings, some can be put to one side as they represent opportunism rather than quality (e.g. number of alliances) or size – how can the number of students be a proxy for quality? But a few emerge as being strong reputational indicators and quite different to ranking indicators. Of these, several get repeat mentions – i.e. teaching quality, new research projects/patents, media coverage, international partnerships and major research awards. It appears that there is a strong desire to get away from measures that relate to historic factors (deceased Nobel prize winners, endowments) and instead put the emphasis on current achievements.

Fig. 26 Suggestions for better ways of measuring reputation in universities

Indicators of reputation	No. men- tions	Already represented in SJT?	Already represented in THE?
Top researchers, research outputs, research rankings, research metrics	4	Yes in sense of citations coverage	Yes, in sense of citations coverage
Major research awards, accolades, international and national prizes	4	No – except Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	No
Patents and big projects, new research projects	3	No	No
Media profile, coverage	3	No	No
Research grants, research funding/external funding	2	Yes in terms of per capita income although skewed by existing endowments	No
Top teachers, quality of teachers	2	No	Staff-student ratio = more about quantity than quality
International partnerships, alliances, networks	2	No	No

Fig. 26 Suggestions for better ways of measuring reputation in universities (cont.)

Indicators of reputation	No. men- tions	Already represented in SJT?	Already represented in THE?
Global distinctiveness	1	No	Yes - In terms of number of international students and staff
Student quality and demand	1	No	Yes - Employer survey
Business school rankings and memberships	1	No	No
Expert opinion of those who visit us	1	No	Yes – peer review
National indicators of quality assurance	1	No	No
Brand measurement	1	No	Yes - Peer review, employer review
Number of students	1	No	Yes - No. of international students
PhD completions	1	No	No
Internships	1	No	No
International students	1	No	Yes

Rankings and strategic intent

I was interested to know to what extent universities used rankings as part of institutional strategies and key performance indicators, whether public or internal facing. I therefore asked:

Has the University set any objectives regarding its world league table ranking? (E.g. to improve its ranking, to enter the top 50 etc.)

Almost a third (30%) of respondents said that their university had set objectives (targets) regarding its world league table ranking. There is no difference between institutions whose world ranking rose or fell.

The most common objective amongst those already in the World 100 is to reach the 'top 50'; the 'top 25' was another common goal; for those in the Top 200, the goal is to be in the 'top 100'. Therefore these major numerical thresholds (25, 50, 100, 200) are very important to universities, rather than specific numbers. Ranges are also easier to hit than specific numbers and more memorable for key stakeholders. The important thing is what range you are in, not what number you are. This also helps to disguise minor falls. Crossing thresholds are also hugely important – to rise into the top 100, or to fall out of it, are both catalysts for senior management discussions.

Other comments included:

To enter the top 50 (in at least one table) by 2015, the University's 50th anniversary.

Don't have (objectives) ready at hand, but it (the effort) was considerable. It strains credibility to rise or fall much from year to year.

THE Ranking is relevant for our university since they decided to change their methodology and separate from QS.

Because of the quality of the university it should be included in the top 50. The university is ranked number one in the local ranking.

(our target is to) Enter top 50

To enter top 15 by the year 2025.

We hope to improve it but have no target.

We have established a plan to move into the top 20 public universities in the US, but this doesn't include an international ranking component.

No specific objective except to provide relevant data that reflects our standing.

Objective to become better in research.

Top 100 by 2013; top 50 by 2050.

Ranking-results will increase with an increase in our quality and our performance. The rankings measure some of the effects, but it is the initiatives themselves that are important

Although there is no a number improvement, it is very important to take care of the rankings, how we appear there, and so on.

Top 100 in five years (2014).

If an *objective* is a specific, precise goal with a measurable performance indicator, i.e. to reach a certain number in a ranking, then to what extent do universities have broader *strategies*, top-level ranking plans, to rise up rankings? Strategies are more likely to be private plans, not ones shared with competitors, but in some case they are public manifestos designed to motivate staff and to impress external stakeholders. Sometimes the very act of having a declared strategy to rise up the rankings is likely to impress stakeholders as much as the actual achievement, our own research shows. I therefore asked:

Have Universities developed a strategy designed to support a strong/robust/higher position in the World league tables?

Of those who went up in the rankings, whilst only a third of respondents had set a specific objective/target to rise up rankings, 56% reported that the their university had developed a strategy designed to support a strong/robust/higher position in the world league tables. The ways of doing this included: data management, better staff recruitment, student satisfaction improvements, promotion of international activities, extending networking, attract more research funding, recruit the best minds, internal communications of the aim (of going up in rankings).

Of those who went down in the rankings, a small number (less than half) had a strategy for supporting a higher position in the rankings. This compares with the ones who had gone up in the rankings, of whom two thirds said they had a strategy to do so.

There may therefore be a correlation between having a strategy and rising in the rankings, if those who go down are less likely to have a strategy to progress than those who go up. With regards to the higher number of strategies than objectives, it would suggest that University managers see objectives as public facing, and a strategy as an internal, private document. If this is the case, then it shows a lack of willingness to create targets for the public domain (in case of failure) but still a wish to climb the rankings for the prestige and reputation this brings.

The impact of a decline in rankings on reputation

None of those who went down in the rankings said they had noticed any impact, perhaps because the changes were very slight, and most were still regarded as a top quality university. Some may not have wanted to admit to reputational damage. Comments included:

Our place in the World Rankings has been pretty consistent. It would take a major shift either way to have a noticeable impact on reputation.

No one mentions it. Parents and alumni notice US News⁶, which faculty note with contempt.

The difference between 13 and 14 is not significant for our reputation in these surveys.

Our strategy has only just been put into place.

The impact of a rise in ranking on reputation

Just under half of those who went up in the ranking confirmed that they had noticed an impact. They noted that their name was now much better known internationally, that visiting professors mentioned the rankings, and that their visibility had greatly improved.

Just over half detected no impact on their reputation after a rise in ranking. Some said it was impossible to measure, others noted a very minor change. Other comments included:

⁶ UNSWR – the American domestic rankings for universities.

Asian universities seem more concerned about rankings.

Not really, we were already in the top 100.

Regular market research with key opinion formers reflects a specific impact.

We anticipate that once we make the top 100, that is when the impact will be most potent.

There have been a few more approaches from other higher academic institutions as well as invitations to present our strategies at conferences.

Number of applicants to become staff and post graduate applications are increasing.

Specific impacts

In terms of specific things that might have become easier as a result of ranking improvements, relationships with other world-class universities seemed to be the main benefit, followed by better and easier international student recruitment. The order of perceived benefits was as follows:

Most mentioned	The ability to attract the best academic staff talent
	The University's ability to forge NEW partnerships of value with other world leading universities and governments
	Quality and demand of international students
	Morale of non-academic and academic staff
Also mentioned	The University's ability to fundraise
	Volume of international coverage
	The ability to fundraise

Fig. 27 Benefits – things that are easier to do with a rise in ranking

Most mentioned	The morale of academic staff
	The morale of non-academic staff
Also mentioned	The University's ability to fundraise
	The University's ability to forge NEW partnerships of value with other world leading international universities
	The ability to attract the best academic staff talent
	The ability to fundraise

Fig. 28 Drawbacks – things that are harder to do with a fall in ranking.

However, some universities also noted that some things were easier, despite slipping, including the ability to attract international students, international media coverage volume

and tone. The international student numbers not slipping are more likely to be the result of the rapid expansion of higher education, thus students continue to increase, even with minor declines in ranking. However, with big increases in ranking, student numbers noticeably rise too.

When asked to predict what a future and consistent decline in ranking over a 3-5 year period would mean, the most likely negative impacts were:

- Reduced ability to attract the top international academics
- Less interest from world leading international universities in partnering our university

A consistent rise in ranking was most likely to cause:

- Increased demand/applications from international students
- More interest from world leading universities in partnering our university

National versus international impacts

65% said that there was some or significant impact within their own country. When asked about international impact, this figure rose to around three quarters. Those who rose in the rankings thought they had a bigger effect nationally than those who fell, but it was still not as significant as the impact internationally.

12 Conclusions

This section now compares the research findings with my four hypotheses to see what we can learn about rankings and university reputation. I also look at how the findings relate to the emerging model for indicators of university reputation (Fig. 12) and combine the indicators suggested by the survey respondents with these earlier interviews with students on university reputation, to make a more holistic model of university reputational indicators.

The four hypotheses were broadly supported by the research, with the proviso that the respondents were small in number and answering questions that were highly subjective, and requiring answers of a very confidential nature – it is not always possible to tell how open people are being. But given this, I can still draw some tentative conclusions.

- **H1 That rankings are judged to be important by universities centrally on the basis of public prominence.**

The study supported this finding by demonstrating that the results of rankings are used prominently in public relations, internal communications and goal setting by senior management. The THE/QS ranking, which combines scores for reputation, was the preferred ranking, and of those who preferred it over the SJT, more said this was down to prominence than robustness. However, there are still a significant proportion who prefer the SJT because it is more robust despite being less prominent.

- **H2 That rankings change university behavior and policy at a corporate level, and are one of the most important key performance indicators for senior management.**

This hypothesis was supported even though a rise or fall was felt to be unpredictable. Rises in ranking are publicized widely by the university, on web pages, in publications, in speeches and to the staff. No contingency planning for a fall was admitted to, however, but much is done to encourage a rise through making it a focus of staff ambitions. 56% reported that their university had developed a strategy designed to support a strong/robust/higher position in the world league tables. Rankings are used to set goals in universities but few have targets for a specific number. More aim to break into a threshold – e.g. top ten, top

50 or top 100. Of those who go up in the rankings, two thirds had a strategy to rise. Of those who fell, less than a half had a strategy to rise. This suggests there may be a link between planned strategic advancement and actual advancement.

The research shows there is little or no evidence of planning in anticipation of a fall in ranking. This may be true, or it may disguise the truth that some planning for a fall takes place, but is not admitted to?

- **H3 That rankings are critical in university reputation management** This hypothesis was partially supported, but perhaps not as strongly as I expected. Just under half noted a change in impacts around them or external to them. Impacts from rises include the ability to attract the best staff, to forge new partnerships of real value, to get better and more international students and improve staff morale. Falls in ranking impact on staff morale, the ability to fund raise and to attract the best academic talent. This suggests falls are more noticeably to internal audiences, and peers, than wider publics – perhaps because students don't look for falls as much as the presence of universities in tables?

However, universities say they **do not regard ranking as the most critical** external reputation metric, but advance many others, the most common of which are to do with excellent research outputs and impacts. Ironically, these tend to be covered in rankings quite extensively. Innovation (patents and projects) and media coverage are the next most frequently mentioned reputation indicators.

- **H4 That global rankings impact on international markets and reputation more than local.**

This hypothesis was clearly supported. The impact of a change in world ranking is thought to be felt most in international rather than domestic markets and to affect the institution’s ability to attract academics, international students and prestigious university partners.

Consistent rise in ranks	Consistent fall in ranks
Increased demand/applications from international students	Reduced ability to attract the top international academics
More interest from world-leading international universities in partnering our university	Less interest form world-leading international universities partnering our university
Enhanced ability to attract the top international academics	Falling share of the best international students

Fig. 29 The impact of rises and falls in rankings, according to survey respondents

The national impact is less intense whether for a rise or a fall, suggesting that your countrymen, your domestic students and parents, are the ones who are least likely to shift in their opinion of you, or more likely to put location over reputation.

Reputation is much more volatile for audiences overseas, who are looking for proof that you are worth investing in before they travel a long way, and are choosing from a much broader pool of universities. Reputation is perhaps, for many, more important than precise location. Therefore any change in ranking is much more likely to impact on your reputation.





	National Impact	International Impact
Rise		
Fall		

Fig. 30 The greater international impact of rises and falls in rankings compared with national impacts, according to survey respondents

Thus in essence, the international impact is greater for a rise or a fall compared with the national impact. Falls are slightly less important than rises for both markets, according to respondents.

Do academic notions of reputation correspond with the emerging reputational model for higher education?

It is useful in concluding this chapter and before a general discussion of the thesis to explore the overlaps between reputation as perceived by the directors of reputation in universities, and reputation as perceived by students. Also to compare the emerging indicators with those used for measuring business reputation. To this end, I have combined the reputational indicators nominated by these leading universities in this survey with the indicators already aggregated from previous research which mainly asked students how they identified a good university (see Figs. 11 and 12). These are now represented in Fig. 31.

There are some areas of overlap, and some areas that are new, highlighted in yellow, which brought the innovation element to the fore with new research, research grants and patents. Also teaching makes a welcome appearance, as do PhD completions. Teaching is the one measure rankings really fail to get a grip on, and the best UK students can do is to look at the National Student Satisfaction surveys. However, this is limited by the fact that students only tend to experience one university's teaching. Internships is a new and interesting measure – i.e. courses that students do in vacations that universities set up. This leads me to change the title of this measure from Employability to Business Interface. I suspect that the number of spin off companies, business interactions and embedded research laboratories would also be signs of reputational success for the business community – another relevant stakeholder group. Global distinctiveness and brand measures are slightly different aspects to public prominence, which are arguably representations of the whole indicators – the old problem of overlapping measures. However, at this stage, it seems more important to list all, rather than blur things together before further testing.

Reputational indicators arising from student interviews	Dimension	Reputational indicators nominated by reputation directors (World 100 survey)
Management		
Culture		
Campus	Institutional character	
Location		
Resources and facilities		
Diverse student body		Size (not quite the same thing!)
Student experience		
Business school status		Business school rankings and membership
Admissions selectivity	Academic profile	Student quality and demand
Flagship programmes		
Famous academics Excellent research		Awards, accolades
Well known departments		
		New research, research grants, research funding, patents
		Top teachers, quality of teachers
		PhD completions
Media profile		
Community liaison/outreach	Public and international prominence	
Partners of influence/co brands		International partners, alliances and networks
Prominence in public life		Global distinctiveness
		Brand measures
Employability	Business interface	
		Internships
Family and advisor endorsements	Third Party Endorsements	Expert opinion of those who visit us
Rankings		National indicators of quality assurance (retention, student satisfaction, programme quality)
Alumni affinity		

Fig. 31 Drawing together reputational indicators from both students and university directors of reputation. New areas mentioned by the World 100 reputational university directors, but not in previous research, are highlighted in yellow

Comparing university reputation indicators with business reputation indicators

Having a formative set of indicators of reputation for higher education, I can now revisit the indicators of reputation mapped by Fombrun, Helm, Forbes and Fortune, and see how they compare (Fig. 32). Many of the educational indicators are very similar in substance, even if nomenclature differs. I have highlighted these in yellow. Quality of product is something that 'institutional character' and 'academic profile' covers broadly, if we assume students, staff, place and programme are university 'products'. Innovation is similar to the innovation that leads research funding and patents in universities, and is clearly a marker of a strong university as well as a good business. Universities that are innovative attract more research funding, as well as potentially more students, and better staff. Companies that are innovative tend to attract more customers, provided that innovation is matched by sensible pricing.

Social responsibility and citizenship is less important, it would seem, to universities for forming reputation, although 'culture' and 'community liaison and outreach' might be said to encompass this. I suspect 'social responsibility' is not highlighted as a major reputational indicator in universities because of its presence rather than its absence - i.e. all universities are expected already to be socially responsible, and therefore it is not a defining characteristic, more an expected one. Helm's 'value for money' isn't mentioned as an aspect of reputation, by students or reputational leaders. At the moment, there is a correlation between high quality and high price in universities, certainly in the MBA world and US universities. Financial performance is less critical to university reputation because this is not a very transparent measure to outsiders, and there are no 'share-holders' as such. But students and university leaders do look for universities that are well resourced, and well managed. Treatment of employees and workplace environment is not yet very evident as a measure of reputation in universities unlike businesses, perhaps because again most universities are seen to be fairly agreeable places to work in the main. People are not attracted to them because of high salaries, and they tend to be seen as places of liberal values and relaxed working hours (even if this is more myth than reality!).

Fombrun et al (2000) Reputation Quotient	Helm's characteristics of reputation (2005)	Forbes/Reputation Institute's World's Most Reputable Companies (2010)	CNN/Fortune's Most Admired Companies (2011)	Emerging HE model of reputable universities (student and reputation leaders views combined)
1 Product and services	1 Quality of products	1 Product/services	1 Product/services quality	Institutional character
	2 Value for money	2 Innovation	2 Innovation	Academic profile and research funding etc Value for money not present as an indicator
2 Social responsibility	3 /4 Commitment to protecting the environment	3 Citizenship	3 Social responsibility	(Community liaison/outreach is closest indicator here)
3 Financial performance	5 Corporate success	4 Performance	4 Use of corporate assets	Resources and facilities
	6 Financial performance		5 Long term investment	
			6 Financial soundness	
4 Workplace environment	7 Treatment of employees	5 Workplace		Institutional character – some elements here similar
5 Emotional appeal	8 Customer orientation			Culture and Student experience perhaps covers this partly?
6 Vision and Leadership	9 Qualification of management	6 Governance	7 Quality of Management	Management
		7 Leadership	8 People Management	
			9 Global competitiveness	Global distinctiveness/international partners
				Business interface
				Third party endorsements

Key

Yellow highlights = item important to both business and university reputation

Green highlights = important more important to business reputation than university reputation but some similarities in other areas

Blue highlights = item important to business reputation but not university reputation

Red highlights = item important to university reputation but not business reputation

Fig. 32 Comparing business reputation indicators with HE reputation indicators

This may change as universities become subject to stronger market forces, and to an extent work ethos is changing fast in the UK, with many staff being made redundant in anticipation of cuts to teaching grants.

Global competitiveness, prioritised by Fortune's list, is very similar to the university indicator of global distinctiveness, having international partners of influence and having a diverse student body. Students are beginning to notice the ruthlessness of work environments, particularly those in PhD programmes.

The two main areas represented in the university list but not in the commercial lists are 'third party endorsements' covering rankings and word of mouth etc, and 'business interface', which suggests a reputable university is one with good business contacts.

Thus one might very tentatively conclude that:

- a) Many of the business indicators apply to universities, but words and terms vary. Management, innovation, quality of product, etc are applicable in both worlds. Financial performance is more important to a business than a university on the face of things, but many other of the stated HE indicators relate to strong finance in universities.
- b) Citizenship and treatment of staff have less high profile in university reputations than in business reputations, probably because all universities are felt to be fairly similar in terms of fairness and social responsibility. Thus they are not points of differentiation.
- c) Third party endorsements and business contacts are seemingly more important for a university's reputation than a business's. This would need much thorough testing, not least because the different academics scoped reputation in different ways to me, and perhaps didn't ask questions about external verifiers. However, it is clear that universities are very expensive places to 'connect' with, and external verification is needed before making any commitment to join.

13 Discussion

I now conclude the project by looking at some of the main findings my project has uncovered; I also pose questions that remain unanswered in relation to rankings and university reputation. Finally, I consider where this work sits in relation to existing theoretical commentaries, and suggest areas of investigation that might further enhance our understanding of the construct of reputation and rankings in higher education.

The public appeal of rankings

We know that reputation will continue to be hard to measure because it is a vague construct, with indicators that can overlap and be hard to disaggregate, shifting with different stakeholder groups. But rankings secure a long term fan base. The most established way of measuring reputation is the Fortune ranking, the basis for other acclaimed metrics (the RQ and its successors). A hierarchical list of companies, or universities, from top to bottom is something that taps into a human need for brevity, simplicity and comparative information – and also provides us with an opportunity to contest the results.

Rankings have particular appeal in higher education for a prospective student or parent. Choosing where to study, or work as an academic, involves so many factors – life style decisions for the duration of study, then long term benefits to do with graduate jobs and future friendships. One cannot simply look for innovation in a university that is full of innovators, there is not one top product like Apple has to show each year, no huge advertising campaign pumping out a single theme, or a balance sheet that shows return to shareholders. How is teaching measured against research, is a campus library more valuable than an Olympic swimming pool? Are sharp graduates a sign of brilliant teaching, middle class upbringing, innate privilege, private schooling, or narrow selection policies – i.e. you only let bright people in? Are the best universities, just the wealthiest, because they can attract the best staff, and build the best campuses?

Then we have the problem with user testing. Education is not a repeat purchase experience that can be tried out to create confidence. The cost is high both in money and time and you will always be a graduate of your chosen university. Students are being asked to evaluate their courses and their facilities more and more, but they tend only to be able to draw on one, and only a small proportion will have experienced two universities, to make their assessments. And so the public need a method of validation and reassurance

before making a commitment to something that they will be committed to for life. Rankings have always been popular as one of the simplest ways of seeing 'who is best' and making comparative decisions, even if the information is biased, or not put together well. The most ambitious students are likely to read rankings and cross refer to them in great detail. Prospective students, and their parents, have no other ways of comparing a multiplicity of universities; the internet allows for rapid sharing of the rankings, there is a clear sense of which is best, in which country to confirm decisions, and to inform a short list.

The institutional appeal of rankings

What the research shows, however, is that rankings are not just useful to, and used by the public (mainly students); they are also a critical part of senior leadership and reputation management for universities, not because of their accuracy necessarily, but because they have an impact internally and externally. They cannot be ignored. For university leaders, and managers of their corporate brand, rankings have immense appeal, as universities who go up in the rankings experience specific advantages (easier to recruit staff, boost of staff morale, easier to recruit international students, invitations to partner with highly ranked universities). The rankings both leverage reputation, and amplify it, even though they are based on factors that are not fully reflective of university reputation or embracing the multiple stakeholders who constitute reputation. And when universities publicise their findings, they are implicitly endorsing the methodologies. So the public believes them all the more.

There are more things to explore beyond the scope of this project. Looking at reputational indicators that are as important to academics as rankings, also helps us begin to build a model for measuring reputation in higher education that combines academic and student perspectives. How can the emerging indicators be measured in an effective way? Should the measures to do with reputation and audience be taken out, or left in? Should rankings be included in the measure, or set aside as a further commentary? Who should such measures be tested on, and on what scale? Should the indicators be weighted? And how should scores be reported? Should personality attributes (warmth, innovative, robust) be included alongside the cognitive attributes highlighted?

In terms of the rankings themselves, it will be interesting to see whether those that achieve international coverage (THE and QS), because they are owned by or published in media outlets, have more purchase than the low profile SJT. The new THE methodology will be closely examined for greater robustness as it continues to try to combine the best of factual measures and perceptual ones. The mix will continue to cause concern for some who regard the two as quite separate things. The SJT ranking will continue to have

both fans and detractors as it focuses on research to the exclusion of teaching and innovation. Its weighting of Nobel Prize winners and wealth will also alienate any new thrusting universities, who will naturally incline towards other measures. QS will probably be the next ranking to evolve as it strives to create a stronger identity after the tumult of the THE pulling away from it, particularly as it manages to create high profile vehicles for viewing (The Times Good University Guide, and the US News and World Report publications). The European project will be one to watch to see if multi-dimensional mapping is clarifying or confusing. Will the public warm to this complex approach? If there are to be more rankings in future will one ranking become the definitive measure, or will a plethora of rankings make them individually less well regarded?

In the meantime, rankings are likely to continue to inform academics and students in their university choices, and be used by employers and governments in decision making. They are clear, concise, and annually updated. They are easy to find, and free to share with friends. Universities broadcast their rankings, and thus affirm their credibility. And there is no other way of navigating and measuring universities' reputations, whatever their shortcomings. Because of this, world rankings are de facto the only measure of reputation in higher education that is public, global and comparative. Their monopoly makes them critical in reputation management.

Reputation management in the commercial sector is still at an early stage of evolution. At issue is how reputation and its allied constructs including image and identity are defined (Fombrun and van Riel, 1997; Chun, 2005) and how each should be measured. The measurement debate is quite profound with current attention being paid to whether measures should be formative or reflective (Helm, 2005). There is the longer standing debate as to the nature of the links between reputation and performance (Fombrun, 1996). This study suggests that the issues in higher education are somewhat different and although there is enormous interest in robustness of measures (mainly on the part of universities and commentators), practicality is winning out and 'traffic' (online viewing numbers) are validating the measures irrespective of whether they are 'good ones'. What matters here is that customers, i.e. students and their advisors, use rankings as a basis for decision making. They do so because it is impractical to sample the product, particularly for the growing numbers of 'foreign' students. In the UK where the funding of higher education has moved from the Government to the individual, such measures are just as likely to be influential with home students going forward. Rankings even influence the perception of existing students, and somewhat more so than the actual student experience it would seem (Sung and Yang, 2008).

Rankings are a proxy for reality but, I would argue, have now become reality. They become real when both students and University managers treat them as real in their decision making. The empirical work presented here shows clearly that such managers set targets in terms of rankings. Prior work has shown that rankings are consistently placed high in the criteria used by students. There are parallels in the commercial world, for example when consumer associations rate products and identify a 'best buy' using criteria that they define. However few products being tested in this way approach the price tags of higher education nor their perceived influence on future careers. There are overlaps between the commercial and the academic systems as the summary at the end of the previous chapter aimed to show, but in many ways the two systems are distinct.

One issue in relying upon rankings for the student is the lack of consistency between them. As chapter 8 showed, there are many rankings for higher education and few share the same criteria or produce the same rank order. One possible parallel in the commercial world is that of employment. The decision-making, the choice of employer, is similar in scope and nature to a choice of university. Rankings do exist of employers and it would be useful perhaps to explore any synergies between the two areas in further research. It would also be useful to test more thoroughly the elements of 'reputation' in higher education, by conducting a much wider study, that asked students, businesses, parents, university leaders, and university staff the same questions about reputation and uses the same definitions. Currently, we are relying on different works that have approached the matter from varied methodologies, with inconsistent definitions of reputation, and asking different questions to formulate the indicators (for example, 'what are the factors that lead you to choose a university', is subtly different to 'which is the most reputable university'.

This work has focussed on management views in what has been a largely exploratory study by questionnaire survey, and with all the caveats this implies as to the robustness of any conclusions. To study the links between rankings and management action further would require the ability to see inside the actual decision-making of a number of universities and over time.

End

Appendix

This is the questionnaire used in the research, and sent to universities in the top 200 rankings.

Questionnaire

It would help us know which university you are, but we appreciate that you may prefer to answer this anonymously. We are offering a free summary of the findings to all those that complete the survey - please leave your details at the end of the survey if you would like a copy.

1. If you are happy to be named, please fill in the details of your university, and who you are here:
 - a. University
 - b. Job Title
 - c. I would prefer to remain anonymous

2. Please indicate which world region you are in:
 - a. Africa
 - b. Asia
 - c. Australasia
 - d. Central and South America
 - e. Europe
 - f. Middle East
 - g. North America
 - h. UK

3. In which country is your institution?

4. Which of the following describes the changes from 2008 to 2009 in WORLD rank for your institution?
 - a. Rise in THE and SJT
 - b. Fall in THE and SJT
 - c. Rise in THE and fall in SJT
 - d. Fall in THE and rise in SJT
 - e. Rise in THE and no change in SJT
 - f. Fall in THE and no change in SJT
 - g. Rise in SJT and no change in THE
 - h. Fall in SJT and no change in THE

5. Which WORLD ranking matters more to you as an institution
 - a. SJT
 - b. THE

6. Why does that ranking matter more? Please select all that apply?
 - a. We have a higher rank in that table
 - b. I believe it is the most prestigious world ranking
 - c. It's more robust (we prefer the methodology)
 - d. It is the most known ranking (most referred to by the agencies, governments and partners I work with)
 - e. It has the most impact on the students and staff we want to attract
 - f. Other (please detail)

7. Did your institution rise or fall in the THE between 2008 and 2009?
 - a. Rise
 - b. Fall

8. What do you think was the underlying reason for the fall in your rank?

9. Had the University management team anticipated/expected the fall in your THE ranking?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know

As you have seen a rise in your rank in the league table that matters to you most you are being routed to questions that relate to the impact of an increase in world rank. Please click below to continue.

10. Did your institution rise or fall in the SJT between 2008 and 2009?
- Rise
 - Fall

11. What do you think was the underlying reason for the fall in your SJT rank?

12. Had the University management team anticipated/expected the fall in your SJT rank?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know

As you have seen a fall in your rank in the league table that matters to you most you are being routed to questions that relate to the impact of a decrease in world rank. Please click below to continue.

13. Which WORLD ranking matters more to you as an institution?
- SJT
 - THE

14. Why does that ranking matter more? Please select all that apply:
- We have a higher rank in that table
 - We believe it is the most prestigious world ranking
 - It's more robust (we prefer the methodology)
 - It is the most known ranking (most referred to by the agencies, governments and partners we work with)
 - It has the most impact on the students and staff we want to attract
 - Other (please detail)

15. Which WORLD ranking matters more to you as an institution?
- SJT
 - THE

16. Why does that ranking matter more? Please select all that apply:
- We have a higher rank in that table
 - We believe it is the most prestigious world ranking
 - It's more robust (we prefer the methodology)
 - It is the most known ranking (most referred to by the agencies, governments and partners we work with)
 - It has the most impact on the students and staff we want to attract
 - Other (please detail)

17. By how many places did you rise in the two tables from 2008 to 2009?
- SJT
 - THE

18. Have you publicised/promoted/communicated your rise in the world league tables?
- Yes – in a planned and strategic manner
 - Yes – but not systematically
 - No

If yes please outline the channels/tactics/methods you used to promote the ranking rise to both internal and external audiences:

19. Is a high/improving world ranking the most critical/important externally awarded accolade/reputation metric for your University?
- Yes
 - No

c. Unsure

If No, what is the most important accolade? Which award results/announcements etc. does the university most eagerly await?

20. Has the University set any objectives regarding its world league table ranking? (E.g. to improve its ranking, to enter the top 50 etc.)
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know

Please comment:

21. Has the University developed a strategy designed to support a strong/robust/higher position in the World league tables?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know

If yes, please outline details:

22. Since your world league table rank improved have you detected any impact on your wider reputation?
- Yes
 - No

Please explain:

23. Since your world league table rank improved have you detected any of the following impacts?
- The tone of the international media coverage achieved by the University
 - Many fewer positive stories
 - Less positive coverage
 - No change
 - More positive coverage
 - Many more positive stories
 - The volume of international media coverage of/interest in the University
 - Much lower
 - Lower
 - No change
 - Higher
 - Much higher
 - The morale of academic staff
 - Much lower
 - Lower
 - No change
 - Higher
 - Much higher
 - The morale of non-academic staff including senior management
 - Much lower
 - Lower
 - No change
 - Higher
 - Much higher
 - The volume of demand/applications from International students
 - Much lower
 - Lower
 - No change
 - Higher
 - Much higher
 - The quality of International students who apply/admit
 - Much lower
 - Lower
 - No change
 - Higher
 - Much higher
 - The University's ability to recruit the best academic staff talent
 - Much harder
 - Harder
 - No change
 - Easier
 - Much easier
 - The University's ability to fundraise
 - Much harder
 - Harder
 - No change
 - Easier
 - Much easier

- i. The University's ability to forge NEW partnerships of real value with other world leading international universities
 - i. Much harder
 - ii. Harder
 - iii. No change
 - iv. Easier
 - v. Much easier
- j. The University's ability to forge relationships with international governments and agencies
 - i. Much harder
 - ii. Harder
 - iii. No change
 - iv. Easier
 - v. Much easier

24. If your University's world ranking improved consistently over a period of 3-5 years which of the following positive impacts do you think the institution would be the most likely to benefit from? Simply identify the 3 of the 10 listed that you believe would be the most likely impacts of such a rise in your in world ranking.
- a. Increased volume of international media coverage
 - b. More positive international media coverage
 - c. A rise in academic staff morale
 - d. A rise in the morale of non-academic staff including senior management
 - e. Increased demand/applications from International students
 - f. An increased share of the best international students
 - g. Enhanced ability to attract the top international academics
 - h. Enhanced ability to secure funds from donors
 - i. More interest from world leading international universities in partnering our university
 - j. More interest from international governments and agencies to engage with the University
25. In your opinion/knowledge how much does your world ranking impact on the University's reputation within your own country?
- a. Significant impact
 - b. Some impact
 - c. Marginal impact
 - d. No impact
26. In your opinion/knowledge how much does your world ranking impact on the University's reputation internationally?
- a. Significant impact
 - b. Some impact
 - c. Marginal impact
 - d. No impact
27. By how many places did you fall in the two tables from 2008 to 2009?
- a. SJT
 - b. THE
28. Had the University set any objectives regarding its world league table ranking?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

Please comment:

29. Had the University developed a strategy designed to support a strong/robust/higher position in the World league tables?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
30. Since your world league table rank declined have you detected any impact on your wider reputation?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

Please comment:

31. Since your league table rank declined have you detected any of the following impacts?
- a. The tone of the international media coverage achieved by the University

- i. Many fewer positive stories
 - ii. Less positive coverage
 - iii. No change
 - iv. More positive coverage
 - v. Many more positive stories
- b. The volume of international media coverage of/interest in the University
 - i. Much lower
 - ii. Lower
 - iii. No change
 - iv. Higher
 - v. Much higher
- c. The morale of academic staff
 - i. Much lower
 - ii. Lower
 - iii. No change
 - iv. Higher
 - v. Much higher
- d. The morale of non-academic staff including senior management
 - i. Much lower
 - ii. Lower
 - iii. No change
 - iv. Higher
 - v. Much higher
- e. The volume of demand/applications from International students
 - i. Much lower
 - ii. Lower
 - iii. No change
 - iv. Higher
 - v. Much higher
- f. The quality of International students who apply/admit
 - i. Much lower
 - ii. Lower
 - iii. No change
 - iv. Higher
 - v. Much higher
- g. The University's ability to recruit the best academic staff talent
 - i. Much harder
 - ii. Harder
 - iii. No change
 - iv. Easier
 - v. Much easier
- h. The University's ability to fundraise
 - i. Much harder
 - ii. Harder
 - iii. No change
 - iv. Easier
 - v. Much easier
- i. The University's ability to forge NEW partnerships of real value with other world leading international universities
 - i. Much harder
 - ii. Harder
 - iii. No change
 - iv. Easier
 - v. Much easier
- j. The University's ability to forge relationships with international governments and agencies
 - i. Much harder
 - ii. Harder
 - iii. No change
 - iv. Easier
 - v. Much easier

32. If your University's world ranking fell consistently over a period of 3-5 years which of the following negative impacts do you think the institution would be the most likely to suffer? Simply identify the 3 of the 10 listed that you believe would be the most likely impacts of such a decline in ranking.
- a. Reduced volume of international media coverage
 - b. Less positive international media coverage
 - c. Declining academic staff morale
 - d. Declining morale amongst non-academic staff including senior management
 - e. Reduced demand/applications from International students
 - f. A falling share of the best international students
 - g. Reduced ability to attract the top international academics
 - h. Reduced ability to secure funds from donors
 - i. Less interest from world leading international universities in partnering our university
 - j. Less interest from international governments and agencies to engage with the University

33. In your opinion/knowledge how much does your world ranking impact on the University's reputation within your own country?
- Significant impact
 - Some impact
 - Marginal impact
 - No impact
34. In your opinion/knowledge how much does your world ranking impact on the University's reputation internationally?
- Significant impact
 - Some impact
 - Marginal impact
 - No impact
35. If you would like to receive a summary of the findings please leave your details here:
- Name
 - E-mail

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