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A review of higher education image and reputation literature: Knowledge gaps and a research agenda

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions are investing increasing resources in order to achieve favourable perceptions among their stakeholders. However, image and reputation management is a complex issue and how stakeholders perceive universities does not always coincide with the image the latter wish to project. For this reason, in this article we address a review of the literature on higher education image and reputation to identify the main knowledge gaps and establish the research lines that merit deeper examination in the future. The gaps identified highlight the need to improve knowledge about the way perceptions (image and reputation) of university institutions are shaped, pinpointing the dimensions or essential aspects that influence their formation and determining whether their degree of influence differs when considering the perspectives of different stakeholders or individuals from different geographical areas. Theoretical propositions related to the identified gaps have been set out.

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1. Introduction

Over recent decades sizable changes have occurred in the higher education (HE) environment leading to an intensification of competition between higher education institutions (HEIs). The expansion of demand experienced during the second half of the 20th century gave rise to an increase in supply in terms of reach and variety (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009) which was boosted by the effects of other phenomena such as globalization and the decrease in public financing. Globalization has favoured a growing internationalization of HE, considerably increasing the numbers of international students (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009) and interest from universities in capturing them. Reduction in public financing has stimulated greater competition for resources and has contributed to the privatization of HE and a proliferation of private institutions. All of the foregoing has stepped up international competition and rivalry between HEIs to attract home-based and overseas students, resources and prestigious teaching staff, leading many universities to perceive a need to build a solid favourable image and reputa-

tion among their stakeholders, these being factors of differentiation that influence their affective responses and behaviour vis-à-vis the institution (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Belanger, Mount, & Wilson, 2002; Drydakis, 2015; Helgesen & Nettet, 2007; Kheiry, Rad, & Asgari, 2012; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001).

Consequently, universities have begun to assign more resources to bolster their image (Curtis, Abratt, & Minor, 2009). However, reality in universities and the perception their stakeholders have of them do not always go hand in hand (Landrum, Turrissi, & Harless, 1999), indicating that image and reputation management is a key issue not devoid of difficulties. Indeed, there is still little knowledge concerning aspects critical for effectively and efficiently managing university image (Curtis et al., 2009), due to the scant attention paid to this to date in the academic research field (Aghaz, Hashemi, & Sharifi Atashgah, 2015; Duarte, Alves, & Raposo, 2010; Luque & Del Barrio, 2009; Wilkins & Huisman, 2015).

Nevertheless, this situation might be changing. Sung and Yang (2008) remark that the study of university image "is a new topic that is receiving greater attention" (p. 358), a view shared by other authors (Aghaz et al., 2015; Curtis et al., 2009). That is why this is the right moment to analyze and report the achievements in this area and determine challenges for the future. Accordingly, this article aims to identify the main themes and knowledge gaps associated with university image and reputation in order to encapsulate

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what is known and to steer future research effort towards the issues that might assist university managers in managing the perceptions of HEIs. To achieve the aforementioned objective we carried out a narrative review, but also employed some systematic techniques that resulted in more robust and transparent findings to be considered by scholars and practitioners in their decision taking.

After revising 70 articles published in 40 journals up until 2015, we have identified four main knowledge gaps: (1) no consensus exists regarding the dimensions that comprise HE image and reputation; (2) knowledge of the similarities and differences that image and reputation formation presents among stakeholders is still very limited; (3) there is no measurement instrument that serves for general application with various stakeholders, and (4) there is little known about the existence of common and specific aspects in the formation of the university image and reputation for different geographical areas.

This article is organized as follows. First, and after this introduction, the review process is described. Then, the outstanding features of the papers selected for analysis are shown. Afterwards, the findings are reported under headings which emerged during the analysis. Finally, the conclusions and limitations of this review are presented.

2. Methodology

To achieve the aforementioned objectives the academic literature on HE image and reputation was reviewed following the process shown in Fig. 1.

2.1. Defining the scope of review

According to the categorization made by Bearman et al. (2012) for literature reviews, we carried out a narrative review but employed some systematic techniques too. The review question raised was as follows: What are the major issues explored and the main knowledge gaps in the published literature regarding HEI image and reputation?

In our opinion, image and reputation are two different, albeit interconnected constructs, which form part of the same nomological net. However, the decision to consider both concepts as the targets of our study is because (1) both are concerned with stakeholders perceptions and (2) there are conceptual inconsistencies underpinning both terms (Barnett & Pollock, 2012; Cian & Cervai, 2014; Clardy, 2012) which is expressed in the literature in their interchangeable and overlapping use (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012; Fombrun, 2012; Walker, 2010). The variety of definitions for the concepts of image and reputation from a corporate perspective is reflected in the adaptations proposed for the university context. For instance, Alessandri, Yang, and Kinsey (2006) defined university image as “the public’s perception of the university” (p. 259) whereas other authors understand it as “the sum of all the beliefs an individual has towards the university” (Duarte et al., 2010, p. 23; Zaghoul, Hayajneh, & AlMarzouki, 2010, p. 158). Similarly, Arpan, Raney, and Zivnуска (2003) explained it as the “various beliefs about a university that contribute to an overall evaluation of the university” (p. 100), a conceptualization that, however, Ressler and Abratt (2009) consider is consistent with the definition of reputation. For these authors, image is to do with how the organization wishes to be seen by its stakeholders (intended image) and how it believes it is seen by them (construed image) whereas reputation, in a view shared by Delgado-Márquez, Escudero-Torres, and Hurtado-Torres (2013), is concerned with the question “what do stakeholders actually think of an organization?”. This interchangeable use of the terms image and reputation and a shared

cornerstone of the perceptions and beliefs of the stakeholders has led us to take as the objective of our study of the literature review works relating to both image and reputation.

2.2. Identification of studies and selection criteria

Those works whose main objectives included further examination of some aspects associated with HEI image and reputation were considered relevant to the review’s purpose and met inclusion criteria for review. Studies were collected in June 2015 from the Web of Science, searching for works (articles, reviews, books and book chapters) that contained in their title the terms *image* OR *reputation* AND “*higher education*” OR *universit**. The terms were searched for in the “title” search field with the aim of finding works completely focused on the topic rather than studies addressing it anecdotally. 68 references were obtained, but 47 did not address the issue under study and were subsequently excluded. The considerable difference between the identified references and the documents to be reviewed was due to the large number of works containing the term “image” in the title but dealing with topics such as self-image, body-image, neuroimage or image-processing in the audio-visual field.

Bibliographies of the included references were searched to identify other relevant references that would support the objectives of our study but which had not been selected with the search strategy. This is how (1) works not included in the Web of Science (for example, those of Beerli, Díaz Meneses, & Pérez Pérez (2002) and Arpan et al. (2003)) or (2) works without the words image or reputation in their title (such as those of Krampf and Heinlein (1981) and Oplatka (2002)) or (3) with terms other than “*higher education*” or *universit** to refer to HEIs (for example, those of Kazoleas, Yungwook, & Moffitt (2001) or Zaghoul et al. (2010)) came to form part of the references to be analyzed. Thus, 49 additional studies were incorporated and, altogether, 70 works were selected for detailed study. These articles were published in 40 different journals, focussed particularly on just 14 (see Table 1).

2.3. Content analysis

Each article was analyzed using a systematic framework established by the three authors. Through iterative testing and revision, we designed a data collection form to guide the extraction of relevant information from the studies. The aim was to develop an instrument that could be used to identify issues and knowledge gaps in the literature but also to gain transparency and minimize bias. Data extraction included (see Appendix I):

- (1) Type of work, categorized according to the proposal by De Bakker, Groenewegen, and den Hond (2005) as theoretical (which is broken down into conceptual, exploratory and predictive), prescriptive, and descriptive.
- (2) Objectives reflected in the works reviewed. First, these were scrutinized following the four categories proposed by Duarte et al. (2010) to classify the research into organizational image: research examining the sources of organizational image, research measuring the multi-dimensional image construct, research addressing the way different people generate different images and research assessing the implications of organizational image. However, the data collection form had to be refined and the number of categories widened to seven as themes emerged from the analysis that could not be classified. The three researchers agreed on the definitive topics to be scrutinized in the objectives and their labels.
- (3) For empirical studies, the geographical context where samples were collected and the population under study were also coded. The latter field was only reflected when samples comprised

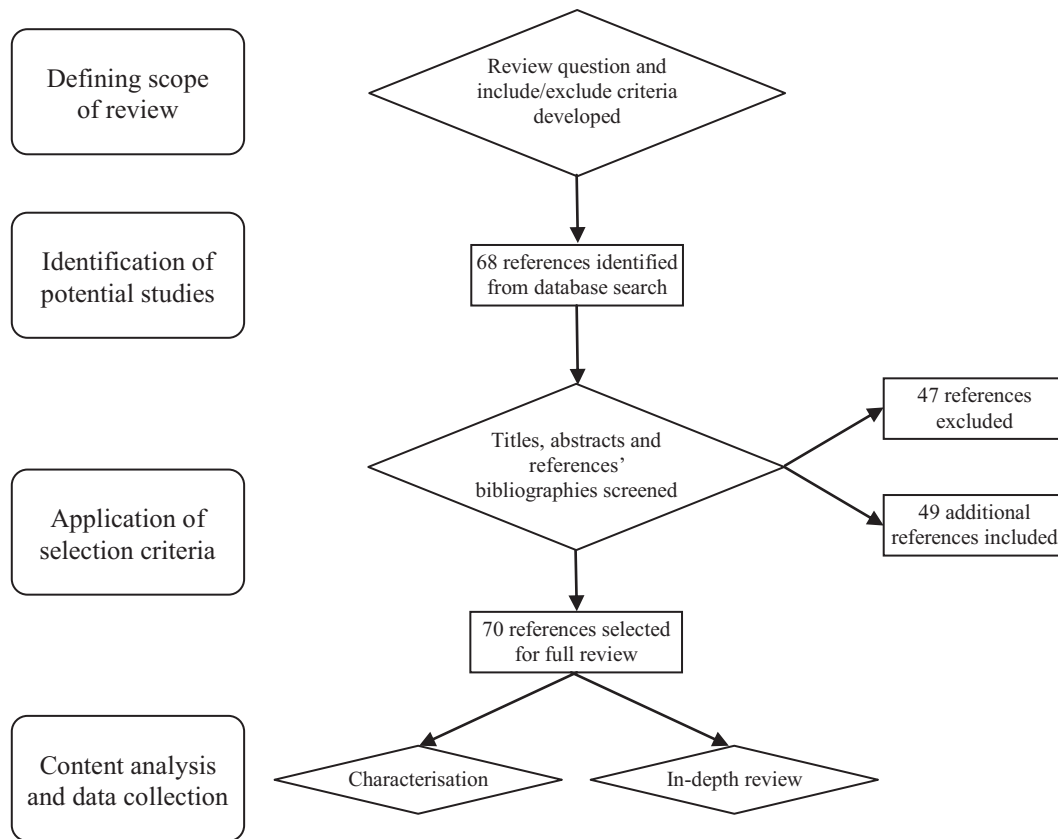


Fig. 1. Review process.

individuals and not when the data collected were of another kind (for instance, content from web pages, promotional material or classification in university rankings).

Ten works were independently analyzed by the three researchers and the extracted information was discussed to ensure a common understanding of the data to be collected. Once the form and process had been refined, the remaining references were divided among the authors and the information was extracted independently. The abstracted data were read and discussed by the three researchers and any ambiguities resolved by consensus.

3. The academic literature on HE image and reputation

3.1. Outstanding features of the academic literature on HE image and reputation

A first analysis of the papers reviewed reveals some outstanding characteristics (see Table 2).

Table 2 indicates that interest in exploring image and reputation in HEIs is recent, although it is growing among researchers. Until 2000, the publication of works on this topic was very sporadic. After that date an increase is observed in the number of academic works published, denoting a growing interest in furthering such investigations. This process intensifies from 2007 onwards, as

Table 1
Top 14 journals publishing articles on HE image and reputation.

Journal	Publications	Percentage	Cumulative
Journal of Marketing for Higher Education	10	14.29	14.29
International Journal of Educational Management Higher Education	5	7.14	21.43
Corporate Reputation Review	4	5.71	27.14
Public Relations Review	3	4.29	31.43
Research in Higher Education	3	4.29	35.72
African Journal of Business Management	3	4.29	40.01
College and University	2	2.86	42.87
Corporate Communications: An International Journal	2	2.86	45.73
International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing	2	2.86	48.59
Journal for Higher Education Management	2	2.86	51.45
Management Dynamics	2	2.86	54.31
Studies in Higher Education	2	2.86	57.17
The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher	2	2.86	60.03
			62.89

Table 2
Characteristics of the reviewed papers.

Characteristic	Number of papers				Total (% of sample)			
	Until 2000	2001–2006	2007–2015					
Papers reviewed (n = 70)	20	13	37	70	(100%)			
Typology of work (n = 70)								
Prescriptive	6	–	–	6	(8.6%)			
Descriptive	3	4	5	12	(17.1%)			
Exploratory	5	2	9	16	(22.9%)			
Predictive	6	7	20	33	(47.1%)			
Conceptual	–	–	3	3	(4.3%)			
Geographical contexts in empirical papers (n = 59)								
Only US context	13	6	4	23	(39.0%)			
Only another non-US context	2	6	25	33	(55.9%)			
Various non-US contexts considered in the same study	–	1	1	2	(3.4%)			
Not specified	–	–	1	1	(1.7%)			
Stakeholders studied (when samples comprising people [n = 53])	(s)	(v)	(s)	(v)	(s)	(v)		
(s) 41 samples comprised of a single stakeholder								
(v) 12 samples comprised of various stakeholders								
Prospective students	3	1	–	–	2	1	7	(13.2%)
Current students	2	3	3	3	15	4	30	(56.6%)
Ex-students, graduates and postgraduates	1	2	–	–	3	4	10	(18.9%)
University managers	2	2	3	–	–	1	8	(15.1%)
Faculty	–	4	–	–	1	–	5	(9.4%)
Administration and services personnel	–	2	–	–	–	–	2	(3.8%)
Students' parents	1	1	–	–	–	–	2	(3.8%)
Firms or employers	1	–	1	–	1	–	3	(5.7%)
Society	–	–	1	1	1	–	3	(5.7%)
Other stakeholders	–	–	–	2	–	1	3	(5.7%)
Main research topic (n = 70) Note: More than one objective was established in some researches (Coding)								
(1)	Theme							
	Identification of aspects/dimensions/facets	3	3	–	–	9	15	(21.4%)
(2)	Proposal of measurement model	2	–	–	–	4	6	(8.6%)
(3)	Relation with other variables	4	7	–	–	25	36	(51.4%)
(4)	Comparative analysis of stakeholders' perspectives	5	1	–	–	–	6	(8.6%)
(5)	Evaluation of image/reputation of a specific HEI	2	1	–	–	4	7	(10.0%)
(6)	Proposal of orientations for management	5	–	–	–	–	5	(7.1%)
(7)	Description of forms of action of a specific HEI	4	3	–	–	2	9	(12.9%)

half of the works reviewed are concentrated between 2007 and 2015.

As for the typology of the works, prescriptive and conceptual studies are less frequent. It is noticeable that the former characterize the early years, while the latter appear in the latest period. A possible explanation for this may be that, after researchers had provided university managers with general orientations through publications, various decades of research on the topic led some authors to attempt to achieve “some order”, establishing concepts. Meanwhile, most of the works published, particularly those during the last decade, are predictive.

There is also a clear predominance of works produced within the US context, particularly in the initial stages, materializing in the fact that the most studied perspective is that of US citizens. Notwithstanding, interest in this topic has been evident in other countries since 2001.

Of the works that are grounded on a quantitative or qualitative analysis of information transmitted by samples comprising people, there is a clear predominance of students (prospective, current or graduates) as the population under study. The opinions of current students engaged in their studies are those that received the most attention (this stakeholder was considered in 56.6% of the sam-

ples), although various works considered the views of other kinds of students, such as prospective (13.2%) or ex-students, graduates and postgraduates (18.9%). The relevance of students for HEIs might have influenced this attention from researchers, but their greater accessibility as against other stakeholders may also have contributed. University managers are the next collective whose perspective was dealt with in more works (15.1%), followed by the teaching staff (9.4%). In last place, a small number of works investigated the perspectives of the administration and services personnel at the university (3.8%), of the students' parents (3.8%), of firms or employers (5.7%) and of society in general (5.7%). Accordingly, consideration of external stakeholder perspectives in future research should provide valuable contributions for academics and practitioners.

Finally, analysis of the objectives set out in the studies reviewed reveals that their main motivation was the analysis of the relation image or reputation has with other variables (half of the researches were performed with this aim) and, to a lesser degree, the identification of aspects/dimensions that comprise these concepts (21.4% of the researches). Other goals were the development of instruments for measuring image or reputation, the comparative analysis of various HEI stakeholder perspectives, the image assessment for

the case of specific universities, the proposal of recommendations to manage it and the description of forms of action in particular universities. These issues are discussed in the next section.

3.2. Major issues in the academic literature on HE image and reputation

3.2.1. Identification of aspects that comprise HE image and reputation and development of measurement instruments

Analysis of the references reviewed shows that in several researches there is an underlying interest in identifying aspects/dimensions/facets that make up the HEI image (the article of Bakanauskas and Sontaite (2011) was the only one related to the concept of reputation), or in developing instruments to enable the measurement of such concepts (see Appendix I). Most of them are concentrated over the last decade and were developed considering the student perspective (see Tables 2 and 3). None has dwelled on the employers' perspective, although it constitutes one of the stakeholders the literature recognizes as being of greater strategic importance for universities (Ressler & Abratt, 2009).

The review of these works reveals a strong consensus for considering university image as a multidimensional concept, but the diversity of dimensions proposed by the authors is huge. The labels used by the different authors to refer to the dimensions they consider in their proposals are very varied, although the differences do not stem just from the terminology, but also appear in the definitions of said terminology. These divergences do not only seem to lie in the different interests that the various stakeholders might have, because they are also observed in approaches taken by works adopting the perspective of one and the same stakeholder. For example, taking the collective of current students as a reference (the most studied), it can be seen that (1) only academic aspects (those relating to training programmes) have been included in the seven works carried out from this perspective, and (2) an important part of the set of proposed dimensions are only represented in one or two of these works (for example, those referring to over-crowding, Administration, or university controlled communications). So, the reviewed literature reveals that there is no consensus among researchers with regard to the dimensions that comprise university image and more investigation is required to advance knowledge concerning facets that delimit the construct.

In the analyzed works, cognitive aspects (related with functional qualities and tangible stimuli) occupy great prominence when compared with affective or emotional features (connected with the attitudes and feelings that an organization arouses), although the idea has increasingly grown among academics that perceptions are not only affected by beliefs (cognitive component), but also by affective assessments (Dowling, 2001; Fombrun, 2012).

Within the cognitive aspects, infrastructure endowment, installations and equipment, along with academic aspects associated with characteristics of the teaching staff and of training programmes, are matters that are underlined in most of the proposals, regardless of the stakeholder whose perspective is under consideration. Other aspects appear to be more specific to particular collectives. For example, those related to social responsibility and integration with the environment (associated with the university adapting to the needs of the community and the labour market) have been considered, albeit scarcely, when adopting the perspective of current students, graduates and Faculty. Besides, there is a marked absence of other dimensions such as research and employability. The scant presence of research-associated issues is striking, even though it constitutes one of the main pillars of the university. This aspect is seen in only two works: one developed from the perspective of society (Kazoleas et al., 2001), the other from that of teaching and research staff (Luque & Del Barrio, 2009). And only the approaches by Duarte et al. (2010) and Bakanauskas and

Sontaite (2011) incorporate employability, through the dimensions "Job opportunities perception" and "Career" respectively. However, Aghaz et al. (2015) consider that this is a factor that shapes university image and thus one which should be incorporated.

Where affective issues are concerned, the emotional component is not countenanced in most of the works reflected in Table 3. Only those by Beerli et al. (2002) and Bakanauskas and Sontaite (2011) seem to include them. So, in the study of image in the university field one of the components that shapes image is possibly being ignored.

Regarding the nature of the relationship (reflective or formative) that HE image maintains with its dimensions, most of the reviewed research follows approaches oriented to verify which aspects determine university image and/or what influence they exert on it, approaches that suggest a formative relationship between the dimensions and the higher-order construct.

Finally, two additional aspects deserve attention. First, the analysis of the studies reviewed suggests that, in the formation of university image, common or intercultural aspects and others specific to different geographical areas might exist, as a consequence of cultural influence. Sporting aspects, for instance, have only been dealt with in works that have studied image from the perspective of the North American population. But despite the increase in the international mobility of students and teachers over recent years, there is a lack of research with a cross-cultural approach addressed towards comparing possible similarities and divergences in image formation in terms of geographical origin. Second, there is an almost complete absence of initiatives to test the degree of applicability of an instrument of measurement validated from the perspective of a stakeholder in other collectives. Perhaps that is why various authors coincide in suggesting that the instruments validated in their investigations should be applied to other, different stakeholders (Arpan et al., 2003; Bakanauskas & Sontaite, 2011; Duarte et al., 2010; Maric, Pavlin, & Ferjan, 2010).

3.2.2. Relations of HE image and reputation with other variables

The question that has aroused most interest among researchers who have investigated image and reputation in HEIs is how these concepts relate to other variables. In several works, the authors concentrate on different variables that impact upon these constructs or are antecedents of them; in others they seek to better understand how they influence other variables; and in some, models are explored in which both kinds of relations intervene.

Concerning aspects that affect image or reputation, Bosch, Venter, Han, and Boshoff (2006) observed that brand identity relates positively with the two dimensions of image that they considered in their study (academic image and recognition). Alessandri et al. (2006) found that a university's solid visual identity gives rise to a more favourable reputation among its students. Treadwell and Harrison (1994) concluded that the similarities in images that different individuals hold of an HEI are associated with the degree of involvement that they have with the organization and with organizational communication. More recently, Matherly (2012) pointed out that the degree to which individuals are familiarized with a university and the recommendations made by other people has a positive relation with the image they have of that university. Delgado-Márquez et al. (2013) concluded that internationalization positively influences a university's reputation, and Chen (2015) found that HE brand images are directly influenced by student perceptions of service recovery and relationship quality.

Finally, in the works by Tapper and Filippakou (2009), Bastedo and Bowman (2010) and Bowman and Bastedo (2011), emphasis is laid on the influence that rankings exert on the formation of university reputation. The first of the articles insists that other factors apart from rankings should be considered when studying institutional reputation. The other two find that published college

Table 3
Dimensions considered in the measurement instruments.

Population	Author(s)	Dimensions/Aspects/Facets*
Citizens/society	Kazoleas et al. (2001)	Overall image; programme image; teaching and research emphasis; Quality of education; environmental factors; financial reasons; sports programmes
Teaching and research staff	Arpan et al. (2003) Luque and Del Barrio (2009)	All attributes; news media coverage Installations and infrastructure; teaching; research; administration; services to the community; services to society
Prospective students	Reid (1973) Krampf and Heinlein (1981) Wilkins and Huisman (2013) Wilkins and Huisman (2015)	Style and provision of teaching; prestige; course provision; personal and popular images; location; physical characteristics; selection procedures Attractive campus; informative campus visit; my family recommended it; top quality programme of study (i.e., major) exactly suiting my needs; Informative university catalogue; close to home (distance); friendly campus atmosphere Prestige; distinctiveness; relevant others Interpersonal; university controlled communications; local campus features; local branch features; communications not controlled by university; home campus heritage and prestige
Current students	Alexander (1971) Beerli et al. (2002) Arpan et al. (2003) Zaghoul et al. (2010) Duarte et al. (2010)	Organizational credibility; manner of group productivity; relational behaviour; Organizational poise; communicative posture; internal state Youth/mature; entrance; crowding; university orientation and preparation; reputation; affective image News media coverage; Academic attributes; Athletic attributes Teaching and education; location and transportation; university services; key factors of the university Job opportunities perception; university communication; university social life; course image
Graduates	Bardo et al. (1990) Aghaz et al. (2015)	Nexus between educational programmes and community needs; meeting of external needs; integration into the environment; student/alumni orientation; educational climate; academic quality University members; University environment; Academic planning; Internal and international reputation
An aggregate of students and ex-students	Maric et al. (2010)	Quality of the professors and of their lectures; material conditions; learning content; management; integration into the environment; administration; grading; graphical image
An aggregate of school leavers, university students and graduates	Bakanauskas and Sontaite (2011)	Behaviour; studies; emotional appeal; citizenship and social responsibility; leadership; performance; workplace; competition; career; innovation

* Some of these dimensions/aspects/facets were eliminated by the authors in a process to refine the measuring instrument, or proved not to be statistically significant in the context where they were tested.

Note: The investigations by Theus (1993), Vidaver-Cohen (2007) and Matherly (2012) are not reflected in the table as they were developed via approaches that differ from the above works. The first of them, through the use of focus groups, set out to identify aspects that university managers find important in the formation of reputation among the stakeholders of a university and concluded that they comprise the following features: the quality of different aspects, size, location, appearance, scope of offerings, excellence of faculty, endowment, campus diversity, campus morale, visibility, cost and prestige. In the second, a conceptual work, its author proposed a model that considered eight dimensions: organizational performance, product/service quality, leadership practices, governance procedures, citizenship activities, workplace climate and approach to innovation. In the third, in a work in which the author jointly examined the opinions of different stakeholders, she proposed six aspects: academic quality, capacity for student transfer, facilities, programme availability, affordability or cost for students, convenience (flexibility in classes and proximity to home), income and job outcomes.

rankings have a significant influence on future reputational assessments by insiders in the HE field. But the degree of influence of reputational rankings on stakeholders' perceptions of universities has still not been sufficiently explored.

Turning to the works that focus on the impact of university image or reputation on other variables, Ressler and Abratt (2009) examined the effect of university reputation on stakeholder intentions. They concluded that universities should continuously assess their reputational capital, at least among prospective students, current students, alumni and employers. Where empirical works are concerned, Parameswaran and Glowacka (1995) analyzed whether perceptions employers have of university graduates' aptitude for professional performance are influenced by the image they hold of the university graduates attended, and drew the conclusion that image acts as a summary construct when these employers are familiar with the university, and as a halo when there is less familiarity. Landrum et al. (1999) noted that the reputation of an HEI affects the probability of parents sending their children there. In the same regard, Matherly (2012) found that it impacts on enrolment intentions at that same university and Wilkins and Huisman (2013) concluded that the opinions prospective students gain about a university through personal relationships and the media, affect intentions of attachment/membership. And, although Milo, Edson, and Mceuen (1989) found a marginal relation between negative reputation and a student's college choice, the investigations by

Pampaloni (2010) and Munisamy, Mohd Jaafar, and Nagaraj (2014) pointed to reputation as being a key factor in a student's choice of university. Sung and Yang (2008) also arrived at the opinion that the different constructs of university image presented positive influences on the favourable attitudes of students towards a university, while Rindova, Williamson, Petkova, and Sever (2005) detected that a favourable reputation contributes to payment of a higher price being made to an organization. Additionally, Polat (2011) found that the perceived organizational image of a university predicts the academic success of its students, Aghaz et al. (2015) that it influences postgraduate students' trust in their university, and Drydakis (2015) that it affects its graduates' labour market prospects.

But the relations most often analyzed are those between image, satisfaction and loyalty. The results of various researches have shown that university image influences student satisfaction (Alves & Raposo, 2010; Beerli et al., 2002; Kheiry et al., 2012), although Helgesen and Nettet (2007) found the relation to be inverse (suggesting that student satisfaction affects the image they have of a university). For the effect of university image on student loyalty, the results indicate that the degree of loyalty tends to be greater when the institutional image is perceived favourably (Alves & Raposo, 2010; Helgesen & Nettet, 2007; Kheiry et al., 2012; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Tamuliene & Murzaite, 2013). Finally, in two researches that examined the perspective of students, Brown and Mazzarol (2009) concluded that institutional image is a key

antecedent of consumer perception of value, of satisfaction and of loyalty, and [Chen and Chen \(2014\)](#) that it influences satisfaction and lifetime customer value.

In the works mentioned, the effects of image or reputation on diverse variables were tested, but there is an apparent need for more research to measure the repercussion of image on other aspects, where various authors have suggested there is also an impact. Concretely, these are questions such as the formation of student expectations, willingness to recommend a university, capacity to obtain financing and recruitment of appropriate teaching staff.

3.2.3. Comparative analysis of various HEI stakeholder perspectives

Few of the investigations under review were developed using samples comprising more than one stakeholder (12 researches), and even fewer specified among their objectives the task of identifying issues around which the stakeholders of the university converge and diverge (6 researches). However, there is a very widely held belief that the different stakeholders of a university may have different perceptions of it ([Duarte et al., 2010](#); [Karrh, 2000](#); [Landrum et al., 1999](#); [Ressler & Abratt, 2009](#); [Treadwell & Harrison, 1994](#); [Vidaver-Cohen, 2007](#); [Wilkins & Huisman, 2013](#); [Wilkins & Huisman, 2015](#)). Different perceptions among stakeholders can be rooted in exposure to different stimuli, the employment of different cognitive filters to process them, or in a difference in the principal interest they each have in the organization's activity and, therefore, in the degree of influence of the aspects that comprise image. "This reality presents problems for integrated marketing efforts" ([Karrh, 2000](#), p. 2), which means it is important to know the origin and magnitude of the differences between stakeholders in university image and reputation formation. The works by [Struckman-Johnson and Kinsley \(1985\)](#), [Terkla and Pagano \(1993\)](#), [Treadwell and Harrison \(1994\)](#) and [Arpan et al. \(2003\)](#) confirmed that there were differences in university image formation between different stakeholders or in their perception of the same organization. [Townsend \(1986\)](#) found that faculty and administrators were in accordance regarding the direction their institution should take, but not so when it came to the most appropriate image for it. And [Karrh \(2000\)](#) proposed a matrix to assess the consistencies and inconsistencies of the beliefs that different groups hold about an institution.

But little is yet known about the origin and magnitude of the differences existing among stakeholders in university image and reputation formation and less still about the coincidences. And it is striking to note that the few works undertaken to make headway here are not recent (the latest dates back to 2003). So, [Aghaz et al. \(2015\)](#) consider that different audiences should be studied and compared in future works. The development of research geared to identify which of the aspects that contribute to this process are equivalent among all or some of a university's main stakeholders, and where there are relevant differences among them, would serve as a guide to university managers in designing a synergistic communication to achieve a favourable image and reputation.

3.2.4. Other minority issues in the study of HE image and reputation

Other research objectives associated with the study of HE image and reputation were set in a smaller number of works. Some of them focused their interest on measuring the image or reputation of particular institutions. They are probably few when compared to the total number of documents reviewed because, given the strategic importance of such information, the universities choose not to disseminate them. Another set of works was developed with the principal objective of providing orientations for HE image or reputation management. They are concentrated within the initial stage

of study around this topic. However, it is worth mentioning that the works classified around research objectives other than this particular purpose also want their results to help university managers in their management endeavours. There are also some works that describe the actions carried out by some HEIs in the area of image with the intention of bringing to light good or bad practices which should be taken into account in management.

4. Conclusions

This article contributes in various ways for both researchers and practitioners. The review of the academic literature on HE image and reputation enabled the identification of the main themes explored and the major findings in this area as well as the knowledge gaps that might be overcome with further research. A large number of prior studies led to important contributions related to the dimensions that comprise HE image and reputation, their antecedents and consequences. However, a better understanding of their formation is required.

Much agreement is observed as to the multi-dimensional nature of the concept of HE image. Also prevalent in most of the reviewed research is the idea that the dimensions of image are what influences it (and not the other way round), an approach that suggests that it is a higher-order formative construct. This means that, knowing the dimensions or facets of HE image, university managers could act upon them to attain a favourable image among stakeholders and, thereby, enhance other variables on which image has an influence (such as student satisfaction, student loyalty or graduates' labour market prospects). However, no consensus exists as to what dimensions comprise HE image (gap 1). In this sense, the list of dimensions identified in this review is huge. But, in accordance with the cognitive components most represented in the prior literature, and considering the growing belief that perceptions are also influenced by affective assessments, the following propositions are suggested:

Proposition 1a. *Stakeholders' perceptions of the academic offer of a university, of its teaching and research resources (facilities and staff) and of its graduates' training, significantly and positively influence the image of that university.*

Proposition 1b. *The affective image held by the stakeholders in relation to a university significantly and positively influences the image of that university.*

Meanwhile, the idea that different stakeholders of an HEI can hold different perceptions of that institution is very widespread. Few works, however, have adopted perspectives other than that held by current students, attempted to identify coincidences and divergences among stakeholders, or focused on testing the application of the very same measurement instrument on different stakeholders. In consequence, knowledge of the origin and magnitude of the similarities and differences between stakeholders is still very limited (gap 2); nor is there an image or reputation measurement instrument that serves for general application with various stakeholders (gap 3). For this reason, ascertaining whether the degree of influence that different factors have on image formation varies in accordance with the collective considered, would contribute to assisting university managers in the aspects they should manage in order to achieve favourable perceptions among different stakeholders. To advance this knowledge, we derive another proposition (on the basis of an equivalent factorial structure):

Proposition 2. *The degree of influence of the dimensions of university image varies when the perspectives of different stakeholder groups are adopted.*

In addition, most of the works reviewed have concentrated the area of study within a single country. Consequently, although comparison of some of their conclusions suggests that there might be common or intercultural aspects in the formation of university image, and others specific to different geographical areas stemming from cultural influence, there is still little known about this question (gap 4). We therefore consider it would be of interest to develop research with a cross-cultural orientation to identify both the equivalences and the divergences between diverse geographical contexts, and suggest the following proposition.

Proposition 3. *The degree of influence of the dimensions of university image varies when the perspectives of citizens of different countries are adopted.*

Advances in these areas would enhance understanding of the formation of perceptions of HEIs among their stakeholders, providing valuable information to be considered in future research and enabling better management of the issue by HEIs.

5. Limitations

As in any literature review, in this study findings are influenced by the decisions taken during the process. Different search strategies (using other search terms, applying them in different fields or databases and imposing alternative restrictions) could have led to a different initial set of references. Besides, the data to collect and how to summarize them are also choices adopted by the researchers which affect the conclusions reached.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at [doi:10.1016/j.iedeen.2017.06.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iedeen.2017.06.005).

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