

Reputation Management in Higher Education Institutions: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) examines the evolving landscape of reputation management in higher education, a strategic concern increasingly shaped by stakeholder expectations, digital transformation, and societal accountability. As Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operate in a highly competitive and scrutinized environment, reputation has emerged as a critical intangible asset that influences trust, legitimacy, student choice, and long-term sustainability. However, existing studies remain fragmented across disciplinary, conceptual, and methodological boundaries, limiting cumulative theoretical and practical insights. Thus, to address this gap, this study adopts a rigorous Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)-based systematic review protocol on two bibliographic databases, Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus. An advanced search strategy was employed using the keywords reputation, reputation management, higher education, brand management, and perception management, with relevant articles published between 2023 and 2025. Following screening, eligibility assessment, and quality appraisal, a total of 28 primary studies were retained for in-depth analysis. The synthesis of the findings reveals interrelated thematic clusters: (1) Reputation, Branding, and Trust-Based Relationship Management in Higher Education; (2) Stakeholder Governance, Perceptions, and Value Co-Creation in Higher Education Systems; and (3) Technology, Sustainability, and Societal Impact in Higher Education Transformation. Collectively, the results indicate a shift from image-centric views of reputation toward more relational, stakeholder-driven, and system-oriented perspectives. Overall, this review contributes by integrating dispersed evidence into a coherent thematic framework and by identifying emerging trends and gaps. It also offers a foundation for future empirical research and strategic reputation management practices in higher education.

Keywords: *Higher education, reputation, reputation management, brand management, perception management.*

INTRODUCTION

Reputation management has become a strategic priority for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) amid intensified competition, stakeholder scrutiny, and rapidly changing digital signals. Reputation is increasingly understood not merely as a symbolic asset but as an outcome of institutional performance, stakeholder relationships, and credibility-building practices that influence enrolment, partnerships, and societal legitimacy. It is therefore a multidimensional construct involving educational quality, alumni competitiveness, institutional influence, rankings, and trust.

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Digital communication, public accountability, and social change continuously reshape institutional reputation through interactions with students, faculty, staff, alumni, employers, policymakers, media, and communities. Reputation consequently encompasses brand identity, academic excellence, research impact, internationalization, stakeholder perceptions, rankings, and strategic communication (Stoica et al., 2025). Universities must manage both their self-presentation and stakeholders' interpretations of performance, governance, crises, and reform.

A further systematic review is therefore warranted beyond crisis messaging. This review examines how communication, trust, governance, engagement, technology, and sustainability interact and whether institutional initiatives produce relational, organizational, and societal outcomes rather than merely favourable perceptions.

This review contributes by integrating branding and communication with stakeholder trust, participatory governance, and value co-creation; examining the conditions that shape legitimate technology and sustainability initiatives; and developing a framework that links communication and governance to engagement, reputation, transformation, and societal impact.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies frame reputation management as a relationship-centred governance challenge rather than a promotional task. Institutional value is co-produced across stakeholder groups, while trust and commitment connect service quality and satisfaction with brand loyalty during instability. Reputation is therefore strengthened when service delivery, relationships, and governance are experienced as fair, consistent, and responsive. Higher-education reputation extends beyond rankings to stakeholder engagement, academic and research quality, brand identity, and strategic communication (Stoica et al., 2025). Perceived quality, brand association, and identity also affect the attraction and retention of students, faculty, and alumni (Xia, 2024). Because economic and national contexts can alter these perceptions, reputation strategies require periodic adaptation (Kovalchuk & Havryliuk, 2024).

Existing reviews remain limited. Crisis-communication research maps institutional responses but seldom explains how routine communication builds trust and resilience, how stakeholder groups interpret messages, or whether they influence decisions. Reputation studies likewise provide little synthesis of when engagement becomes genuine participation and value co-creation rather than symbolic consultation (Stoica et al., 2025; Kovalchuk & Havryliuk, 2024; Ahmad Kamil et al., 2025).

Research also inadequately connects reputation with higher-education transformation. Governance and stakeholder legitimacy may shape the adoption of technology and sustainability initiatives, yet the roles of trust and participation remain unclear. Studies also blur institutional outputs, such as adopting a platform or policy, with societal outcomes such as inclusion, environmental performance, employability, community wellbeing, and public value (Xia, 2024; Stoica et al., 2025).

Next is the fragmentation across levels of analysis. Branding and communication research tend to focus on institutional messages and stakeholder perceptions. Crisis-communication research tends to focus on response strategies and reputation protection. Governance research, where considered, concerns participation and accountability. Transformation research tends to focus on technology, sustainability, or organizational change. These strands are rarely integrated into a single explanatory framework. Consequently, the literature does not yet provide a clear account of how communication

practices shape trust; how trust and stakeholder perceptions influence participatory governance and value co-creation; or how these governance processes affect the legitimacy, adoption, and societal impact of institutional transformation. At the group level, effectiveness also depends on how contextual conditions shape group processes and outcomes (Baninajarian & Abdullah, 2009; Kush et al., 2024).

Furthermore, digital communication has also shifted the operational logic of reputation management by making institutional self-representation more visible, comparable, and sensitive to stakeholder interpretation. In addition, comparative qualitative evidence demonstrates that social media communication can reflect institutional resource dependence and strategic priorities. This is particularly the case when international student recruitment is tied to legitimator or financial resource needs across various national settings (Sun et al., 2025). More micro-level evidence on platform performance further indicates that engagement is shaped by content strategy variables, with content type and post context strongly predicting interactions in higher education branding environments (Demirer, 2025). Complementing these insights, branding research indicates that perceived authenticity can drive favourable brand attitudes, emotional attachment, and positive word of mouth. Taken together, these effects suggest that “how” an HEI communicates may matter as much as “what” it communicates when reputation is built through stakeholder interpretation (Girardin et al., 2024a). Digital integrated marketing communication can likewise strengthen brand equity by coordinating online touchpoints and stakeholder experiences (Qi et al., 2024).

Reputation is also linked to responsibility, sustainability, and regulatory readiness. Divergent stakeholder priorities across governance, environmental, social, economic, and academic dimensions require institutional alignment and coherent reporting. Emerging technologies create additional reputational risk where rules for academic conduct and AI-related training remain underdeveloped.

Therefore, there are many theoretical approaches in communication research; differences in stakeholder groups may also matter, as prospective students and university employees have different opportunities to compare institutional messages with direct organizational experience. Stakeholder theory provides a framework for interpreting these differences by directing attention to whose interests and experiences are represented in institutional evaluations (Freeman, 1984). Applied to this review, this perspective suggests examining reputation across stakeholder groups rather than treating it as a uniform assessment. Relationship management offers a complementary explanation by drawing attention to relational outcomes such as trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Together, these perspectives support an interpretation in which communication practices may contribute to reputation through the relationships that stakeholders experience. This interpretation remains a theoretical proposition unless the included studies directly examine the proposed mechanism. In culturally diverse settings, communication management must also account for how cultural differences shape stakeholder interpretation and organizational relationships (Abdullah, 2010).

The central gap concerns how HEIs convert communication and branding into durable relationships; how participatory governance conditions that process; and how these relationships affect technology- and sustainability-driven transformation. Reputation may arise from communication, substantive performance, stakeholder co-creation, or their interaction, yet these mechanisms have not been synthesized across stakeholder groups, routine and crisis contexts, and diverse higher-education systems.

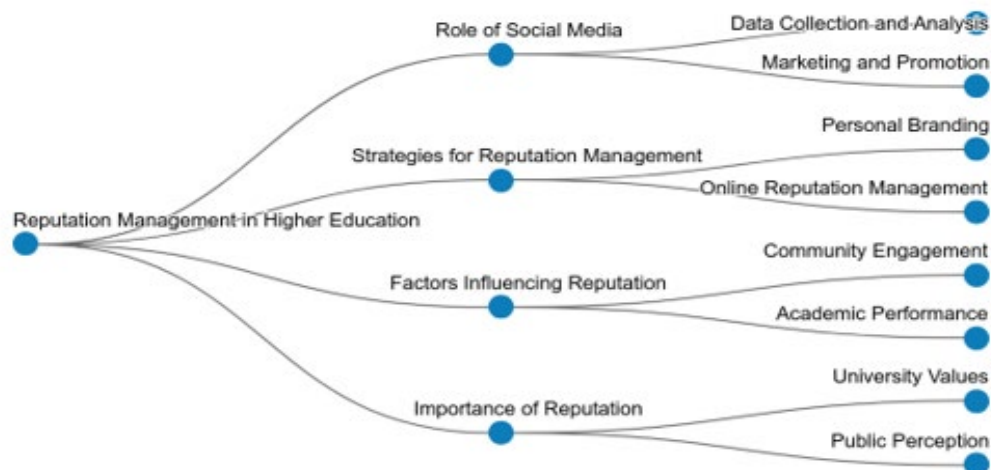


Figure 1: Concept map indicating major dimensions of reputation management in higher education

Figure 1 conceptually frames reputation management in higher education as a multidimensional agenda shaped by four interconnected strands. The first strand highlights the role of social media, which supports both marketing and promotion as well as data collection and analysis to monitor stakeholder sentiments. The second focuses on strategies for reputation management, notably personal branding and online reputation management, to build credibility and manage digital narratives. The third strand addresses factors influencing reputation, particularly community engagement and academic performance as core drivers of trust and legitimacy. Finally, the fourth strand emphasizes the significance of reputation, grounded in university values and reflected through public perception. Overall, the map concludes that a university's reputation is an outcome of performance and values, and something that must be actively cultivated and protected through evidence-informed, digitally enabled, and stakeholder-focused communication practices. Community engagement through corporate social responsibility can further strengthen university-community relationships and institutional legitimacy (Niu et al., 2024).

Reputation management is therefore an integrated system in which governance, trust, communication, and societal-impact initiatives interact. Credible strategy requires coordinated capacity in policy, communication, service quality, and ethical safeguards across local and international contexts.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions define an SLR's scope, guide study selection and data extraction, and structure rigorous scholarly comparison and thematic synthesis. Because research questions drive review methodology (Kitchenham, 2007), this study used the Population, Interest, and Context (PICO) framework (Lockwood et al., 2015). PICO sharpened the inquiry into reputation management in higher education and guided the following three questions:

- RQ1: How do higher education institutions' branding and communication practices shape stakeholder trust and relationship outcomes that contribute to institutional reputation in digitally mediated and crisis-sensitive contexts?
- RQ2: How do stakeholder perceptions and participatory governance mechanisms influence value co-creation and stakeholder engagement outcomes in higher education systems under accountability and reform pressures?

RQ3: How do stakeholder perceptions and institutional governance shape the adoption of technology-enabled and sustainability-driven initiatives, and how do these initiatives translate into measurable societal impact outcomes in higher education transformation?

METHODOLOGY

This review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to ensure transparent and reproducible identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). Searches were conducted in Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus because of their broad coverage and reliable metadata. PRISMA organized the review into identification, screening, eligibility, and data abstraction. Comprehensive searching was followed by duplicate removal and screening against predefined criteria, full-text eligibility assessment, and systematic extraction and synthesis of the included evidence.

a. Identification

Structured searches using terms related to reputation, reputation management, and higher education identified 1,456 records: 855 in Scopus and 601 in WoS (Table 1). The corpus reflected research across communication, management, public relations, and higher education. Using both databases reduced index-specific omissions in this multidisciplinary field. The high-recall corpus was then refined through duplicate removal, explicit inclusion criteria, and quality appraisal to exclude adjacent but non-target topics while retaining representative evidence.

Table 1: The search strings

Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("reputation management" OR "brand management" OR "image management" OR "perception management") AND ("higher education" OR "tertiary education" OR "post-secondary education" OR university* OR college*)) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2023) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2024) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2025)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) - Date of Access: January 2026
WoS	("reputation management" OR "brand management" OR "image management" OR "perception management") AND ("higher education" OR "tertiary education" OR "post-secondary education" OR "university" OR "college" OR "academic institution") (Topic) and 2025 or 2023 or 2024 (Publication Years) and Article (Document Types) and English (Languages) - Date of access: January 2026

b. Screening

Screening reduced 1,456 records to 297 potentially relevant studies: 157 from Scopus and 140 from WoS. The balanced totals indicate complementary coverage rather than dependence on one database. A total of 1,159 records were excluded because they were non-English, published before 2023, or outside the permitted journal-article format; nine duplicates were removed. Restricting the review to English-language journal articles published in 2023-2025 prioritized consistent extraction and contemporary evidence on rapidly changing digital and governance practices (Table 2).

Table 2: The selection criterion is searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Time line	2023 – 2025	< 2023
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press
Subject Area	Social Science	Besides Social Science

c. *Eligibility*

Of the screened records, 288 proceeded to full-text assessment. Titles, aims, methods, contexts, and substantive relevance were evaluated against the predefined criteria to ensure that apparent abstract-level relevance translated into evidentiary fit. Full-text assessment excluded 260 articles for scope mismatch, misaligned titles or abstracts, inaccessible full text, or lack of empirical evidence. The remaining 28 studies formed the final synthesis corpus.

d. *Data Abstraction and Analysis*

An integrative qualitative synthesis accommodated the studies' diverse designs. The team closely read the 28 eligible publications, extracted relevant concepts and findings, and developed themes and subthemes across communication, marketing, management, and higher-education perspectives (Figure 2). Iterative coding compared each study's method, context, and findings. Co-authors collaboratively refined themes, maintained an analytic log of coding decisions and alternative interpretations, and resolved discrepancies through deliberation to improve credibility, consistency, and auditability.

e. *Quality of Appraisal*

According to the SLR protocol guidelines proposed by Kitchenham and Charters (2007), methodological quality was assessed through six criteria. Each was scored Yes (1), Partly (0.5), or No (0).

- QA1. Is the purpose of the study clearly stated?
- QA2. Is the interest and the usefulness of the work clearly presented?
- QA3. Is the study methodology clearly established?
- QA4. Are the concepts of the approach clearly defined?
- QA5. Is the work compared and measured with other similar work?
- QA6. Are the limitations of the work clearly mentioned?

Multiple experts independently assessed each study and aggregated their scores. Only studies scoring above 3.0 were retained for synthesis, ensuring a defensible minimum level of methodological quality.

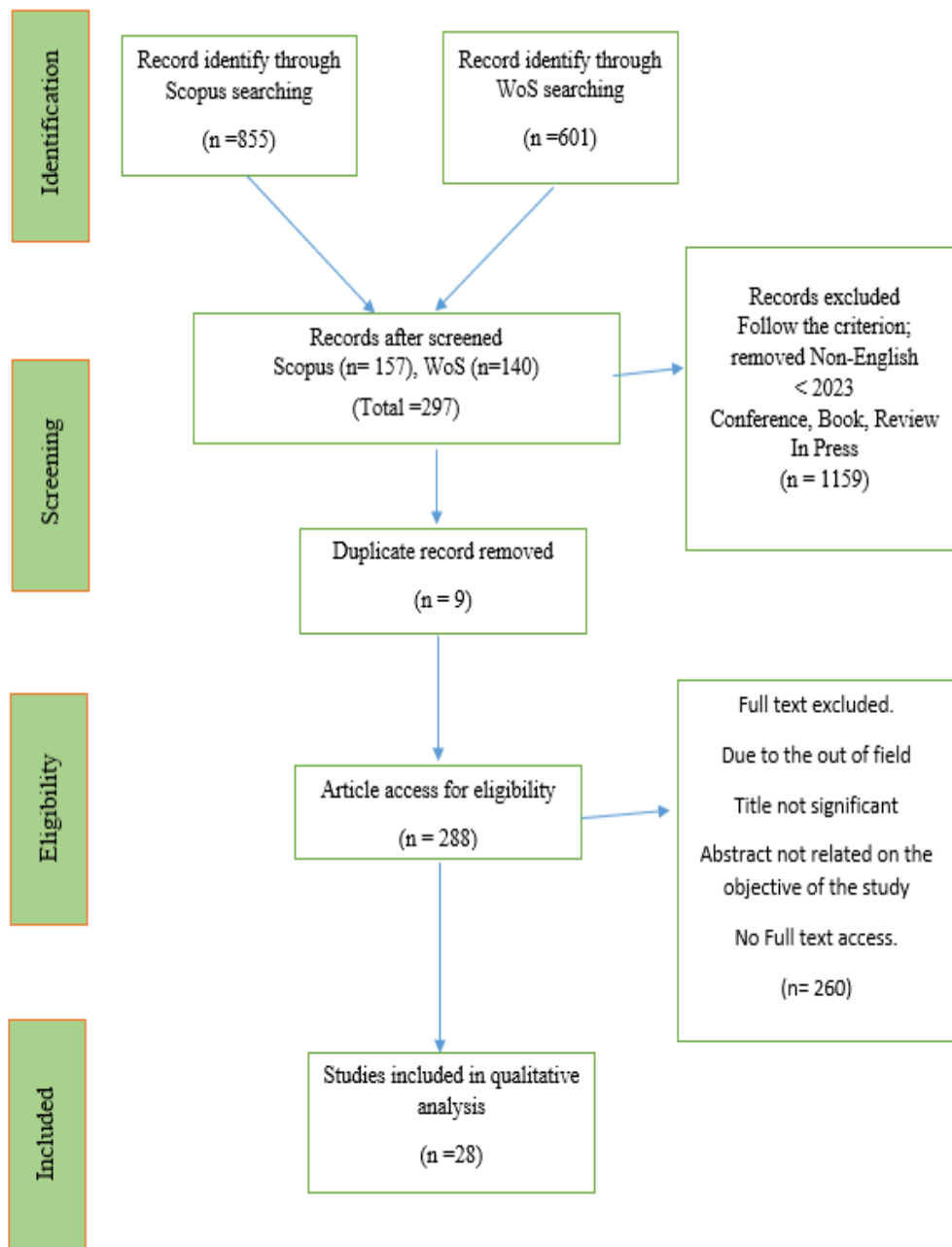


Figure 2: Flow diagram of the proposed searching study (Moher et al., 2009)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 shows that most included studies demonstrated moderate-to-high quality, particularly in stating purpose, relevance, methods, and core concepts (QA1-QA4). Comparison with previous research and explicit limitations (QA5-QA6) were less consistent. Studies scoring at least 50% were retained, producing a sufficiently credible evidence base for thematic synthesis.

Table 3: Performance of Quality Assessment (QA)

PS	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	Total Mark	Percentage (%)
PS1	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS2	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0
PS3	Y	Y	Y	P	N	N	3.5	58.3
PS4	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS5	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5.0	83.3
PS6	Y	Y	Y	P	P	N	4.0	66.7
PS7	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS8	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5.0	83.3
PS9	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS10	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0
PS11	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0
PS12	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5.0	83.3
PS13	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS14	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS15	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS16	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS17	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0
PS18	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6.0	100.0
PS19	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS20	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5.0	83.3
PS21	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0
PS22	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS23	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS24	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS25	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5.0	83.3
PS26	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7
PS27	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0
PS28	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7

PS18 achieved the highest quality score (100%), meeting all six criteria. PS3 scored lowest (58.3%) because it only partly defined its approach and omitted comparison with prior work and study limitations.

Table 4: Articles for review

Name and Year	Method	Contexts	Key Findings	Team Allocation
Purevsuren et al. (2025)	Survey of 5,902 alumni, employers, and parents; structural equation modelling using SmartPLS 4.1 and SPSS 25.0.	Mongolian universities; stakeholders included alumni, employers, and parents.	Social responsibility strongly and positively influenced university reputation; faculty and alumni reputation, research and innovation, and external collaboration enhanced social responsibility, which acted as a mediator.	Theme 1
Sun, Lim, and Cockayne (2025)	Comparative qualitative case study using 19 interviews with university managers and content analysis.	One Chinese and one UK university; post-COVID-19 social-media communication and international-student recruitment.	International students were linked primarily to legitimator resources in the Chinese case and financial resources in the UK case; social-media practices reflected different resource dependencies.	Theme 1

Demirer (2025)	Quantitative content analysis of 1,250 Facebook posts from the top ten Turkish HE institutions; MANOVA tested content and timing variables.	Official Facebook pages of leading HE institutions in Turkey; engagement measured through likes, comments, and shares.	Content type and post context were the strongest engagement drivers; institution-generated university news posted on weekday afternoons performed best.	Theme 1
Montenegro Velandia, Caridad-Faria, and Soto-De-Clavero (2025)	Systematic literature review combined with bibliometric analysis.	HE trusts, reputation, student choice, and crisis management across the reviewed literature.	The literature has shifted toward technological and socio-emotional concerns; trust and reputation influence student attraction and retention.	Theme 1
Anggarina, Irawan, and Dewi (2024)	Descriptive analysis combining questionnaire surveys and in-depth stakeholder interviews.	HE reputation management and public-relations practice; stakeholder communication and institutional values.	Public relations served as a key stakeholder liaison; reputation was associated with accreditation, graduate quality, leadership, rankings, facilities, services, innovation, publications, and collaboration, while misconduct and fraud were reputational risks.	Theme 1
Rew et al. (2024)	Self-report survey of 301 undergraduates from four US universities; PLS-SEM and path analysis.	US undergraduate students; relationships among service quality, satisfaction, trust, commitment, and university brand loyalty during crisis.	Trust and commitment mediated the relationship between student satisfaction and university brand loyalty, supporting investment in student relationships.	Theme 1
Girardin, Blal, and Lunardo (2024)	Field study involving two HE institutions; examined antecedents and outcomes of authenticity perceptions.	Two HEIs; outcomes included brand attitude, emotional attachment, word-of-mouth, and willingness to pay.	Indexical, iconic, and existential cues shaped authenticity perceptions; perceived authenticity predicted brand attitude, positive word-of-mouth, and emotional attachment.	Theme 1
Marjanović, Domazet, and Miljković (2023)	Descriptive statistics and survey research with 403 students from six private and state faculties.	Students evaluated instrumental values on which HE brands and study programs should be built.	Students expressed positive views of instrumental values as foundations for faculty branding, providing a basis for value-oriented brand and program development.	Theme 1
Huebner (2023)	Review of the existing literature on HE brands management.	HE brands strategy amid competition, market change, and COVID-19 effects.	Brand-experience design is proposed as a potential sustained competitive advantage; the review identifies research gaps and four areas for future research.	Theme 1
Khan, Hameed, and Hussainy (2023)	Convenience-sample survey of 245 teaching and non-teaching staff; structural equation modelling with SmartPLS.	Private HE institutions; internal brand management, employee brand citizenship, commitment, and student satisfaction.	Internal brand management strongly supported brand citizenship behaviour, which led to brand commitment and most strongly influenced student satisfaction among the tested consequences.	Theme 1
Sarturi and Aragão (2025)	Stakeholder-theory study applying and extending Harrison and Wicks' value-creation model.	Public HE institutions and five stakeholder groups.	Reputation and inter-stakeholder relationships complemented traditional value dimensions, while stakeholder engagement emerged as a key outcome.	Theme 2

Watkins and Bennett (2025)	Case study using semi-structured interviews with 19 participants.	University of North Alabama's transition from NCAA Division II to Division I during 2018–2022; administrators, athletic staff, coaches, athletes, and faculty.	Stakeholder accounts addressed NCAA bylaws, resource use, nearby institutions, community effects, morale, and athletic-department identity during the transition.	Theme 2
Huang, Chen, and Horiuchi (2025)	Phenomenographic qualitative study based on interviews with 11 stakeholders.	Policymakers, academic-association representatives, and leaders from two Japanese national universities.	Public good was understood as inclusive societal benefit; stakeholders described changing government–university relations and a balance between government support and institutional autonomy.	Theme 2
Kudaibergenova et al. (2025)	Quota-based survey across 42 Kazakhstani universities; 832 faculty and 155 administrators; descriptive statistics, Welch's t-test, and two-way ANOVA.	Faculty and administrative staff in an emerging HE system with early-stage government excellence initiatives.	Although agreement on the multidimensional nature of excellence exceeded 94%, faculty and administrators differed systematically in how they valued core indicators; administrators generally assigned higher importance.	Theme 2
Ryan, Turner, and Fogelgarn (2025)	Qualitative stakeholder study framed by Kahu and Nelson's student-engagement framework.	One Australian university; graduates, mentor teachers, and teacher educators discussing preservice teacher preparation and engagement.	Stakeholders held mismatched expectations about theory, practice, and readiness; limited preservice-teacher engagement was identified as a barrier, supporting greater coherence between coursework and placements.	Theme 2
Moitra and Madan (2025)	Qualitative study using interviews, focus groups, and panel discussions with multiple stakeholder groups; thematic analysis.	Indian health and nutrition HE curricula; administrators, educators, learners, and subject experts.	Educators were willing but lacked confidence, learners questioned career relevance, and administrators worried about reconciling traditional and modern science; five strategies were proposed, including training, curriculum redesign, experiential pedagogy, student sensitization, and interdisciplinary research.	Theme 2
Mrema et al. (2024)	Interviews, focus groups, and documentary review involving 46 participants across four universities; content analysis.	National and institutional quality-assurance mechanisms in Tanzania; stakeholder participation and university compliance.	Insufficient stakeholder input into quality-assurance mechanisms was associated with non-compliance among universities, academics, and students; greater stakeholder involvement was recommended.	Theme 2
Mercado, Bowers, and Pennello (2024)	Instrumental multiple-case study across one semester using observation notes, field notes, and semi-structured interviews.	Three music-education school–university partnership programs at different development stages; five in-service teachers and one administrator.	Partnership benefits included reinforcement and best-practice sharing, while challenges involved coordinating teachers and time; equal stakeholder planning, reflection, evaluation, communication, and more visits were recommended.	Theme 2

Ezeuduji et al. (2023)	Mixed methods: structured student questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with lecturers and industry representatives.	Six universities in Finland, the UK, and South Africa; tourism and business education, employability, work readiness, and industry engagement.	University of Zululand students rated highest on career preparation, graduate competencies, and work readiness, but lowest on industry and student engagement.	Theme 2
Wainaina and Sun (2025)	Technology Acceptance Model–framed quantitative survey of 137 educators across 13 Kenyan universities.	Kenyan higher education; educators considering GenAI for teaching and research.	Educators saw potential benefits but raised ethical, integrity, and human-element concerns; perceived usefulness was the strongest predictor of adoption willingness, supporting ethical policy, training, and institutional support.	Theme 3
Basheer et al. (2025)	Mixed methods: literature-derived indicators, policymaker interviews, and a Relative Importance Index survey of 81 stakeholders.	American University of Sharjah; students, educators, administrators, and policymakers assessing sustainability across governance, environmental, social, economic, and academic dimensions.	Stakeholder priorities differed substantially; environmental initiatives were emphasized more than social-equity and economic dimensions, while cost trade-offs and fragmented operations pointed to the need for communication and centralized frameworks.	Theme 3
Severino et al. (2025)	Mixed-methods study using interactive multimedia questionnaires.	Portuguese and international students at two Lisbon HE institutions; students were treated as potential future tourists.	Cultural and historical landmarks, favourable climate, and ecological sustainability were major contributors to Lisbon’s appeal and informed sustainable destination-marketing strategies.	Theme 3
Tabacu (2025)	Qualitative literature review, normative legal analysis, and comparative content analysis of EU provisions and university policies.	European higher education; academic conduct, AI-assisted teaching and research, integrity, copyright, and data protection.	The study argues that existing European frameworks leave important higher-education uses underregulated and proposes binding institutional rules covering training, disclosure, supportive-only use, assessment adaptation, and user responsibility.	Theme 3
Al-Hail, Fekih Zguir, and Koc (2024)	Comparative literature review followed by thematic analysis of interviews with 20 stakeholders.	A university in Qatar; social media use in learning, teaching, assessment, professional identity, reputation, and knowledge dissemination.	Social media supported professional identity, reputation, research profiles, and knowledge dissemination but lacked robust methods for formal learning and assessment; a sustainability-oriented integration framework was proposed.	Theme 3
Hernandez-Diaz et al. (2024)	Quantitative structural equation modelling using validated sustainability and performance scales; 5,344 responses from students, teachers, and administrators at five private universities.	Private universities in Medellín, Colombia; cross-sectional assessment of sustainability and institutional performance.	Holistic sustainability positively affected university performance and predicted performance in about 60% of the universities analysed, with important contributions from outreach and strategic management; generalizability is limited by the single-period, single-territory design.	Theme 3

Sawir et al. (2024)	Qualitative case study using interviews, community focus groups, and PR-material review; 27 purposively selected participants.	Tolitoli Regency, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia; emerging tourism development, stakeholder engagement, community participation, and sustainability policy.	Strategic PR supported policy acceptance, business alignment, community participation, destination image, and sustainability education, but had to address misinformation and development–conservation tensions; transferability is limited by the single-region case.	Theme 3
Tavitiyaman and Zhang (2024)	Self-administered survey of hospitality and tourism practitioners, educators, and students.	Hospitality and tourism, HE programs in Hong Kong; sustainability education framed by the triple bottom line.	Stakeholders favoured stronger sustainability training, education, and sustainable-building content, with industry practitioners placing greater emphasis than students; internships, experiential learning, and field trips were preferred teaching activities.	Theme 3
Chugh et al. (2023)	Review of 46 empirical studies across institutional contexts, disciplines, technologies, and stakeholder profiles.	HE technology implementation, including course delivery, pedagogy, stakeholder acceptance, and administrative structures.	Effective implementation depends on the interaction of technology characteristics, stakeholder perceptions, discipline, success metrics, and theoretical frameworks; the authors propose a five-dimension implementation framework.	Theme 3

Three themes structured the synthesis (Table 4): (1) reputation, branding, and trust-based relationship management; (2) stakeholder governance, perceptions, and value co-creation; and (3) technology, sustainability, and societal impact in higher-education transformation.

Theme 1: Reputation, Branding, and Trust-Based Relationship Management in Higher Education

Reputation in higher education is consistently positioned as a strategic, multidimensional asset shaped by institutional performance, stakeholder perceptions, and broader societal contributions. Notably, empirical evidence across diverse contexts demonstrates that reputation is an outcome of academic quality and a mediated construct influenced by social responsibility, ethical governance, and collaborative engagement. The large-scale structural model proposed in the Mongolian context confirms that university social responsibility plays a central mediating role in shaping institutional capabilities. Furthermore, these capabilities include faculty reputation, alumni standing, research productivity, external cooperation, and overall reputation formation (Purevsuren et al., 2025). Notably, this finding aligns with systematic and bibliometric evidence indicating a conceptual shift in reputation research from operational indicators toward trust-based and socio-emotional dimensions, including integrity, competence, and benevolence (Montenegro Velandia, 2025). Reputation is further reinforced through stakeholder trust, which directly shapes student decision-making and long-term institutional attractiveness. In parallel, PR scholarship emphasizes that reputation must be strategically aligned with institutional vision, mission, and values, with professionalized communication serving as a key mechanism for sustaining legitimacy and mitigating reputational risks (Anggarina et al., 2024). Together, these studies depict that

reputation management in higher education extends beyond symbolic image construction and is deeply embedded in value-driven governance, stakeholder accountability, and socially responsive institutional behaviour.

Furthermore, digital communication and branding strategies emerge as decisive instruments in contemporary reputation management, particularly under conditions of heightened competition and resource dependency. For instance, a comparative qualitative analysis of Chinese and UK universities illustrates how distinct resource imperatives shape institutional self-representation on social media. Specifically, legitimator dependence dominates in the Chinese context, whereas financial diversification drives communication strategies in the UK (Sun et al., 2025). These strategic orientations influence how international students are framed as learners and as critical institutional resources, thereby shaping reputation narratives in the post-pandemic environment. Complementing this perspective, large-scale quantitative content analysis of university social media platforms shows that engagement-driven branding is highly sensitive to content type, contextual framing, and temporal dynamics. Institution-generated news and strategically timed posts, in particular, produce significantly higher interaction levels (Demirer, 2025). Beyond visibility, branding effectiveness is also linked to perceived authenticity and experiential coherence. At the same time, empirical branding studies confirm that authenticity cues indexical, iconic, and existential significantly predict brand attitudes, emotional attachment, and positive word-of-mouth within higher education settings (Girardin et al., 2024b). Moreover, these findings are reinforced by conceptual and review-based analyses that advocate for brand experience design as a sustained competitive advantage, particularly in environments disrupted by market shifts and public health crises (Huebner, 2023). Overall, this body of literature underscores that digital branding and communication strategies contribute to reputation by fostering credibility and ensuring consistency. It also aligns stakeholder experiences with institutional values and expectations.

Trust-based relationship management is the relational core that links reputation, branding, and long-term institutional loyalty, especially during periods of uncertainty and crisis. Quantitative evidence from relationship marketing models demonstrates that trust and commitment function as critical mediators between service quality, student satisfaction, and university brand loyalty. Accordingly, these findings highlight the importance of relational quality over transactional engagement (Rew et al., 2024). Similarly, this relational logic is echoed in studies examining brand citizenship behaviour, where internal brand management practices significantly influence staff commitment and student satisfaction, thereby strengthening brand performance and reputational resilience (Khan et al., 2023). From a strategic perspective, trust is repeatedly identified as a prerequisite for transforming brand image into enduring brand reputation, particularly when institutions face reputational threats or external shocks (Montenegro Velandia, 2025). PR scholarship further reinforces this position by emphasizing the role of transparent communication, crisis responsiveness, and value-based messaging in maintaining stakeholder confidence and institutional legitimacy (Anggarina et al., 2024). Moreover, instrumental value-based branding research also confirms that students positively evaluate institutions that consistently embed shared values into brand identity, curriculum design, and engagement practices, thereby strengthening trust and competitive positioning (Marjanović et al., 2023). Essentially, these studies indicate that effective reputation management in higher education is fundamentally relational. It requires

integrating trust, authenticity, and stakeholder-centred communication to sustain institutional credibility, loyalty, and long-term success.

Theme 2: Stakeholder Governance, Perceptions, and Value Co-Creation in Higher Education Systems

Stakeholder governance in higher education systems is repeatedly portrayed as a negotiated process in which institutional change is interpreted through role-based expectations and accountability pressures. For instance, during the transition to National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I, Watkins and Bennett (2025) revealed that administrators, coaches, athletes, and faculty attached different meanings to regulatory bylaws, resource allocation, community positioning, and organizational identity across a multi-year transition. Consequently, governance legitimacy depends on whether operational burdens and perceived benefits are distributed in ways regarded as fair by internal groups. Parallel concerns about procedural legitimacy arise in the Tanzanian quality assurance context, in which Mrema et al. (2024) identified insufficient stakeholder input as a pathway to weak compliance. This finding implies that governance tools lose authority when participation is perceived as symbolic rather than substantive. At the system-policy interface, Huang et al. (2025) indicated that “public good(s)” in Japanese higher education is not a single definition but a set of stakeholder interpretations linked to inclusivity, open access, knowledge production, and collaboration. Following this, it reflects an evolving relationship between government steering and institutional autonomy. In a complementary way, Kudaibergenova et al. (2025) depicted that “academic excellence” is widely accepted as multidimensional. Nonetheless, faculty and administrators systematically assign different salience to indicators and barriers, advocating that governance reforms require co-created metrics to reduce interpretive gaps and translate policy into practice.

Additionally, value co-creation is further shaped by relational architectures that connect HEIs with external partners and professional ecosystems, in which stakeholder perceptions guide the feasibility of implementation. For instance, Ryan et al. (2025) highlighted mismatched expectations among graduates, mentor teachers, and teacher educators regarding readiness for practice. He also identified engagement as a condition that enables learning transfer, and these findings suggest that the governance of professional preparation is strengthened when responsibilities, participation norms, and placement expectations are explicitly aligned across stakeholder groups. The partnership perspective is further extended by Mercado et al. (2024), who demonstrated that school-university collaborations generate benefits such as reinforcement and best-practice exchange, while experiencing operational friction related to time management, coordination across multiple teachers, and variable partnership designs. Accordingly, the recommended emphasis on equal planning, reflection, and evaluation positions co-governance as a practical mechanism for sustaining joint programs. At the university-industry interface, Ezeuduji et al. (2023) reported that employability outcomes and work-readiness perceptions differ across institutions and contexts. In particular, industry and student engagement emerged as sensitive dimensions that can lower perceived collaboration quality, even when competency development is rated highly. Curriculum innovation is also framed as a co-creation challenge. Moitra and Madan (2025) described educators as supportive but lacking confidence, learners as uncertain about the relevance of their careers, and administrators as concerned about bridging traditional and modern epistemic frames. Consequently, the proposed strategies (training, curricular restructuring, pedagogical innovation, sensitization and resources, and

interdisciplinary research) signal that stakeholder governance must manage capability gaps and legitimacy concerns alongside content decisions.

Across the set of abstracts, an integrative reading positions stakeholder governance and value co-creation as mutually reinforcing. Governance processes shape how value is defined, while perceived value feeds back into trust, engagement, and compliance with institutional directions. Furthermore, Sarturi and Aragão (2025) provided the clearest synthesis by extending a stakeholder-based value model to include reputation and inter-stakeholder relationships, while also identifying stakeholder engagement as an outcome of the value creation process. This framing helps connect the procedural issues reported in Tanzania's quality assurance mechanisms (Mrema et al., 2024) with the interpretive divergence observed in academic excellence metrics (Kudaibergenova et al., 2025). In both contexts, misalignment in perceived fairness and meaning reduces cooperative behaviour. Similarly, the long transition dynamics in NCAA reclassification (Watkins & Bennett, 2025) can be interpreted as a governance stress test in which organizational identity and morale become part of the "value" that stakeholders evaluate. This interpretation, in turn, echoes Sarturi and Aragão, (2025) emphasis on relational dimensions beyond goods and services. The public-good framing in Japan (Huang et al., 2025) further suggested that state steering and institutional autonomy need not be treated as a binary. Instead, governance can be conceptualized as negotiated coordination, with stakeholder backgrounds shaping acceptable policy pathways. Overall, the abstracts indicate that higher education systems benefit from governance designs that (i) broaden participation beyond formal consultation, (ii) make role expectations and metrics explicit, and (iii) institutionalize shared evaluation and feedback loops. Such designs ensure that partnerships, curricula, and organizational transitions become sites of deliberate co-creation rather than fragmented implementation.

Theme 3: Technology, Sustainability, and Societal Impact in Higher Education Transformation

Digital transformation in higher education is described as a socio-technical change in which perceived utility, capability gaps, and governance safeguards jointly shape adoption outcomes. For example, in Kenya, Wainaina and Sun (2025) reported that educators recognize Generative AI as helpful for instructional quality, research productivity, and learner engagement. Nevertheless, strong concerns remain about ethics, academic integrity, and the loss of "human" elements, and perceived usefulness becomes the main predictor of willingness, which implies that institutional roll-out needs practical value signals alongside risk controls. Meanwhile, a related governance lens is provided by Tabacu (2025), who observed that rapid AI uptake is outpacing regulatory readiness. The proposed response involves binding institutional rules, including compulsory training, disclosure of AI-assisted work, updated assessment approaches, and user responsibility for rights violations. These measures indicate that the legitimacy of AI use depends on explicit conduct standards rather than informal norms. At the implementation level, Chugh et al. (2023) synthesized evidence that technology characteristics, stakeholder acceptance, and administrative structures interact with discipline needs and post-implementation metrics. Thus, "success" is defined by technical deployment, measured learning outcomes, and governance alignment. The same tension appears in Al-Hail et al. (2024), in which social media is described as exceeding a mere communication tool and becoming a channel for identity, reputation, and knowledge sharing. Despite this, weak methodological integration into formal learning, teaching, and assessment limits the sustainability of these benefits. Across these studies, technology adoption is

positioned as a transformation problem requiring institutional capability building, rule clarity, and evaluation metrics, rather than merely platform availability (Chugh et al., 2023; Al-Hail et al., 2024; Wainaina & Sun, 2025; Tabacu, 2025).

Sustainability is framed as a strategic performance domain. However, the abstracts repeatedly demonstrate fragmentation in indicators, differences in stakeholder priorities, and uneven translation into measurable outcomes. For instance, Basheer et al. (2025) operationalized sustainability through a structured indicator set aligned with multiple SDGs. They revealed that awareness gaps, financial constraints, and decentralized reporting can disrupt implementation even when environmental actions (e.g., energy efficiency, sustainable procurement) are valued. Additionally, the evidence suggests that social equity and economic dimensions may receive lower emphasis, creating an imbalanced sustainability portfolio. A performance-oriented model is reported by Hernandez-Diaz et al. (2024), which empirically links sustainability to university performance using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Specifically, holistic sustainability practices are associated with stronger institutional performance, particularly through outreach and strategic management, although the cross-sectional scope limits generalizability and invites longitudinal validation. However, pedagogical integration is not detached from this agenda. Tavitiyaman and Zhang (2024) observed that stakeholders in hospitality and tourism education prioritize sustainability topics, such as training and education, and sustainable building. Notably, industry practitioners are often more insistent than students on classroom inclusion and on experiential methods (internships, field trips) to enhance learning effectiveness. A complementary public-facing mechanism appears in Severino et al. (2025), in which ecological sustainability contributes to place attractiveness among students and shapes perceptions of destination value. This finding, in turn, suggests that sustainability narratives also operate through identity and experience. Overall, sustainability transformation is presented as requiring coherent indicator systems, governance alignment across stakeholder groups, and a credible link between sustainability practices, curriculum design, and institutional performance (Hernandez-Diaz et al., 2024; Tavitiyaman & Zhang, 2024; Basheer et al., 2025; Severino et al., 2025).

Conversely, societal impact is treated as an external-facing outcome in which higher education intersects with communities, tourism economies, and public legitimacy. The abstracts indicate that the communication strategy is central to translating institutional intentions into stakeholder participation. In Tolitoli Regency, Sawir et al. (2024) emphasized that PR practices influence the acceptance of sustainable tourism policies by shaping understanding, aligning local business behaviour, and countering misinformation. Moreover, community participation is portrayed as transformative yet constrained by conservation-development trade-offs, prompting recommendations for PR training and crisis communication. The role of perceptions aligns with the destination image study by Severino et al. (2025), which identified that cultural heritage, climate, and ecological sustainability are attraction factors for residents and international students. In response, this finding implies that “image management” can serve as a tool for sustainability-linked competitiveness beyond the campus setting. On a similar note, Basheer et al. (2025) underscored that sustainability progress is weakened when reporting is decentralized and stakeholder priorities diverge, supporting the idea that communication infrastructure and governance coherence are prerequisites for credible societal impact claims. In line with this, technology also connects to this outward dimension. Al-Hail et al. (2024) highlighted that social media supports professional identity and knowledge dissemination. Nevertheless, it lacks

pedagogical methodologies for formal integration, which may limit long-term societal value unless learning designs mature.

CONCLUSION

This SLR was undertaken to synthesize and critically examine recent scholarly work on reputation management in higher education, with particular attention to how reputation is conceptualized, governed, and operationalized in contemporary HEIs. The review applied a PRISMA-guided protocol to peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in WoS and Scopus and published between 2023 and 2025, resulting in the inclusion of 28 high-quality primary studies. In particular, the review was designed to address research questions focused on three interrelated dimensions: reputation, branding, and trust-based relationship management; stakeholder governance, perceptions, and value co-creation; and technology, sustainability, and societal impact in higher education transformation. By narrowing the timeframe and applying rigorous quality appraisal criteria, the review responded to the need for an up-to-date, methodologically robust synthesis. Simultaneously, this approach ensures that emerging trends in a rapidly evolving academic and socio-digital environment are accurately captured.

Overall, the findings reveal several consistent patterns across the reviewed literature. First, reputation in higher education is increasingly framed as a relational, stakeholder-driven construct rather than solely as a static outcome of rankings or academic performance. Accordingly, studies converge on the importance of trust, authenticity, social responsibility, and transparent communication in shaping institutional reputation, particularly through branding, PR, and digital engagement practices. Second, governance and stakeholder participation emerge as central mechanisms for forming and sustaining reputation. Furthermore, evidence depicts that stakeholder perceptions of fairness, inclusion, and procedural legitimacy influence compliance, engagement, and value co-creation across contexts such as quality assurance, academic excellence initiatives, professional preparation, and institutional transitions. Third, technology and sustainability are no longer peripheral considerations but core drivers of reputational transformation. For instance, digital technologies, including social media and AI, are reshaping how institutions communicate value and legitimacy, while sustainability practices increasingly link institutional performance to societal contributions. Across the studies, mixed-methods and qualitative designs dominate, reflecting the complexity of reputation as a socially constructed phenomenon. Simultaneously, theoretical lenses such as stakeholder theory, relationship marketing, and governance frameworks provide conceptual coherence.

Consequently, this review contributes to the field by integrating fragmented bodies of literature into a coherent, three-theme framework that reflects the multidimensional nature of reputation management in higher education. By synthesizing evidence across governance, branding, technology, and sustainability domains, the review extends prior work that often examined these elements in isolation. The thematic structure highlights how reputation functions as a connective mechanism linking internal governance processes, stakeholder relationships, and external societal expectations. From a practical perspective, the findings posit that higher education leaders should move beyond image-centric strategies toward integrated approaches that embed reputation management within governance structures, stakeholder engagement practices, digital policy frameworks, and sustainability agendas. Concurrently, several limitations must be acknowledged. The review was confined to English-

language journal articles indexed in two databases and limited to a three-year publication window, which may exclude relevant regional or practice-based studies. In response, future research should expand database coverage, incorporate longitudinal and comparative designs, and empirically test integrated reputation frameworks across diverse institutional and cultural contexts. In summary, this review underscores the value of systematic evidence synthesis in advancing theoretical clarity and informing strategic decision-making in higher education. This is particularly crucial as institutions navigate increasing accountability, digital disruption, and societal scrutiny to shape sustainable, credible reputations.

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