The antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education: A parental perspective

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A field study submitted to the UFS Business School in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Magister in Business Administration

at the

UFS Business School

University of the Free State

Bloemfontein

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DATE: 20 November 2022

DECLARATION:

I declare that the field study hereby handed in for the qualification Master's in Business Administration at the UFS Business School at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same work, either as a whole or in part, for a qualification at / in another university / faculty. I also hereby cede copyright of this work to the University of the Free State, South Africa.

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa are increasingly realising the differentiating role that corporate reputation plays in a very competitive higher education marketplace. However, from the literature reviewed, there are uncertainties towards the dimensions of a HEI's corporate reputation that impacts specifically the perspective and behavioral responses of parents of Grade 12 learners. Parents play a critical role in the selection of a HEI for post-school studies for their Grade 12 child.

The field study set out to identify the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education from a parental perspective. Service experience, information from others, and information from the media were identified as antecedents of corporate reputation of a HEI. Trust, identification, commitment, word-of-mouth intention, and supportive intention were identified as consequences of a HEI's corporate reputation. A conceptual model of the parental perspective of a HEI's corporate reputation was developed based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory.

The field study followed an ontological assumption, a positivism approach, and a cross-sectional time horizon. The theory development followed a deductive theory approach. A quantitative research method was followed using a simple random sampling technique to collect data from 163 Grade 12 learners' parents of high schools in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Six high schools agreed to distribute the self-completion questionnaires to the parents of their respective Grade 12 learners. The self-completion questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first two sections contained screening and background questions, while the third section posed statements to test each of the eleven hypotheses according to a seven-point Likert scale.

Data analysis was done to test the hypotheses using the statistical software package SmartPLS version 4.0. Findings indicated that the influence of information from others, information from media on corporate reputation were positive and statistically significant. The influence of corporate reputation on trust and identification was positive and statistically significant. Furthermore, the influence of trust and identification on commitment was also positive and statistically significant as well as the influence of commitment of word-of-mouth intention and supportive intentions.

The field study's findings provided a basis for HEI management teams to understand the perspective of parents on corporate reputation of HEIs and the impact of their perceptions on the selection of a suitable HEI for post-school studies for their children. Recommendations were given to HEI management teams to practically improve the perspectives of the HEI's corporate reputation.

Key words: Higher education institution (HEI), corporate reputation, parental perspective, parental involvement, information from others, information from media, commitment, trust, identification, word of mouth intention, supportive intention.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The following persons and high schools in Bloemfontein are hereby acknowledged and sincerely thanked:

- God, who gave me a dream and through whose steadfast and everlasting love I can achieve everything.
- Professor Jacques Nel, for your continued patience, guidance, and wisdom. Your assistance with especially the analysis of the data is greatly appreciated. I have learned so much from you.
- Professor Francis Petersen, for your support, encouragement, and for allowing me the time and opportunity to further my studies.
- Herman, Brendan, Andrea, and Gerhard for your encouragement, love, and support throughout the journey. Thank you for enduring the multiple heaps of research articles, for being my soundboard, and especially keeping the household afloat, while I was occupied with the writing of this dissertation.
- My father, Nico Coertze, who passed away in August 2021, for your belief in me and always being proud of me.
- The school principals and parents of Grade 12 learners in Grey College Secondary School, Navalsig High School, Jim Fouché Hoërskool, Hoërskool Sentraal, Fichardtpark Hoërskool, and C&N Sekondêre Meisieskool Oranje for respectively distributing the questionnaires and participating in the study.
- Elvira Oberholzer, who epitomises the essence of the University of the Free State, which is “Inspiring excellence and transforming lives through quality, impact, and care”. Your understanding, excellent administrative support, kindness, and care made this journey joyful. You are a ‘rock star’!

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Warren Buffet famously said that a company's reputation takes twenty years to be built but can be destroyed in five minutes. If companies would contemplate on the importance of corporate reputation, they would do business differently (Keh & Xie, 2008).

Corporate reputation is a significant and major component of corporate marketing (Abratt & Kelyn, 2012). Corporate reputation is regarded as an essential intangible asset of a company (Badri & Mohaidat, 2014; Safón, 2009). It is a stimulus for a customer's decision to buy or not buy a product or service (Terblanche, 2009). Companies with good reputation management practices enjoy differentiation in the marketplace and can increase awareness and desire from current and potential stakeholders to engage, thus increasing the competitive advantage and likeliness to attract more customers (Skallerud, 2011).

Reputation management is a tedious process and simultaneously fragile. It can change in a moment if not effectively managed (Akova & Kantar, 2020). Very often, companies' corporate reputation dominates the headlines due to scandalous actions. Many companies have learned the hard lesson about the scope of a damaged reputation's effect on customer loyalty and eventually on the financial well-being of a company (Guckian, Chapman, Lickel & Markowitz, 2017). The explosion of information through media channels, investors' demands for more profit and transparency, and the growing awareness of social responsibility recognise the building and maintaining of corporate reputation as a strategic activity of corporate marketing management (Argenti & Drukenmiller, 2004).

Similar to organisations in the private sector, the management of corporate reputation is also important for higher education institutions (HEIs) (Lee, Park, & Cameron, 2018). HEIs have many stakeholders, including parents of students (Lee et al., 2018). Parents are viewed as consumers, like students, with perceived consumerist needs which include the desire to 'know' what it is that they are paying for (Pugsley & Coffey, 2002). Therefore, it is imperative to understand the role corporate reputation plays in parents' higher education decision-making. The intended research will study the formation of corporate reputation in higher education from a parental perspective. At the same time, trust, identification, commitment, advocacy, and supportive intentions will be studied as corporate reputation consequences.

1.2. BACKGROUND

1.2.1 Corporate reputation defined

Keh and Xie (2009) state that corporate reputation finds a place academically in economics, sociology, management, and marketing fields of study. Albassami, Alqhatani, and Saleh (2015) view corporate reputation in the marketing literature as a construct with a wide range of variables such as trust, loyalty, and commitment. Walsh and Beatty (2007: 129) provide an external perspective on corporate reputation. They define it as the overall assessment of an organisation about its character or identity:

> The customer's overall evaluation of a firm based on his or her reactions to the firm's goods, services, communication activities, interactions with the firm and/or its representatives or constituencies (such as employees, management, or other customers) and/or known corporate activities.

Akova and Kantar (2020) define corporate reputation as the perception of public opinion on an institution's whole, including values, identity, and images. Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004) see corporate reputation as the collective representation of the company's image and identity held by multiple constituencies over time and how they perceive its behavior and performance.

From the above definitions, corporate reputation is constructed by an image, perception, experience of services and/or goods over time, and how ethical a company conducts its business. Lee (2019) studied the impact of the communication and promotion of a HEI's identity and images on parents' perception of reputation, attitudes, and behavioral intentions towards an institution.

1.2.2 Corporate reputation in higher education

HEIs progressively realise that they form part of the service industry (Khanna, Jacob & Yadav, 2014), despite the struggle to reconcile the historical status as institutions of educational teaching and learning excellence (Davies, 2021). Davies continues that HEIs are coming to terms with students' consumer status and understand the need to adapt to a business-orientated approach. This approach would require of a higher education institution (HEI) to build mutually beneficial relationships with 'stakeholders' such as prospective students, parents, alumni, potential and existing donors, and the media.

Skallerud (2011) states that research within the fields of management, marketing, and corporate strategy, elucidated that corporate reputation influences a company's success. Therefore, the concept of corporate reputation applies to HEIs in the anticipation that a good reputation will attract quality and quantity students.

Christensen and Gornitzka (2017) agree with the above notion and believe that modern HEIs cater to many stakeholder groups and are socially embedded. HEIs project a unique image, communicate information, and are contextually connected to different actors in the environment. These actors, such as alumni, donors, parents, and prospective students, are essential for commitment, trust, support, and legitimacy towards a HEI. Astin (1984) cited in Lee (2019) proposed that higher education reputation marketing should be approached differently from the usual service or product marketing and promotion. The selection of a suitable HEI by parents is complicated due to the combination of consumption and investment properties against the background of a positive corporate reputation.

Pires and Trez (2016) highlight that corporate reputation is the accumulated views and opinions of the organisation's history and the expectations on its future actions, given its efficiency in relation with its competitors. In addition, Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, and Beatty (2009) state that corporate reputation relates to other concepts or corporate associations such as corporate identity and image. Therefore, a higher education institution's (HEI's) corporate reputation is forthcoming from the perception in stakeholders' minds based on their expectations compared to the lived experience, what they have heard from others, and the facts they have gathered from friends, family, the internet, and media.

1.3. THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

Beneke and Human (2010) believe that reciprocal relationships with a broader network of stakeholders are integral for reputation management. Parents and prospective students may be equally important to establish a high level of loyalty and trust towards a HEI. Walsh et al. (2009) support the notion of relationship marketing towards beneficial stakeholder management. A reciprocal relationship is an essential determinant of the reputation and perception a customer holds of a company.

Parents want their children to receive the best possible education at a university, which they believe and perceive as most reputable (Akova & Kantar, 2020). The available literature on parental involvement and influence in selecting a university is limited (Wong, Ng, Lee & Lam, 2019) and even more so regarding the relationship between the HEI's reputation and parents' behaviour and power during the selection phase. Lee (2019) agrees and states that despite valid evidence that parents play an integral role in their child's selection processes of a HEI, there is scant research available to understand the parental perspective. Lee (2019) motivates that most research is on the prospective student's perspective and not from the parental perspective. Gao and Ng (2017) confirm that parental involvement is a crucial determinant of the selection of a preferred HEI, affordability of the institution, admission to the institution, attendance, and completion of the degree. Parents want the best for their children. Parents involvement in the choice of higher education is likely to increase when a significant financial layout and commitment are required.

Parental involvement during the selection phase is critical for preparing the school leaver for university life. Parental involvement can be categorised into the following categories, i.e., (1) economic capital, (2) cultural capital, and (3) social capital. The intertwining and complex relationships between these three capital types strengthen the dynamic process of parents' contributions to university selection and access (Gao & Ng, 2017). The cost of tertiary education, household income, and socioeconomic status are among the most common determinants when post-school options are discussed. The higher the household income, the higher the propensity to continue post-school education (Sá, Florax & Rietveld, 2003). Studying in the proximity of a university offers relief on the financial investment and emotional cost as the support systems are close to ensuring students' emotional and physical wellness.

Akova and Kantar (2020) state that parents, from as young as pre-school, investigate and evaluate schools that would best suit their children. A Norwegian study conducted by Skallerud (2011) across primary schools investigated parent-based school reputation as being predominantly influenced by parent satisfaction and loyalty. This behavior continues into secondary school. When the learner reaches senior high school, parents investigate and consider information on HEIs, which includes infrastructure, accommodation, achievements, qualities of teaching staff, and job opportunities upon graduation, and especially corporate reputation of HEIs (Skallerud, 2011).

In Iacopini and Hayden (2017), parents viewed the importance of educational teaching and qualifications in a very serious light. Parents interviewed felt a deep sense of responsibility to assist their children with post-school options to become better qualified. Parents regarded a good corporate reputation, significant contribution to employment opportunities once graduated, and a university free of corruption as critical considerations when evaluating and selecting a university. Based on the discussion to this point, it can be asserted that reputation management for HEIs is vital to acknowledge parents as customers (Skallerud, 2019) and as a very important stakeholder group for the success of a HEI (Lee, Park, & Cameron, 2018).

1.4 ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF CORPORATE REPUTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

1.4.1 Antecedents of corporate reputation

Knowledge and information of a company either motivates or discourages customers to engage with the company to acquire its goods or services. Shamma, and Hassan (2009) highlighted the impact of various sources of information on different stakeholders' perceptions about a company. The antecedents of corporate reputation discussed in this section are personal experience that customers have with a company, information gathered from others such as friends or family, and information gathered from media sources.

1.4.1.1 Experience of services

Walsh and Beatty (2007) believe that the customer is pivotal to the concept of reputation and highlighted corporate reputation as a customer's evaluation based on the firm's interaction (experience) with goods and services, constituencies, or other corporate activities. The authors describe corporate reputation as a positive and general perception (estimation) that the public holds of a company or for the purpose of this study, HEIs that positively impact the public’s attitude and behaviour towards the HEI. The assessment translates into a quality promise or a value proposition, which directs the company to serve customers with high-quality services. Shamma and Hassan (2009) agree that personal experience and interactions with a company are the main drivers of knowledge gathering to form perceptions about corporate reputation.

The concept of quality needs to be de-constructed, as it is reliant on various customer variables. The quality of services is difficult to determine since customers have different expectations, biases, and values, which articulate into pre-purchase and post-purchase evaluation (Walsh & Beatty, 2007). Lee (2019) identifies HEIs’ culture and value system as determinants of corporate reputation. Values and culture are influential factors for selecting a HEI include academic quality, tradition, sense of belonging and care, innovativeness, engaged scholarship, and student-centredness. These touchpoints of culture and values translate into the institution’s performance. Furthermore, performance links experience and parent satisfaction as key antecedents for corporate reputation.

1.4.1.2 Information from others

Teo and Soutar (2011) state that HEIs need to take note of informal knowledge sharing between a potential customer (parent and student) and non-commercial senders. Informal knowledge sharing plays a significant role is the preference and selection of a HEI (Teo & Soutar, 2011). Traditional advertising and promotion tactics are no longer the predominant sources of knowledge gathering and have fallen victim to the increasingly popular informal reference sources and social networks.

1.4.1.3 Information from the media

The media is a crucial tool for influencing how customers views brands. While customer experiences may improve views of a company's goods or services and the level of credibility and trust toward a company, information learned from the media could give hint about other attributes of a company's reputation that are crucial for reputation (Shamma & Hassan, 2009). Einwiller, Carroll, and Korn (2010) also state that the media is a primary source of a company’s information on their activities and general news. Media favourability and visibility influence a company’s prominence in the market and the general public’s perception of the corporate reputation. Einwiller et al. (2010) further indicate that stakeholders rely increasingly on media to learn about a company’s attributes that are challenging to relate directly to personal experience and other people's knowledge. Applying the statement to the current study, parents are likely to rely on traditional and digital media channels to obtain information about a HEI that they are not able to gather from informal and influential social networks.

1.4.2 Consequences of corporate reputation

Walsh et al. (2007) state that companies, such as HEIs, need to manage corporate reputation by measuring it and understanding its consequences on customer outcome variables. A general view is that a 'good' corporate reputation is an important signal of quality, credibility and trust focused on sound transactions with stakeholders in the environment (Walsh et al., 2009). The reverse is also true; a 'bad' corporate reputation will elicit unfavorable evaluation from the customers who engage with the company.

1.4.2.1 Trust

Diaconu and Pandelica (2011) highlight the importance of relationship marketing and relationship building with a prospective customer to secure trust, loyalty, and confidence towards an institution for long-term success, which Beneke (2011) refers to as the lifetime value of a customer. In the context of HEIs, the lifetime value of the student should stretch beyond the registration and graduation phases into the postgraduate or alumni donor phase. Walsh et al. (2009) found that a positive corporate reputation holds benefits for the company such as loyalty, trust, and retention, which concurs with the customer's lifetime value explained by Beneke.

In the context of the field study, trust is a comprehensive outcome from corporate reputation (Van der Merwe & Puth, 2014). Keh and Xie (2009) state that trust will be established when one party, the trustor (parent), has confidence and believe in the integrity, reliability, ability, and benevolence of the trustee or the service provider (HEI) to act in a specific context. Trust is the foundation of corporate reputation and is fueled by trustworthiness, honesty, and competence. Public relations, as a function of marketing and relationship management provide the bedrock on which trust is built and fostered.

Van der Merwe and Puth (2014) explain trust flowing from the Social Exchange Theory, as a multi-dimensional, inter-subjective, and systemic social reality and has affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. The affective dimension is characterised by emotion and an inherent moral element present in the trust relationship (Van der Merwe & Puth, 2014). The emotional bond between the two parties is based on the trustee's goodwill, values, and ethical character to meet the trustor's needs. The cognitive dimension is grounded in the trustor's perception that the trustee can act with integrity and benevolence. The third dimension of trust lies in the behavioral evidence of the practical execution of trust.

1.4.2.2 Identification

Van der Merwe and Puth (2017) define identification as the familiarity and similarity a customer has towards an organisation. Identification allows stakeholders to align themselves with the values and integrity of an organisation.

Akova and Kantar (2020) motivate that HEIs with a good reputation for student-centric teaching and learning practices encourage a strong sense of belonging. These students have the desire to be emotionally associated with their universities. They become ambassadors and participative alumni and hold potential donor abilities, thus have a high customer lifetime value. Stemming from the Organisational Identification Theory and the

Social Identity Theory, Bhattacharya and Sen, cited in Keh and Xie (2009), state that when a company satisfies one or more of a customer's key self-definitional needs, a solid customer-company relationship forms, which result in a positive perception towards corporate reputation.

Customer identification is critical for building meaningful relationships and lasting commitment between the two parties. Despite its value and influence on purchase behavior, customer identification is underutilised, and research literature is limited (Keh & Xie, 2009). Customer identification is a construct that extends beyond purchase behavior and is cemented on a deeper identity level. A strong brand identification leads to loyalty, an influential advocacy role, resilience to negative information, and willingness to try new services or products (Keh & Xie, 2009). From a higher education perspective, parent identification is conceptualised as a variable resulting from corporate reputation to form a committed, loyal, and trusting relationship with a HEI.

1.4.2.3 Commitment

Commitment, embedded in the Social Exchange Theory, is regarded as the manifestation of a long-term willingness to maintain a meaningful relationship between two parties (Keh & Xie, 2009). The interaction between a HEI and the customer (parent) leads to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. It influences the reputation held by and ultimate commitment levels from the parent for further engagement and investment (Nguyen, Yu, Melewar, & Hemsley-Brown, 2015).

1.4.2.4 Word-of-mouth intention

Another consequence of corporate reputation the literature review word-of-mouth intention. Walsh et al. (2009) has done considerable research on word-of-mouth resulting from customer-based reputation perceptions. Reichfeld (2003, 2006), cited in Walsh et al. (2009), stresses that to grow and succeed, a company should ask whether a customer would recommend its services or not.

Walsh and Beatty (2007) stress that positive or negative corporate reputation are concomitant with positive or negative word of mouth or influential advocacy. Customers enjoy sharing their experiences, whether it is on social media or face-to-face conversations, especially when these experiences were poor or excellent. A company or a HEI with a positive reputation will enjoy an extensive reservoir of benevolence (goodwill), and their happy customers (parents) will have the advocacy power to proclaim their endorsement of the performance.

As mentioned before, social media platforms gave every consumer a loud voice to either endorse or reject a company's credibility and reputation. On social media, opinions frequently emerge in comments. The integration of technology collects these comments and opinions, and the analyses thereof will enable a company to obtain valuable knowledge of its intangible elements (Ramos et al., 2019).

1.4.2.5 Supportive intention

Corporate reputation is constructed through a perceptual, balanced articulation of an institution's actions into values of trustworthiness, respect, loyalty, admiration, and confidence (Foruodi, Gupta, Melewar, & Fourodi, 2016). Akova and Kantar (2020) found that the more important reputation is for the customer, the importance of prestige, respectability, and awareness of the company grow parallel. Customers are the organisation's most valuable assets, as they are the primary revenue generators (Walsh et al., 2009). Behavioural intentions such as support intentions are determined the customer is treated throughout the purchase experience.

This study will take a customer-based approach from the parents' perspective to identify the antecedents and customer behavioural responses as consequences of corporate reputation in higher education.

1.5 RESEARCH GAP

As mentioned above, there is limited literature available on the nature of interactions between HEIs and parents (Lee, 2019; Wong et al., 2019). To date, research is lacking on the unique parental perspective on the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in the higher education environment (Lee, 2019). The higher education sector could benefit from research focusing on understanding the parental perspective of factors influencing corporate reputation. HEIs invest increasingly more funds in reputation marketing tactics and communication messages and therefore it is worthwhile to track reputation marketing trends that influence parents' perceptions. (Lee, 2019).

1.6 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There are twenty-six public higher-education institutions in South Africa. The competitive nature of the higher education landscape encourages tertiary institutions to aggressively recruit qualifying prospective students through various marketing messages, tactics, and promotions. Lee (2019) warns against the limited appetite parents might have for communication messages in an already flooded advertising space.

Motives or wants and needs influence parents' perceptions and expectations about the comprehensive offerings of HEIs (Lee, 2019). These perceptions and expectations are amongst others; location, application and admission processes, student culture and tradition (Lee, 2019), variety of academic programmes, tuition fees, accommodation, as well as the opinions of 'influencers' such as parents, teachers, friends, the reputation, and finally the local and international rankings (Safón, 2009) of the institution (Wong et al., 2018). Corporate reputation plays an important role in attracting customers, which refer to parents of prospective students in the context of the field study. (Wiid, Cant & Makhitha, 2016). The aforementioned perceptions and expectations vs initial and/or post-experience realities affect and influence the reputation management processes directly. When the expectation falls short of the lived experience, the reputation of the university is severely impacted, and the institution ends up not as the first choice, but as the fall-back choice. On the other hand, a good institutional corporate reputation strengthens and supports the selling effectiveness of the recruitment team (Wiid et al., 2016). Through this study, more insights will be obtained to deliver a more accurate picture of the parent's perspective on the reputation of HEIs and how this perspective influences the decision-making process of choosing an institution.

1.6.1 Research problem statement

The problem statement guiding the study is: Parents form perceptions on the corporate reputation of HEIs through service experience, obtaining information from others such as friends and family, and information gathered from media reports. In context of the study service experience, information from others, and information from media are antecedents of corporate reputation and may translate into behavioural consequences such as trust, identification, commitment, word-of-mouth intention, and supportive intention.

Parents are crucial role players when a HEI is selected and therefore insight is needed to clarify the role of corporate reputation in influencing the selection decision.

1.6.2 Research Questions

The overarching research questions are:

- What are the antecedents that influence corporate reputation perceptions of parents of prospective undergraduate students?
- What are the consequences of corporate reputation in the higher education environment?

1.7 PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To find answers to the research problem stated in paragraph 1.6, the following primary and secondary objectives will direct the research in a focussed manner.

1.7.1 Primary research objective

The primary research objective is:

- To identify the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in the higher education context from a parental perspective.

1.7.2 Secondary research objectives

The secondary research objectives are:

- To identify from literature the antecedents of corporate reputation of tertiary institutions of higher education
- To identify from literature the consequences of corporate reputation of tertiary institutions in higher education
- To determine the extent which corporate reputation influences parents in selecting a HEI
- To develop a conceptual model on the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in the higher education environment
- To empirically test the conceptual model
- To recommend interventions based on the research results the HEIs can introduce to improve corporate reputation amongst parents of Grade 12 parents

1.8 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

HEIs in South Africa are realising the importance of reputation building communication messages, however from the literature reviewed, there are still uncertainties towards the dimensions of corporate reputation that impact parents' behaviour towards a HEI. The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory forms the basis of the conceptual model depicted in Figure 1.1.

Based on the S-O-R Theory, the experience of service, information from others and information from the media are regarded as the stimuli (S) from the external environment. The internal perspective (O) held by parents (the organism), which influences trust, identification, and commitment of parents towards a HEI. The behavioral intentions depicted in the conceptual model as word-of-mouth intention and supportive intention, represent the responses (R) in the Theory. Additional theories such as the Source Credibility Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Social Identity Theory, and the Commitment-Trust Theory support the S-O-R Theory and are discussed in Chapter 3.

The conceptual model proposes to address the relationship between the antecedents and the consequences of corporate reputation that influence of parents' perspectives on the corporate reputation of HEIs in South Africa.

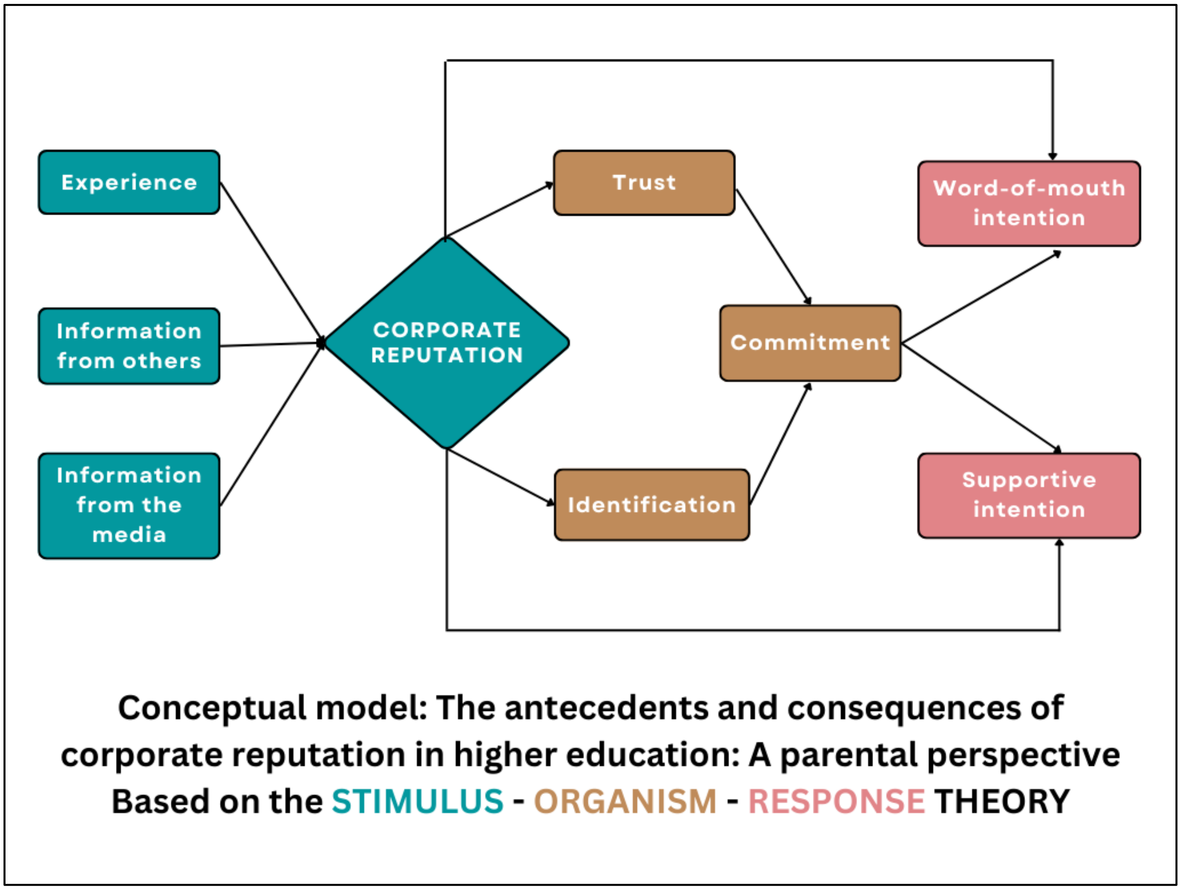

Figure 1.1: Conceptual model of antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in the higher education environment

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.9.1 Research approach and design

Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aardt, and Wagner (2014) state that research can be approached quantitatively and qualitatively. The main distinction drawn between the two approaches is that a quantitative research approach involves reflecting data in numbers (numerical data). In contrast, a qualitative research approach reflects data through the emphasis on words, such as interviews. According to the above distinction, the intended research study will follow a quantitative research design to find answers to the research questions, as it intends to gather statistical data through self-completion questionnaires.

1.9.2 Population and sampling strategy

The population consists of parents or guardians of Grade 12 learners in 2022 of public and private schools in Bloemfontein. Six schools in Bloemfontein agreed to participate in the study by disseminating the questionnaire to the parents of the Grade 12 learners. It is estimated that each school has 100+ Grade 12 learners in 2022. Only these six schools in Bloemfontein, who agreed to disseminate the self-completion questionnaires either through emailing the link to the online survey or the hard copy questionnaire to their Grade 12 parents, will be included in the screening questions at the start of the questionnaire. These schools are Grey College, Hoërskool Sentraal, C&N Sekondêre Meisieskool Oranje, Navalsig High School, Fichardtpark Hoërskool, and Jim Fouche Hoërskool.

A specific type of non-probability sampling technique called convenience sampling, often referred to as availability sampling, collects data from population members who are easily available to take part in the study. Convenience sampling is a sort of sampling in which the research will rely solely on the first primary data source that is available (Bryman et al., 2014). To put it another way, this sampling technique entails gathering people anywhere they can be found and usually wherever it is convenient. Prior to choosing the participants for convenience sampling, no inclusion criteria were established. Everyone is encouraged to take part. It is, in fact, the recommended option in some research studies. This approach can be used in business research to gather early primary data on specific topics, such as how consumers perceive a particular brand or how prospective buyers feel about a new product design. However, in some circumstances, convenience sampling may be the sole choice (Hair, Page, & Brunsveld, 2020).

As not all high or secondary schools agreed to participate, the sample is limited to only the abovementioned six schools in Bloemfontein who have agreed to disseminate the self-completion questionnaires. Not all parents in the population will have an equal chance to participate; therefore, a convenience sampling strategy (non-probability sampling) is applicable. It is estimated that approximately 200 respondents would respond.

1.9.3 Data Collection

The field study received ethical clearance from The General/Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State to conduct research amongst parents of Grade 12 learners in Bloemfontein, with reference number: UFS-HSD 2022/1060/22. Data was gathered through online and hard copy self-completion questionnaires since the study is quantitative of nature. Both the online and hard copy self-completion questionnaires were designed in an attractive horizontal format, so as to keep the attention of the respondents and consist of screening, background, and a series of open-ended and close-ended questions. The self-completion questionnaire consisted of three sections, which were (A) screening questions, (B) background questions, and (C) beliefs on the corporate reputation of a HEI. The questionnaire was pre-coded according to a seven-point Likert-scale and subdivided into separate categories or themes (Bryman et al., 2014) in line with the research questions. The questionnaire took 15 minutes to complete.

The online version, developed on the Evasys online survey system, provided buttons per questions which the respondent had to click to select. The hard copy version presented the questions in a table format. The respondent had to select the appropriate column that represents his/her evaluation.

The researcher does not have access to contact detail of parents and will rely on schools to disseminate the self-completion questionnaire to Grade 12 parents on their database. Those schools who opt for the dissemination of the internet-based questionnaires will email the link to the online Evasys system, which consists of the preamble, POPIA consent, and the questionnaire.

The schools who opted for the option to disseminate hard copy questionnaires were provided with copies of the preamble, POPIA consent form that each respondent had to agree to, as well as the questionnaire. The learners were provided with copies for each parent, which had to be returned to the school on an agreed upon date. The completed hard copy questionnaires were placed and sealed in an envelope with the school's name and the number of questionnaires received and it was personally collected by the researcher on an agreed upon date. The participating schools provided written consent to assist in the study.

1.9.4 Data analysis

190 Responses were received, and the statistical analyses are based on the responses with clean, valid, and usable data, which total 163 responses. 27 Responses contained insufficient and or invalid data and were excluded from the statistical analysis. To test the hypotheses in the conceptual model, developed in Chapter 3, the statical software package SmartPLS version 4.0 was used to test the hypotheses in the conceptual model. To evaluate the structural model, PLS-SEM results were used. (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019).

1.9.5 Ethical Considerations

Agwor and Adesina (2017) explain that ethics are moral principles that govern conduct and decision-making behavior about interactions or dealings between individuals. Since this research will entail gathering data from people about their behavior, considerations regarding ethics, to protect the researcher and participants, will be paramount throughout the research process. Bryman et al*.* (2014) classify ethical considerations into four main areas, which are harm to participants, informed consent, protection of privacy, and level of deception. Throughout the research, strict adherence to all the above ethical considerations was ensured.

Chapter 4 will elucidate more on the research methodology and ethical considerations pertaining to the conducted study.

1.10 DEMARCATION AND POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The research is in the field of Marketing. Fombrun (1996) cited in Badri and Mohaidat (2013) stated that the measurement of corporate reputation of HEIs attracted ample attention in the marketing and business management literature. Many studies on corporate reputation confirmed the link between a good reputation and customer behavior (Badri & Mohaidat, 2013), which is embedded in the marketing and promotion of goods and services.

The geographical demarcation of the study is limited to the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, Free State Province, South Africa and is a sample representing HEIs in South Africa. It is furthermore demarcated to only one of the three UFS campuses, namely the Bloemfontein Campus.

Possible limitations of the study which offer future research opportunities are the geographical and population boundary of Bloemfontein parents and the generalisation of the findings to all universities, universities of technology, and parent populations throughout South Africa and in other countries. Furthermore, parents' specific perception on specific South African HEIs' corporate reputation is another possible limitation of the study.

1.11 LAYOUT OF REMAINING CHAPTERS

The existing literature, theoretical framework, data analysis, findings, and recommendations will be arranged and presented in the following chapters:

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Chapter 5: Data analysis

Chapter 6: Findings, conclusions, and recommendations

1.12 CHAPTER 1: CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the higher education landscape and the increasing realisation of HEIs that they exist in a service industry; the importance of a good corporate reputation becomes increasingly evident. The perceptions and experience that parents of school leavers hold of the corporate reputation of a HEI, are influenced by specific antecedents, and have consequences on the trust, identification, commitment, loyalty, and advocacy of parents. The perspective of parents as customers will receive more attention in chapter 2.

The management dilemma, research questions, the primary objective and secondary objectives of the study were presented. A conceptual model of antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education from a parental perspective was introduced. while a design for the research methodology and ethical considerations were discussed. An overview of the data analysis, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 5, has been alluded to. The demarcation of the study as well as possible limitations were highlighted.

Literature review

CHAPTER 2

2.1. INTRODUCTION - AN INSIGHT INTO THE STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Chapter 1 set the scene of the field study and provided an overview of how antecedents influence the corporate reputation of a HEI that have consequences on the formation of trust, identification, commitment, and behavioral intentions that include word-of-mouth intention and supportive intention. The perspective from parents of Grade 12 learners in high schools on the corporate reputation of HEIs was explicitly alluded to.

Chapter 2 is structured as follows: an overview of worldwide change in higher education, followed by a literature review that alludes to the concept of corporate reputation, drivers that contribute to the formation of corporate reputation, parental perspectives on the corporate reputation of HEIs, management of corporate reputation, benefits of an excellent corporate reputation, and finally discussing the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education.

The value of corporate reputation across various disciplines is gaining momentum among academics. Each of the disciplines articulate corporate reputation in context to the overall discipline (Shamma & Hassan, 2009). Intangible assets, such as corporate reputation, are also seen as a source of competitive advantage by strategists. Corporate reputation is defined by communication experts as a collection of corporate characteristics that contribute to the formation of a company's connection with its constituents (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000). Corporate reputation is now seen as having broader positive or negative outcomes that go beyond consumer relationships. Companies or HEIs should strive for a positive reputation across a variety of stakeholder groups, including parents, and bear a large portion of the responsibility for this achievement on the marketing and communications function (Shamma & Hassan, 2009).

2.1.1 Role of HEIs

According to Diaconu & Pandelică (2011), the role of HEIs focuses on scientific research, learning, training, and shaping the minds of the student cohort through the imparting of knowledge by dedicated academic staff. Furthermore, HEIs are responsible for integrating new and existing knowledge into society's technological, scientific, and economic advancements.

Qazi, Qazi, Raza, and Yousufi (2021) state that, as social and educational structures, HEIs are microcosms of society and responsible for the formation of citizens to advance society at large. Qazi et al. (2021) continue stating that education is a driving force in a country’s economic and social growth. Furthermore, a country’s overall development is partially mirrored by the level of education advancement. Therefore, as Qazi et al. (2021) indicate, HEIs are pillars of innovation, creativity, constructive thinking, and the insertion of trained specialists into the labor market.

2.1.2 The changing higher education landscape

Against the role of HEIs, it is no surprise that technology and communication advancements (Erisher, Obert, & Frank, 2014), the rise of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the recent global Covid-19 pandemic, and the changing demands of the labor market have necessitated a change in the learning and teaching methodologies. In addition, higher education in, amongst others, the United States of America, Malaysia (Munisamy, Jaafar & Nagaraj, 2013), Europe (Christensen & Gornitzka, 2017), and Pakistan (Qazi et al., 2021) face intense challenges such as a decrease in government funding, fewer funding grants, and donations (Lee et al., 2018; Pérez-Dias and Rodriquez, 2015) coupled with a reduction in quality and quantity of student enrolments (Lee, 2019). The increasing international competition aggravates the mounting pressure to meet and expectations and demands of the developmental goal (Qazi et al., 2021) due to global student mobility (Hemsley-Brown, Melewar, Nguyen & Wilson, 2016).

According to Azouri, Daou, and Khoury (2014) cited in Qazi et al., (2021), a HEI is regarded as a business and not just a tertiary institution. The sizeable changes in funding sources, internationalisation, quality of first-time entry undergraduate students, and intensification of competition have stepped up the rivalry between HEIs worldwide to attract the attention of home-based and international students and academic staff (Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabando, Zorrilla & Forcada, 2017). Qazi et al., (2021) go further stating that the intense rivalry not only include recruitment of the brightest young minds, but also research investments. Qazi et al. (2021) state that HEIs are becoming more like one another and finding it challenging to draw in excellent students as a result. As a result, universities' competitive advantage is diminishing. According to Erisher et al., (2014) HEIs management teams are increasingly concerned with the brand image that links with the HEI's identity or corporate reputation that articulates their existence. The main strategy to navigate a challenging competitive higher education landscape is to establish a distinctive brand identity or corporate reputation (Erisher et al., 2014). A strong corporate reputation might enable HEIs to stand out from the competition and get a competitive edge. While reputation is the degree of trust or mistrust in a HEI's ability to live up to stakeholder expectations, brand image is a crucial predicate to a HEI's strong reputation and is the perception that stakeholders have in their thoughts (Qazi et al., 2021).

2.1.3 The South African context of higher education

The South African higher education context looks no different than the situation described in section 2.1.2. According to Beneke and Human (2010), increased demand for more access to higher education, restricted government funding, shifting demographics, and the emergence of private education institutions forced HEIs to become more innovative in their student recruitment marketing endeavors. The national government-supported historically HEIs in South Africa to some degree. Beneke and Human (2010) highlighted in their exploratory study that the national government insisted on more representative student councils, equitable distribution of tertiary education spending, while implementing strict budgetary constraints. Over the past few years, the increasingly competitive nature of higher education necessitated HEIs in South Africa to turn more towards corporate principles such as an integrated institutional strategic marketing programme, relationship marketing to different stakeholders, strategic positioning of a corporate reputation, and personalised student recruitment processes. HEIs in South Africa realise that it is no guarantee that quality students will organically apply and therefore turns to innovative marketing solutions to address contextual student preferences and the changing job market requirements (Beneke & Human, 2010; Beneke, 2011).

2.2 CORPORATE REPUTATION IN THE FIELD OF MARKETING

More HEIs' leadership are realising the importance of integrated marketing and strategic positioning of their institutions to manage and mitigate the impact of the fierce competition in the education landscape (Diaconu & Pandelică, 2011). A definition of the marketing concept is a good starting point since the demarcation of the study is in the discipline of marketing. Marketing is required to create awareness of the university's product offerings, education, student life, and ultimately increase the number of enrolled students. (Khoshtaria, Datuashvili & Matin, 2020).

Kotler and Armstrong (2010), in the web article by Friesner (2016), define marketing as the process to create value for customers through the building of solid relationships with these customers to extract value from the customers in return. This definition highlights the value exchange process between an organisation or company or, in the case of the study, a university and the customer and the benefits of long-term relationships.

Wiid, Cant, and Makheta (2016: 8) define strategic marketing as "the process of planning, implementing, and controlling the marketing efforts of the organisation to meet the goals and objectives of the organisation and successfully satisfy customer needs and wants".

In addition, Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer (1995) motivate that marketing has moved from a transactional orientation towards a relational orientation, which is characterised by commitment, trust, loyalty, forsaking of alternatives, and mutuality. In terms of relevance to the conceptual model presented in the study, the consequences of corporate reputation amongst others, include trust and commitment.

To identify the link between marketing and corporate reputation, Chun, Argandoña, Choirat, and Siegel (2019) report that corporate reputation as an academic discipline is relatively young but evolved considerably over the last two decades. Initially, the term corporate reputation was referred to as a function of marketing, and its understanding was limited to the constructs of customer evaluation (judgment) and image. Since then, significant insights into the relationship between multiple disciplines and corporate reputation have resulted in a multiple stakeholder approach. Corporate reputation is a vulnerable and fragile concept and can be tarred by any stakeholder. According to Chun et al. (2019), numerous disciplines of corporate reputation include human resources, media, strategy, marketing, philosophy, and especially business ethics. All the above definitions for the intended research are suitable and relevant.

2.2.1 Higher education marketing

Lenore-Jenkins (2016) identify higher education marketing tactics as mailings, telephone calls, and the old-fashioned boots-on-the-ground visits to high schools. In referring to the predominantly used mass marketing tactics such as advertising, outdoor advertising, sponsorships, Beneke and Human (2010) add that direct and semi-direct selling techniques such as open days, career exhibitions, and school visits to Grade 11 and 12 learners complete the suite of traditional marketing tactics that most institutions of higher education deploy. These tactics, as stated above, involve predominantly one-way communication, have a short-term focus, and are very costly. However, they are essential to establish a favorable judgment of a HEI's reputation in the minds of the prospective students.

The higher education landscape in South Africa is complicated because competitors and prospective students alike are no longer limited by geographical borders and are spoilt for choice between many public and private universities and colleges. To improve and retain a competitive advantage among competitors, it becomes increasingly critical to include digital public relations, advertising, and marketing in the marketing mix (Gifford, 2010).

Lee (2018) states that despite acknowledging education marketing as a necessity and a reality, the value of a theoretical model is not reflected in the literature dealing with higher education marketing. Diaconu and Pandelică (2011) elaborate that marketing in HEIs is necessary to create different stakeholder and institutional benefits related to its strategic plan, vision, and mission. These benefits refer to customer satisfaction, attracting students, obtaining donors, and other means of financial resources. Diaconu and Pandelică (2011) state that the marketing strategy of a HEI should align with the institutional strategic positioning strategy, which articulates into making the right decisions on the marketing mix components. In addition, all marketing tactics and communication messages should be crafted contextually for each stakeholder to address the specific needs of each stakeholder.

2.2.2 Fierce competitive landscape

A significant factor in the marketing of a HEI is an analysis of the competitive environment and how it can be navigated to get the best yield in terms of student enrolment and building reputation. Munisamy, Jaafar, and Nagaraj (2014) highlight the need to understand how and why students choose a HEI in relation to the increasing competition in the higher education market. As a significant equivalent for quality, corporate reputation guides the selection and evaluation of HEIs.

Within the battle for market dominance, the institution of higher education that wins is the one that can adapt speedily to the changing landscape to create and maintain traction within the tertiary education environment. Corporate reputation links strongly with business topics such as (1) market-entry barriers, (2) quality management, and (3) transaction costs. A good reputation, especially applicable to HEIs, can be a barrier to entry for competitors. A good corporate reputation is difficult and costly to replicate (Smith, Rupp, & Motley, 2013).

Lee (2018) proposes that communication specialists should elevate the strategic positioning of a HEI through its images and identities while influencing parents' attitudes, perception of the corporate reputation, and behavioural intentions towards a HEI. Therefore, within this higher education ecosystem, the key is to leverage each element at the right time, target the right audience with the right message, and position an institution's brand among all internal and external stakeholders. This leveraging action refers to contextual marketing (University of the Free State, 2020).

Lee (2018) supports the view mentioned above and adds that corporate reputation management has become vital for HEIs to gain and maintain a competitive advantage. Attracting students and quality academic and support staff, donors, and grants pivot around an excellent corporate reputation. Lee (2018) continues and links the above concepts of public relations and communication to the context of reputation management by HEIs. Lee (2018) further emphasises that higher education marketing should intensely focus on a relational approach to engage stakeholders to strengthen its competitive advantage effectively. Through a focussed and strategic relationship-driven approach, the appeal and perception of a HEI are positively secured. Alessandri, Young, and Kinsey (2006), state HEIs can redirect perceptions of academic performance, external performance (integration of knowledge), supportive and caring engagement to improve corporate reputation.

Kotler (2003), cited in Diaconu and Pandelică (2011), identifies the application of contextual communication messages in the higher education landscape as the four C's, namely customer (student or parent) needs, costs incurred by the customer (student or parent), purchase convenience and comfort, and finally communication activities.

Increasingly, HEIs feel the pressures of reduced funding due to declining government subsidies (Beneke & Human, 2010). The width and depth of available resources also add to the success or failure to recruit sufficient and the right-fit students for an institution of higher education, which aggravates the competitive nature of the higher education landscape. Nan Dawkins (Blumenstyk, 2006) states that within the competitive environment, the companies - and in this case, institutions - with higher budgets are the most successful in recruiting enough and the right-fit students.

The general perception that people have of a HEI is influenced by its corporate reputation (Khoi, 2020). Corporate reputation includes a person's perceptions of a person, organisation, institution, or entity (HEI) based on past and present events, including their beliefs, feelings, thoughts, ethical behaviors, and experiences (Plewa, Ho, Conduit, & Karpen, 2016).

2.3 THE CONCEPT OF CORPORATE REPUTATION

Walsh and Beatty (2007) motivate that the concept of corporate reputation may be associated with three business topics: (1) transaction costs research, (2) quality management, and (3) barriers to entering the market. A favorable reputation reduces transactional costs between the seller (company) and the buyer (customer). Reichfeld (1996), cited in Walsh and Beatty (2007), states that increasing the frequency of interaction reduces the uncertainty customers might hold. They become less dependent on the company's constituencies for advice and information, which translates to lower transaction costs. Reputation is beneficial to ensure the delivery of quality services or the production of quality products. Customers will quickly indicate poor services or products through advocacy power and refusal to further engage, which will tarnish the reputation severely. The last business topic, barriers to entering the market, links up with the competition in the market as discussed in the preceding paragraph. A good corporate reputation is tough to replicate; thus, competing companies or companies considering entrance to a mature market might consider the financial layout too much to establish their reputation and decide not to enter the market.

2.3.1 Definitions of corporate reputation

Most definitions like those provided by Scheepers and Sheldon (Caruana, Cohen, & Krentler, 2005) focus only on the public's or stakeholders' perceptions involved with a particular firm or its brand. Walsh and Beatty (2007: 129) provide an external perspective on corporate reputation, namely a reputation based on the customer's view and experience, and therefore defined the terms customer-based reputation as:

> The customer's overall evaluation of a firm based on their reactions to the firm's goods, services, communication activities, interactions with the firm and its representatives or constituencies (such as employees, management, or other customers) and or known corporate activities.

Tangible and intangible assets exist within any organisation. Tangible assets refer to physical infrastructure, human and financial resources, while intangible assets are difficult to manage and measure. Smith et al. (2013) acknowledge that corporate reputation is a significant intangible asset to produce a strategic competitive advantage. However, Doorley and Garcia (2015) provide another view on the asset status of corporate reputation. They state that the historical perspective of a reputation as an intangible asset is not correct and should be viewed as a tangible asset since it has real and tangible monetary value. They state that as nebulous as corporate reputation can be, it can and should be measured.

Caruana et al. (2005) acknowledge corporate reputation as a construct gaining attention and popularity amongst companies with increasing amounts of time and financial resources invested into building a positive corporate reputation. It is vital to nurture and guide the corporate reputation in the beliefs, values, and benefits embedded in the corporate identity, which should articulate into the corporate culture (Smith et al., 2013) since reputation has a significant impact on the bottom line.

A robust corporate reputation encourages a strong sense of belonging for internal stakeholders and a high level of belief and trust among external stakeholders. Well-managed corporate reputation has increasingly attractive influences on potential stakeholders. Lee et al. (2018) agree that the corporate image mirrors the public's overall impression of an organisation. The authors acknowledge the relationship-driven characteristic of reputation building and the organisation’s collective past and future actions, which also supports the definition by Fombrun and Van Riel in 1997 as cited in Caruana (2005). This view shows that corporate reputation is linked to past performance and expected or anticipated performance. On the other hand, the relational approach implies an engagement between the customer, as the external stakeholder, and the company's staff (internal stakeholder). Thus, the notion that corporate reputation results from perceptions before (antecedents) transaction or engagement and the company's performance during the transaction, which leads to specific post-engagement behavior and attitudes (consequences) towards the company, is supported.

Kossovsky (2014) defines reputation as an expectation of behavior. He states that:

> Customers have expectations when they buy products or services, employees have them when they accept jobs, vendors have them when they partner, creditors and investors have them, and even regulators have them. Not to be left out, members of society at large have expectations too. The expectations of your company's stakeholders govern their behaviors—how much and how quickly they buy, what they are willing to work for, and what they will charge your firm for credit.

Corporate reputation can thus be defined as a multi-faceted business asset that entails the careful influencing of the perception of public opinion on the whole of an institution, including values, identity, and images (Akova & Kantar, 2020). Therefore, it is understood from all the above authors that corporate reputation is grounded in the corporate perspectives and perceptions of multiple internal and external stakeholders. Smith et al. (2013) stipulate that public perceptions involve opinions on a company's financial stability, quality of leadership, quality of services and or products, quality and integrity of employees, investment worth, social responsibility, and innovativeness. Therefore, the relevance of corporate reputation on the triple bottom line (people, profit, planet) is evident in the observation by Smith et al. (2013).

From a different organisational perspective, Chun et al. (2019) state that reputation is a socially constructed concept underpinned by a causal relationship between good behaviour and the communication of the excellent behaviour itself. This view is built on organisational ethics and virtues (values) that portray the culture through individuals' character throughout the organisation.

In addition, Qazi, et al., (2021) state that corporate reputation reflects the HEI's perceived status about the goals, values, governance and working practices, student treatment, and a shared experience and service expectations. Khoi (2020) describe a reputable HEI as an institution that is well-respected in the community, holds stakeholders' confidence, has ethical and respected leadership, and an image that contributes to the value of their qualification.

Quality of performance and meeting customers' expectations directly affect the capital reservoir or equity of an organisation's corporate reputation (Walsh & Beatty, 2007). A literature review reveals that some authors state that corporate performance (antecedent) drives corporate reputation (consequence). In contrast, others argue the exact opposite: corporate reputation (antecedent) drives corporate performance (consequence) (Pires & Trez, 2018). The field study will accept the concept of corporate reputation in higher education as described by Van Vught (2008). Van Vught (2008: 169) provides a suitable and applicable definition of corporate reputation to HEIs:

> The reputation of a HEI can be as the image (of quality, influence, trustworthiness) it has in the eyes of others. Reputation is the subjective reflection of an institution's various actions to create an external image. An institution's reputation and its quality may be related, but they need not be identical. HEIs try to influence their external images in many ways, not only by maximizing their quality.

Van Vught (2008) recognises the impact of the competition for reputation as a 'reputation race' between HEIs. He highlights the excessive cost that HEIs pay to constantly improve their image and gain an attractive position in this race as highly reputable academic institutions. The objective of this 'reputation race' is cemented in recruitment, the recruitment of quality students, and the recruitment of quality faculty staff. Pérez-Diaz and Rodriquez (2015) state that reputation is a social phenomenon referred to as a reputational currency in higher education markets.

2.3.2 Parental perspective of corporate reputation in higher education

Christensen and Gornitzka (2017) state that modern HEIs are socially embedded through engaging a more comprehensive network of diverse stakeholder groups. The authors recognise different role-players as essential sources of support, resources, commitment, legitimacy, and trust. Beneke and Human (2010) agree that HEIs should extend relationship marketing to the broader network or different publics (Pérez-Diaz & Rodriguez, 2015) beyond the prospective student. Relationships with key feeder schools and especially parents to create an even better competitive advantage, build brand equity, and establish a high level of loyalty towards the institution through a long-term, reciprocal relationship, should all be integrated as reputation management strategies in the marketing plan. Walsh et al. (2009) support the notion of relationship marketing toward stakeholder management.

The relationship is an essential determinant of a customer's perception of the corporate reputation of an organisation. If applied to the context of the field study, parents are more than willing to engage with a HEI and build relationships that will last for at least three years while their child studies for a first degree. According to a study conducted by Matherly (2011), reputable HEIs have an impact on the likelihood of parents sending their children to them for academic post-school studies (Simiyu, Komen, & Bonuke, 2019).

2.3.2.1 Different phases of parental involvement

The *corpus* of literature on parental involvement and influence in selecting a HEI is rare and even more so regarding the relationship between the corporate reputation and parents as the customers. Gao and Ng (2017) motivate that parental involvement is crucial for university selection, attendance, and completion. Parents want the best for their children. More so when a significant financial layout and commitment is required. Thus, parents want their children to receive the best possible education at a university they believe and perceive as the most reputable (Akova & Kantar 2020). Promoting parental involvement is critical for preparing the school leaver for university life during the selection phase. Akova and Kantar (2020) state that parents investigate and consider information on universities, including infrastructure, accommodation, achievements, qualities of teaching staff, job opportunities upon graduation, and especially reputation.

In a study by Iacopini and Hayden (2017), parents viewed the importance of educational teaching and qualifications in a very serious light. Parents interviewed felt a deep sense of responsibility to assist their children with post-school options to become better qualified. Parents regarded an excellent reputation, significant contribution to employment opportunities once graduated, and a university free of corruption as critical considerations when evaluating and selecting a university.

Lee et al. (2018) also recognise parents as critical stakeholders in searching for information on higher education options that significantly influences the selection of a HEI through various avenues such as media, the internet, high school, friends, and family. Parents' perspective on the antecedents of the reputation of a HEI is hard to articulate as it is inherently subjective due to the parents' different priorities, expectations, and experiences.

HEIs can improve and influence corporate reputation through consistent, honest, and authentic behaviour. The familiarity and interest in a specific HEI that stakeholders such as parents and prospective students hold also affect the institution's positive predisposition. Experiences with an institution affect the customer emotionally and articulate into specific consequences such as satisfaction, attitude, loyalty, and endorsement (Ramos, Casado-Molina & Ignácio-Peláez, 2019). The aforementioned customer behaviors and attitudes will serve as the consequences of the post-performance corporate reputation and perception during the intended study.

Lee (2018) states that despite parents' influential role in choosing a HEI, research to understand the parental perspective is very scarce. Most literature reviewed reveals the student's perspective on making post-school choices, not the parental perspective. This study intends to provide insights into how parents view corporate reputation when choosing a suitable and reputable HEI for post-school studies.

2.3.2.2 Choice factors influencing the selection of a HEI

Many choice factors could influence the decision-making process of selecting a HEI. Jordaan and Wiese (2010) identified and researched twenty-three choice factors, namely geographical location, choice of academic programmes, admission requirements, quality of academic teaching, facilities, the attractiveness of the campus, tuition fees, student life, sport and recreation programmes, safety and security, on-campus residences, academic reputation, financial aid and support, diversity profile and multi-culturalism, image, language policy, links with international universities and industries, employability, flexible study mode options, and whether parents, siblings or friends are alumni. Knowing which of the above is or are essential to each target segment, an institution can craft a specific and targeted recruitment strategy and deliver that message through either traditional or digital platforms or a combination of both to encourage a prospective student to select an institution for higher education studies (Jordaan & Wiese, 2010).

School leavers want a promising future, a successful career, and to improve their lives through education. To achieve this ideal, a reputable HEI is chosen through a very selective and careful process (Akova & Kantar, 2020).

2.3.3 Corporate associations

Buzzwords such as corporate image and corporate identity frequently emerged in the reviewed literature in the same sentence as corporate reputation. According to Walsh et al. (2009), it is essential to delineate corporate reputation from other branding concepts. Branding concepts are the institution's ***identity*** (staff members' mental associations), the ***intended image*** (mental associations that management want their most important stakeholders to hold), the ***construed image*** (mental associations that the staff believe others outside the institution hold), and the ***reputation*** (the actual mental associations held by others, including the general public and stakeholders).

The shift in status from an educational focus to a service provider places an increasing value on intangible relational capital assets such as corporate image, reputation, and identity and its impact on HEIs' sustainability (Maduro, Fernandes & Alves, 2017). The corporate reputation of HEIs is one of the key differentiators of a unique identity, supported by branding concepts such as brand image, meaning, and equity (Maduro et al., 2017).

HEIs' leadership and management teams are eager to develop differentiating strategies based on their identity while understanding the different nuances and meaning of an institutional narrative for various stakeholders and improving the brand image to enhance its reputation (Hemsley-Brown, Melewar, Nguyen & Wilson, 2016). However, Pérez-Diaz and Rodrigues (2015) acknowledge that more analytical and empirical research is required to distinguish reputation from corporate associations such as image and brand. The authors state that the weight of reputation is still to be determined in the decision-making process and judgment by the different publics.

2.3.4 *Corporate reputation versus corporate brand equity*

A corporate brand is defined as a name, sign, or symbol used to identify items or services of the seller(s) and differentiate them from competitors' goods. Brand equity is defined as a 'brand's differentiated effect on customers' responses to marketing and promotion tactics (Khoshtaria, Datuashvili & Matin, 2020). A stakeholder's assessment of an organisation directly influences the actions he or she decides to take or not to take. Based on this assessment, building a brand and brand equity (visibility and consistency in the use of name, logo, and symbolism) is necessary, will not lead to gaining stakeholders' support and loyalty. The brand image is simply an associated concept of corporate reputation (Walsh et al., 2009). Therefore, in the context of the field study, it is proposed that a HEI should adopt a strategic stance towards actively building its corporate reputation to cement it in the parents' hearts and minds.

2.4 REPUTATION MANAGEMENT AS AN INSTITUTIONAL IMPERATIVE

Corporate reputation management entails the deliberate and strategic influencing of stakeholders' perceptions. Everybody in the organisation, company, firm, or in the case of the intended study, a HEI, is responsible for reputation building (Gaines-Ross cited in Stoner, 2019). Research done by Weber Shandwick, a leading global public relations firm, highlighted that a whopping 60% of a company's market value could be attributed to corporate reputation (Stoner, 2019). Therefore, it is not surprising that reputation risk is amongst the top identified risks of organisations around the globe (Stoner, 2019). The corporate reputation of HEIs requires a long-term investment, consistent nurturing, and financial commitment. Thus, HEIs' leadership teams must adopt a vigilant mindset to secure corporate reputation in an education market filled with disruption, multiple media channels, distraction, and fierce competition (Stoner, 2019).

Doorly and Garcia (2015) recognise reputation management as a corporate asset that requires a comprehensive long-term strategy to measure, audit, and strategically manage it. Doorly and Garcia (2015) state that comprehensive reputation management cuts across all departments of an institution. The departments' involvement in operationalising reputation drivers into performance and behavior communication is different from brand and identity promotion.

Smith et al. (2013) agree with Doorly and Garcia (2015) and state that corporate reputation is indeed difficult to measure as an intangible asset. The pure nature of corporate reputation is unobservable, difficult to benchmark, and a subjective measure of success. Smith et al. (2013) advise companies to measure observable comments, especially on social media. Furthermore, the correlation of the company's performance with public opinion is required to determine the health of the company's reputation. Failing to do so will inevitably result in reputational risk.

2.4.1 Reputational risk management

The online world has turned Google into a reputation management engine (Stoner, 2019), both from the public's opinion to obtain knowledge and from an organisational perspective to promote its reputation. Since the emergence of social media, the avenues for public opinion have changed drastically. The internet, blogs, websites, and social networking created opportunities for users to share reviews, opinions, and experiences with strangers. Historically bad experiences were limited to word-of-mouth sharing to only people who knew a company. Today, customers share their experiences with millions of people. The speed and range of information flow through the internet have shed more light on the power of negative comments on the corporate reputation of a company (Smith et al., 2013).

HEIs worldwide have long been distinguished by prestige in academic results, prominent alumni, and rankings. Therefore, corporate reputation is imperative in the education industry. HEIs will continue to be vulnerable to reputational risk emanating from various drivers such as financial standing, corporate governance, corporate culture, professional liability, customer relations, student actions, and quality of education. Rayner (2013) highlighted the multiple sources of reputational risk, including profitability, financial performance, unethical behaviour, poor corporate governance, corporate culture, liability, customer relations, marketing innovation, product recall, litigation, and major adverse events.

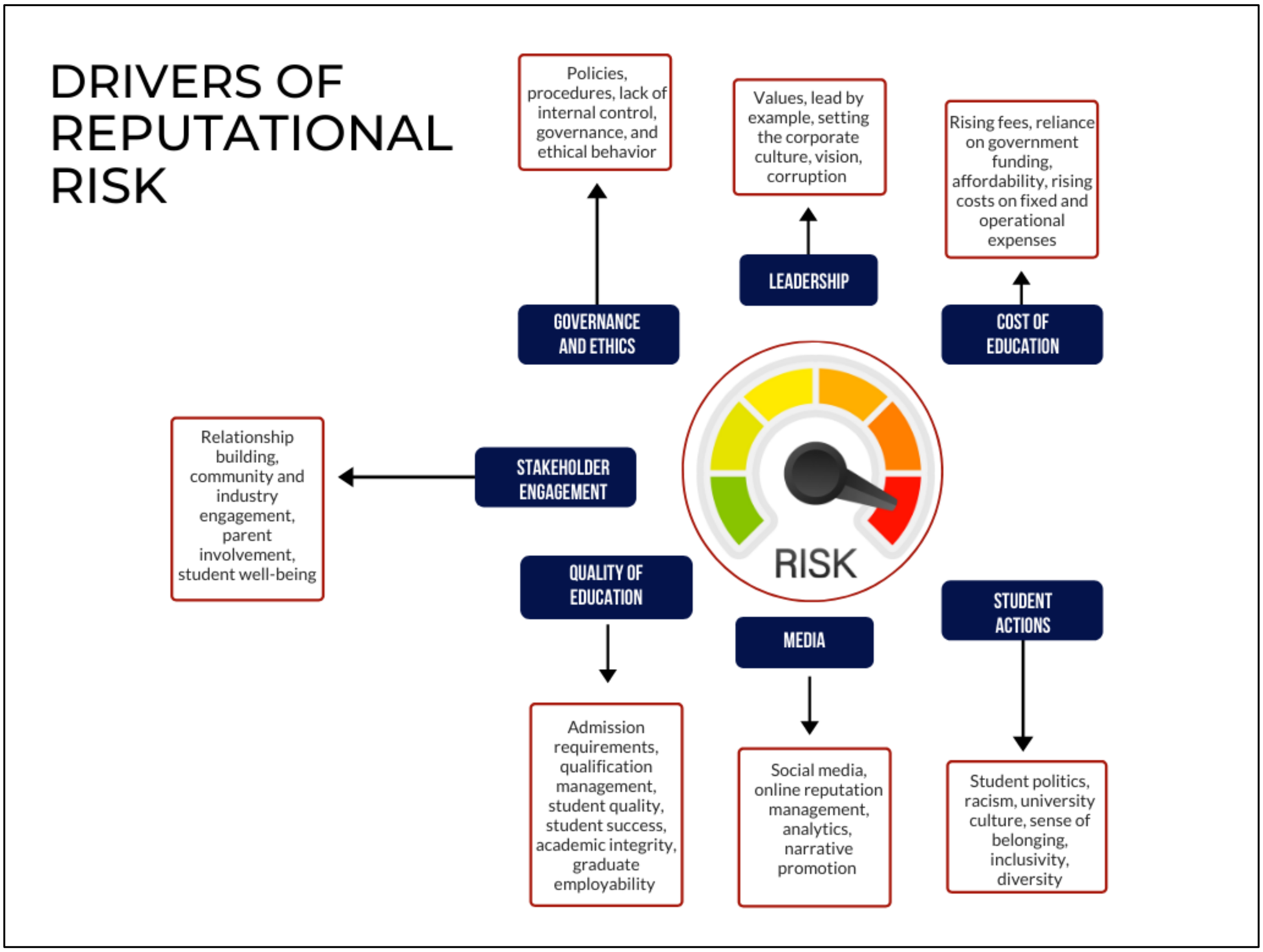

Figure 2.1: Drivers of reputational risk. Adopted from the article: Managing risks to reputation in educational institutions by Safetrac.

Kossovsky (2014) states that a reputation crisis occurs when stakeholders' expectations and subsequent behaviors change. Directors are condemned, and the after-effects of a reputation crisis can be permanent and personal. While adverse media events can be devastating to a corporate reputation, it is when stakeholders' behaviors are changed that it becomes a crisis. Media coverage should not be regarded as the only means to avert a reputation crisis or rectify a reputation after a crisis. All actions, overtly or covertly, of a company, are at the fingertips of any internet user. Governance, operations management, and leadership are at the center of reputation risk management. There can be perverse brilliance in setting expectations very low in a business strategy. However, public relations efforts to drive up expectations or spin a story can fail horribly if operational realities do not support the campaign.

As the higher education environment changes rapidly, new risks will transpire; while the known knowns will evolve, and unknown unknowns will undoubtedly unfold. HEIs must realise that the new reality is to be comfortable with perpetual discomfort (Deloitte, 2018).

2.5 CONSTRUCTS OF A HEI's CORPORATE REPUTATION

Prestige and corporate reputation are important for HEIs (Delgado-Márquez, Bondar, and Delgado-Márquez, 2012). Pérez-Diaz & Rodriques (2015) describes the character of a reputation as being **manifold**, which means that a HEI can possess multiple reputations related to the different functions. **Different publics** could hold different perceptions of each process within a HEI. The manifold character of reputation is practically found in the various experiences, e.g., a HEI could have an excellent academic or sports reputation but a bad reputation for selection and enrolment processes. To reduce the manifold and complex nature of corporate reputation will depend on the constructs that the different publics use to form their perceptions and expectations.

In a study conducted by Weber Shandwick in partnership with KRC Research, titled The State of Corporate Reputation in 2020: Everything Matters Now, the **'omnidriven'** nature of reputation was highlighted. A variety of drivers influences a company's reputation portfolio. This lack of distinction suggests that companies can no longer solely prioritise just a few key drivers of reputation but must focus simultaneously on many factors. This finding supports the manifold character identified by Pérez-Diaz and Rodrigues (2015) and forces the question of which elements should be considered to understand university reputation? From the quality of academics and students, cost of products and services, financial performance, corporate culture, internationalization to donor funding, HEIs need to be on high alert to manage all factors when building and safeguarding their corporate reputation.

Lee (2018) identified the following factors or constructs of a HEI's corporate reputation from a parental perspective: (1) financial affordability to determine the value for money for their investment into their child's education, (2) institutional culture or the value system, which demonstrates the ethos, academic teaching, and learning quality, traditions, innovativeness, student-centredness, and academic community of an institution, (3) image of how the different external publics perceive the institution, (4) identity which is how the internal public such as employees and students perceive the reality of the institution, and (5) personal or peer experience.

De Jager and Soontiens (2010) motivate that institutional policymakers, leadership, and management should take cognisance and understand the varied factors that contribute to building a sustainable corporate reputation. The authors indicate that internal competencies, external perception, and association are the backbone of a HEI's corporate reputation. Like Lee (2018), De Jager and Soontiens (2010) identify the external perception as the quality of image, teaching excellence, learning experiences, but add the standard of facilities, campus life, and employability of graduates. From an internationalisation perspective, De Jager and Soontiens (2010) highlight research leadership and output, innovation, scholarships for international students, international rankings, and world-renowned accolades as factors influencing an HEI's corporate reputation.

Smith et al. (2013) refer to the industry-specific validation and legitimisation. Delgado-Márquez et al. (2012) add another significant reputation driver in the higher education landscape: the industry-specific ranking system. University rankings deconstruct higher education into two dimensions: institutional reputation and institutional performance. The ranking position of a HEI provides proof of academic quality, the value (integrity) of a degree obtained, demand for graduates from a top-ranking university, and international prestige. Prospective students and parents judge a university's ranking and correlate it to the potential employability, career opportunities, and value for their time and monetary investment.

Pérez-Diaz and Rodriguez (2015) summarise reputation factors in two categories: objective factors and subjective factors. The objective factors reflect the realities of the HEI, such as the basic characteristics of age, size, private or public status, and financial resources. Furthermore, it also refers to output indicators such as the number of graduates, registered students, number of scientific publications, number of patents, and the performance of graduates. Pérez-Diaz and Rodriguez (2015) differentiate the publics that evaluate the HEI's reputation. E.g., the prospective student public considers the factors most related to them are much different than a donor would evaluate relevant factors. These subjective factors are the same as indicated by Lee (2018) and De Jager and Soontiens (2010).

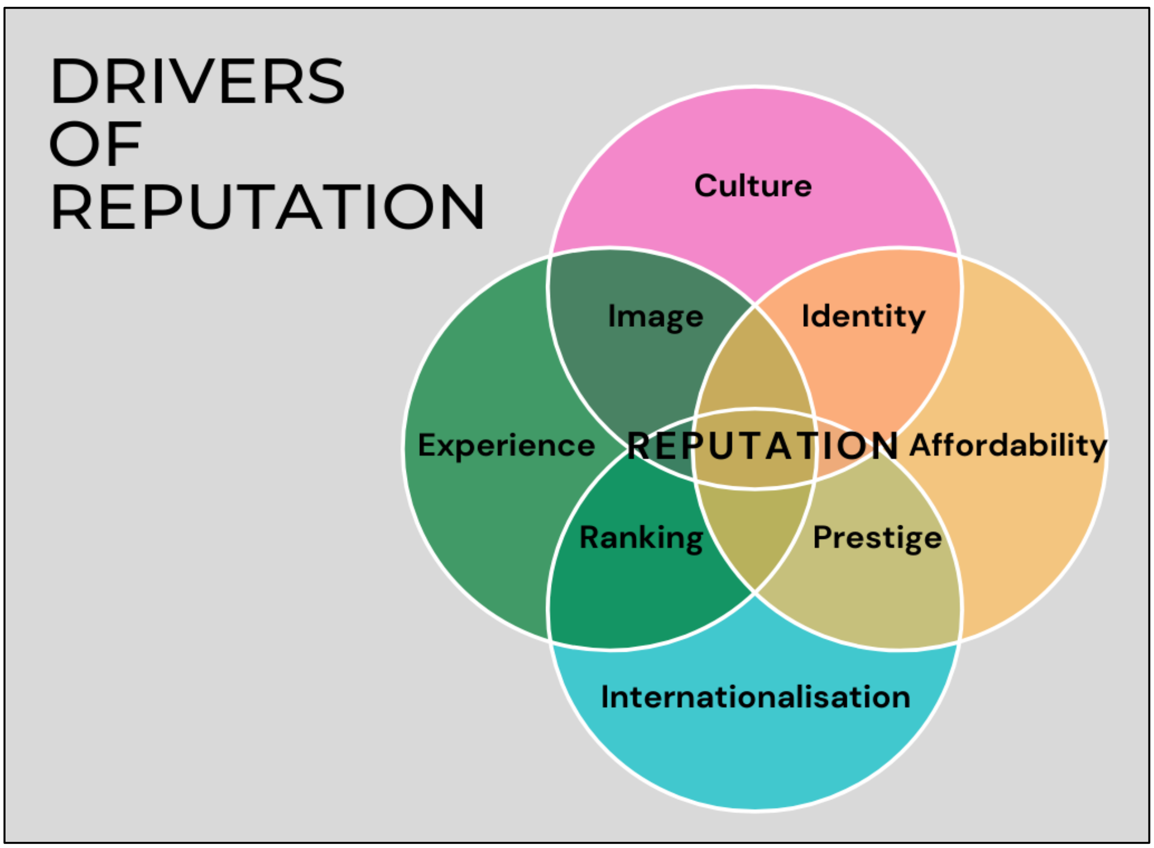

Figure 2.2: Drivers of corporate reputation

2.6. BENEFITS OF A GOOD CORPORATE REPUTATION

Higher financial profits, motivated employees, good working conditions, and engaged customers are empirically proven benefits of an excellent corporate reputation (Chun et al., 2019). It is then no wonder that many managers see reputation as a short-term quest to drive sales rather than a laborious effort to build a robust corporation based on ethical corporate character overall. Smith et al. (2013) state that corporate reputation is "extremely rare, non-substitutable, imperfectly imitable, valuable, and ultimately strategic."

2.6.1 Corporate reputation - a barrier to market entry

Chun et al. (2019) motivate that a good reputation is a testament to the company's proper behaviour and value-driven actions. A good corporate reputation is an essential competitive asset that can be a barrier to entry for competitors as it is difficult to copy. Competitors might not deem the excessive costs to compete with an established reputation as worthwhile and choose not to enter the market. Smith et al. (2013) highlight corporate reputation's rarity and non-substitutable and imitable nature. Smith et al. (2013) acknowledge the long-time corporate reputation takes to develop and find its way into customers' memory of brand inventories.

2.6.2 Corporate reputation - a competitive advantage

According to Walker (2009), there is a clear relationship between corporate reputation and a company's competitive advantage. Terblanche (2009) states that corporate reputation is constructed through stakeholders' experiences, information gathered about the company's actions, and comparing it against those of leading rivals or competitors. Corporate reputation is thus a crucial strategic tool to ensure and strengthen competitive advantage.

Competitiveness intensified over the recent decades due to significant changes in the higher education environment (Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabando, Zorilla & Forcada, 2018). Khoshtaria et al. (2020) add to the statement that dwindling numbers of potential students that qualify and educational service customers' changed behaviour further contribute to the increasing competitiveness amongst HEIs. The technological advancements and diminishing global boundaries (Khoshtaria et al., 2020) within the higher education landscape forced HEIs to review their reputation management processes and strategic positioning in the market to deal with the demands from the macro environment. From a global perspective, the higher education sector experienced expansion and growth amongst minority groups to attain a tertiary qualification to improve their lives (Erisher, Halimani & Gwavuya, 2014). Competitive forces drive HEIs to strengthen the active involvement and transaction exchange between the HEI as a service provider and its customers (parents and students) (Khanna, Jacob & Yadav, 2015).

Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabando et al. (2017) and Khanna et al. (2014) acknowledge that the recent decades have seen significant changes in the higher education landscape that lead to intensified competition between HEIs. Globalised inter-connectedness, technological advancements, growing demand vs. supply, and continuous reduction of government funding stimulated an increase in competitiveness among public universities, the proliferation of private institutions, and the privatisation of higher education. As stated at the start of the chapter, the South African context is no exception to the above and has experienced severe rivalry from other public universities and private institutions to attract local and international students. New entrants to the education market who provide an alternative online teaching and learning mode add to the crowded space and increase the multitude of choices and options for the prospective student to choose.

2.6.3 Corporate reputation - a selection mechanism

Lee et al. (2018) state that parents search for a HEI information and significantly influence their school-leaving child's choice of a HEI. Parents respond more favorably to HEIs with a well-managed corporate reputation and brand image. Benefits of corporate reputation are widely postulated in the existing literature and are often linked with reducing the levels of uncertainty and anxiety if applied to the HEI selection process. Suppose a HEI successfully reduces these levels of uncertainty and anxiety; it will increase brand equity as the prospective students and parents will trust, be loyal, and believe in the HEI's credibility. Delgado-Márquez et al. (2012) support the notion of corporate reputation as a screening mechanism for parents and prospective students to narrow down the list of potential HEIs. Since the study will focus on the process preceding the university's performance, the level of trust as an antecedent for customer-based reputation will be significant to determine.

2.6.4 Corporate reputation - an institutional differentiator

In their study, Delgado-Márquez et al. (2012) identified four benefits of an excellent corporate reputation that differentiate a HEI from its competitors. Firstly, a good reputation attracts **quality faculty staff**, which has a causal relationship with the quality of academic output, research, and graduates. Secondly, an excellent corporate reputation positively influences current students' **social and educational priorities** such as a sense of belonging, identification, social culture, diversity, safety, facilities, study programmes, and support services. Thirdly an excellent corporate reputation has a **prestige** nuance to attract prospective students, thus creating a desire to join a prestigious HEI. Finally, an excellent corporate reputation differentiates a HEI in the international landscape since it impacts the **position** on the world ranking system. Given these four benefits, Delgado-Márquez et al. (2012) emphasise the importance of effective reputation management to drive the prestige and rankings of HEIs.

2.7 CORPORATE REPUTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A PARENTAL PERSPECTIVE

2.7.1 Antecedents of corporate reputation

2.7.1.1 Experience of service

Panda, Pandey, Bennet, and Tian (2019) state that a critical antecedent of corporate reputation is the quality-of-service experience. HEIs should use service quality as a differentiator in the competitive landscape to establish a positive corporate reputation through providing a quality experience that leads to customer (parent) satisfaction. Shamma and Hassan (2009) state that experience with a company resides on a personal customer level. In their direct engagement with products, services, online services, and representatives, customers form perceptions about the focal company.

Akova and Kantar (2020) reason that effective corporate reputation management attracts quality employees. Self-sacrificing, successful, disciplined, and conscientious employees are attracted to work for companies with a positive corporate identity. Employees are responsible for delivering services to customers. Each employee is jointly responsible for the production and maintenance of corporate reputation. Management processes, working principles, and procedures need to be developed in line with the corporate culture that will support and strengthen the corporate reputation (Akova & Kantar, 2020).

Walsh et al. (2009) stress that employees must be empowered to treat customers in a way that fosters customer satisfaction and engenders loyalty and trust. Staff training and performance measurement will ensure that customers have an enjoyable interaction and are satisfied with the transaction. Shamma and Hassan (2009) agree and state that the employee environment is a significant component in the development and maintenance of corporate reputation. Employees contribute to, support, and communicate the corporate reputation through their actions.

From a marketing perspective, literature on the delivery of an educational service describes educational services as intangible, perishable, heterogeneous, and intertwined between production (university) and consumption (student). A co-creation of experience results between parents, students and staff during the application, enrollment, and learning process.

Bromley, Hardaker, and Fill, cited in Walsh et al. (2009), describe services provided by HEIs high in credence value as customers cannot evaluate the service elements at all sometimes. In contrast to manufacturing companies who produce tangible goods, the quality of service might not be immediately apparent and, therefore, difficult to evaluate due to its intangible nature. Van Vught (2008) also defines higher education academic products and services as experience goods. He states that the 'clients' of higher education can only judge the quality of the educational product and services after experiencing them.

Walsh et al. (2007) and Lee et al. (2018) emphasise that customers are one of the most critical company stakeholders since customers are the primary revenue generators. This statement also applies to HEIs; without revenue streams, it cannot deliver on its promises and fulfill the knowledge needs of society. Therefore, parents of self-paying students are regarded as key stakeholders as they are responsible for 'foot the bill.' It is assumed that pre-interaction evaluation is an antecedent and post-interaction evaluation is a consequence of the corporate reputation.

2.7.1.2 Information from others and the media

Simiyu et al. (2019) state that prospective students (and parents), from the standpoint of a HEI, are likely to gather information on the institution prior considering enrollment. There is no guarantee that parents will respond positively or favorably towards the value and brand proposition as communicated through the different media platforms. Beneke and Human (2010) highlight that HEIs’ recruitment philosophies need to change towards a targeted relationship-building approach to attract and entice a top-performing prospective student to choose the institution. The benefits for the parent derived from such a relationship with a HEI are encapsulated in whether the institution meets the parents’ needs and wants, which ultimately influences the selection of the preferred HEI for post-school studies.

HEIs' corporate reputations are becoming increasingly important as parents become more responsive to market developments. Through various media channels, parents and other stakeholders are informed about a HEI's actions and activities. Furthermore, word-of-mouth (information from others) and word-of-mouse (digital media) exchanges are key sources of knowledge and information regarding HEIs. Inferential sources, i.e., information obtained from others through informal social networks, influence perceptions on corporate reputation due to its origin in relational factors (Shamma & Hassan, 2009).

Marketers face additional problems, as they must gain a greater knowledge of these parents' perspectives and inter-parent communications (Shamma & Hassan, 2009). In their study, Shamma and Hassan (2019) found that customers form perceptions about non-relational corporate aspects, such as financial performance and social responsibility through media channels.

2.7.2 Consequences of corporate reputation

According to Keh and Xie (2007), trust, identification, and commitment are direct consequences of corporate reputation that lead to behavioural intentions such as word-of-mouth intention and supportive intentions.

2.7.2.1 Trust

Moorman, Deshpande, and Zaltsman (1993) cited in Garbarino, and Johnson (1999) define trust as “a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence.” The authors state that an expectation of trustworthiness is the result from a reliable, intentional, and able performance of a trustee.

It is necessary to highlight the difference between trustworthiness and trust to understand the concept of trust. Kharouf, Lund, and Sekhon (2014) differentiate between trustworthiness as an antecedent of trust and as a characteristic of an entity or trustee, while trust represents the beliefs held by a trustor about a trustee. Both concepts highlight continuum (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999) of an interpersonal relationship over a period in which a trustor gathers adequate information about the trustworthiness of the trustee or the level of confidence that the trustee inspires in the trustor. Therefore, in the context of the field study, a trustee (HEI) can only be trusted by a trustor (parents, students, and stakeholders) if it instills trust and confidence. Garbarino and Johnson (1999) continue to motivate that in a service orientated relationship, the trustee is regarded as reliable if the services provided (intention) meet or exceed the expectations (ability) of the customer, is a good corporate citizen, and delivers on commitment (integrity).

In their study, Walsh et al. (2009) found that corporate reputation can be considered a reliable indicator of a service firm's ability to satisfy customers' (parents’) current and future needs and wants (desires). Delgado-Márquez et al. (2012) note a positive correlation between a HEI's reputation and the quality, trustworthiness, and influence it inspires. Prospective students and parents are more likely to choose an institution when they trust it. Increased trust leads to the development of positive experiences, judgment, and eventually commitment to enroll. Furthermore, the authors found that trust increases the quality of perceptions and leads to positive supportive and word-of-mouth intentions.

On the other hand, Smith et al. (2013) state that companies need to be patient and deliver consistent quality products and or services to build trust. Failure to do so will confuse customers and break the onset of trust. In their study, Qazi et al. (2021) found that a HEI's trustworthiness significantly impact its corporate reputation.

2.7.2.2 Identification

Customer identification is critical for building meaningful relationships and lasting commitment between the two parties. Despite its value and influence on purchase behavior, customer identification is underutilised, and research literature is limited (Keh & Xie, 2009). Customer identification is a construct that extends beyond purchase behavior and is cemented on a deeper identity level. A strong brand identification leads to loyalty, an influential advocacy role, resilience to negative information, and willingness to try new services or products (Keh & Xie, 2009).

Corporate reputation is a key characteristic with which customers identify based on their experiences and perceptions of the company. Corporate reputation positively influences customer identification due to attractiveness of the focal company's identity. The level of attractiveness is regarded as a requirement for identification. Furthermore, identification between a customer and a company depends on the levels of similarity, distinctiveness, and prestige (Keh & Xie, 2007). Keh and Xie (2007), motivate that a company with a positive corporate reputation show superior financial profitability, media exposure, and quality services and products, which increases its competitiveness in the market. Customers regard a company with a positive reputation as prestigious and is favored to identify with and to form a connection. From a higher education perspective, parent identification is conceptualised as a variable resulting from corporate reputation to form a committed, loyal, and trusting relationship with a HEI.

Akova and Kantar (2020) indicate that HEIs with a good reputation for student-centric teaching and learning practices encourage a strong sense of belonging or identification.

These students have the desire to be emotionally associated with their universities. They become ambassadors and participative alumni and hold potential donor abilities.

2.7.2.3 Commitment

Simiyu et al. (2019) state that in the context of higher education, corporate reputation is viewed similarly to business reputation. It allows HEIs to entice potential students by changing their opinions toward enrollment (retention). Building a solid reputation, according to Heslop and Nadeau (2010), increases stakeholder confidence and improves relationships since stakeholders always seek information and recommendations about an organisation prior undertaking a further commitment (Zekua & Sheikha, 2014).

Moorman, Zaltsman, and Deshpande (1992) cited in Garbarino, and Johnson (1999) define commitment as “an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship.” As in the case of trust, commitment is a vital component for a reciprocal relationship over a period of exchanges (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999).

2.7.2.4 Supportive intention

Engaging in additional supporting behaviors such as buy (enrollment), repurchase (postgraduate studies, alumni activities, or donor donations), as well as word-of-mouth intention, are examples of behavioral intentions. When a customer's experience with a product or service is good or pleasurable, it is frequently shaped into supportive intention actions (Hwang & Choi, 2019). In addition to the wide variety of the above choice factors, Diaconu and Pandelica (2011) highlight the importance of relationship marketing and relationship building with a prospective customer to secure trust, loyalty, and confidence towards an institution for long-term success, which Beneke (2011) refers to as the lifetime value of a customer. This lifetime value preferably stretches beyond the registration and graduation phases into the postgraduate or alumni donor phase. Walsh et al. (2009) found that an excellent corporate reputation holds benefits for the company, such as loyalty, trust, and retention, which concurs with the lifetime value of the customer of Beneke.

2.7.2.5 *Word-of-mouth intention*

Another consequence of corporate reputation that appeared in the literature review was the value of word-of-mouth. Walsh et al. has done considerable research on word-of-mouth due to corporate reputation. Reichfeld (2003, 2006), cited in Walsh et al. (2009), stresses that a company should ask whether a customer would recommend its services or not.

Walsh and Beatty (2007) stress that a positive corporate reputation should be advocated through word-of-mouth. Customers enjoy sharing their experiences, whether on social media or in face-to-face conversations, especially when these experiences are very poor or excellent. A company or HEI with a positive corporate reputation will enjoy a more significant reservoir of benevolence (goodwill). Their happy customers (parents and students) will have the advocacy power to proclaim their endorsement of a company or a university's performance. Social media platforms gave every consumer a loud voice to endorse or reject an institution's credibility and reputation. On social media, these customer opinions frequently emerge in the form of comments allowing the evaluation of the overall performance and relations between the intangible and tangibles components. The integration of technology that collects these comments and opinions and analyses the data will enable the company to obtain valuable knowledge on the intangible elements of a company (Ramos et al., 2019).

2.8 CONCLUSION: CHAPTER 2

A general view is that a good corporate reputation is an important signal of quality, credibility, and trust based on sound transactions with stakeholders in the environment (Walsh et al. 2009). The reverse is also true; a negative customer-based reputation will elicit unfavorable evaluation from the customers who engage with the company. Customer or parent satisfaction refers to a favorable post-engagement judgment where needs and wants were fulfilled by a university (Walsh et al., 2009).

The value of a HEI’s corporate reputation is a key indicator of its success. It is the most important and strategic asset a HEI can have. Business leaders and academics agree that reputation is a valuable corporate asset that HEIs aspire for. Corporate reputation is crucial since it has an impact on both financial and non-financial outcomes.

The values of credibility, integrity, trustworthiness, and quality are packaged into brand associations such as corporate reputation, corporate image and identity, and brand symbols. Of these brand associations, corporate reputation stands out as the most critical element. Corporate reputation perceptions held by parents are difficult to control as it flows from mental photographs and experiences. Corporate reputation is important for competitiveness amongst HEIs.

If HEIs are entrusted with the education of the youth, quality at all service touchpoints will dictate the maturity of the corporate reputation and influence the reservoir of reputation capital in the minds of internal and external stakeholders, especially parents of prospective students.

Chapter 3 will discuss the theoretical framework and the hypotheses development.

Theoretical framework

CHAPTER 3

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter highlighted the literature reviewed on the various constructs, antecedents, and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education. This chapter will review the theoretical framework adopted to achieve the study's primary objective, which is to identify the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in the higher education context from a parental perspective.

The overarching theory adopted for this study is the Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory. Drawing on other theories, such as Source Credibility Theory, Social Identification Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and the Commitment-Trust Theory, factors were identified from the literature and hypotheses were developed for the relationships in the conceptual model.

This chapter commences with a review of the Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory.

3.2 THEORETICAL ROOTS

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory originated in 1929 by Woodworth as an extension of the classic stimulus-response model of Pavlov in 1927 (Pandita, Nishra, & Chib, 2021). The theory was further developed by Mehrabian and Russel in 1974. The S-O-R is regarded as a simple theory to understand consumer behavior (Khan, Ullah, & Malik, 2022; Tan, 2020) and consists of three sequentially aligned components, namely, stimulus (S), organism (O), and response (R) (Arora, 1982). The S-O-R has been applied in various disciplines but is especially appropriate to understand customer engagement behavior (Khan et al., 2022). Mehrabian and Russel (1974) explain the influence of external triggers from the environment (stimuli-S) on the perception and emotion of an individual (organism-O), which leads to positive or negative behavioral responses (R) (Zegarra & Ruiz-Mafé, 2020). Aslan and De Luna (2020) report that many studies such as online shopping behavior by Peng and Kim (2014), retail and satisfaction by Cachero-Martínez and Vásquez-Casielles in 2017, and Aslam, Ham, and Farhat (2018) in a study on electronic word-of-mouth, applied the S-O-R theory in their respective studies on consumer behavior.

According to Vieira (2013) and Arora (2008) the S-O-R Theory highlights different stages of involvement. The stimuli component describes external or situational (Arora, 2008) involvement, while organism refers to internal or enduring (Arora, 2008) involvement, and the response involvement (Arora, 2008) component is a consequence of the stimuli influence and internal involvement. Tan (2020) explains that the analytical generalisability of the S-O-R theory attributes to the wide application in disciplines such as marketing, consumer behavior, brand perceptions, and specific research issues "that relate to socio-psychological states, stimulating factors, intentions, commitment, behaviors, and performances”.

3.2.1 External stimuli (S) as antecedents of corporate reputation

The first component of the S-O-R Theory refers to the stimuli from the external environment that lead to the trigger of perceptions, emotions, and behavior in the organism or the inner self of an individual. According to Goi, Kalidas, and Zeeshan (2014), external stimuli are pivotal in influencing customers' perceptions and subsequent responsive behavior. Durmaz and Diyarbakirlioglu (2011) explain the role of perception, in the customer's decision-making process. Since many stimuli are transitory, customers tend to remember stimuli because their emotions were affected, relevant, entertaining, or it reinforced earlier views. Each individual or customer uses various sources such as hearsay, previous experience, and imagination to fill gaps of information (Durmaz & Diyarbakirlioglu, 2011). Khan, Ullah, and Malik (2022) identify marketing stimuli as external stimuli that influences consumer behavior and include the elements of the marketing mix of product, price, placement, promotion, and people, which were alluded to in Chapter 2. With specific reference to the current study, the external marketing stimuli that will be investigated are experience of service, information from others, and information from the media that lead to the parents’ perception of corporate reputation of a HEI.

Khan et al. (2022) emphasise that it is critical to understand the impact of stimuli to understand customer behavior as they influence a customer to purchase or avoid a certain service or product. Applying the statement to the current study, HEIs need to understand how parents are influenced by external stimuli, such as service experience, information obtained from social networks, and from media to form positive or negative perceptions of the corporate reputation, which in turn will motivate them towards positive or negative behaviors.

Shamma and Hassan (2009) consider customers the most important stakeholder of a company as they are the main revenue generators. Customers perceptions of a company are influenced by their direct interactions and experiences with the company. To define customer experience of services, Becker and Jaakkola (2020: 637) suggest customer experience "should be defined as non-deliberate, spontaneous responses, and reactions to particular stimuli". Therefore, in the context of the study, parents' perceptions of a HEI can be formed through interactions with its representatives, online services, call centers, academic faculties, or facilities, all of which are external stimuli. Qazi, Qazi, Raza, and Yousufi (2021) state that a good brand image is a differentiator to distinguish themselves from competitors and navigate a challenging competitive landscape. Berry (2000), cited in Panda, Pandey, Bennet, and Tian (2019), supports the statement, and elaborates that a unique brand image can lead to a positive corporate reputation which can impact the student's experience at a HEI.

Expectations of customers and the public have become more intense and extends beyond the normal expectations of the product and or service. In the context of the study, these expectations from parents as customers are compared to the satisfaction level of service experience parents, which leads to the formation of the corporate reputation of a HEI. Therefore, the following hypothesis is presented:

H1: There is a positive relationship between experience of service and corporate reputation.

The next external stimuli influencing the formation of a parent's perspective on a HEI's corporate reputation is information obtained from others through social networks (extra personal) and from media sources (promotion). The Source Credibility Theory, by Ja-nis and Kelly in 1963 (Umeogu, 2012), supports the S-O-R theoretical basis of the study in the sense that it explains the perceived credibility and persuasiveness of information sources by a receiver such as a parent. Information seekers through word-of-mouth or online channels, are more willing to trust information, if they regard the source as reliable, share similar values, preferences, and beliefs (Wong, Ng, & Lam, 2020). Wong et al. (2020) motivate that parents and prospective students turn to significant others in their social network, traditional, and online media sources to gather information about a HEI and form a perception on the corporate reputation because of the credibility of the information.

Based on the S-O-R Theory, marketing stimuli such as information from others can influence a parents' decision to approach or avoid a HEI (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974). Information from others affects the customer's motives, decision mediators, perceptions, and emotions since connotative meanings of brands and therefore, corporate reputation can create a bias. Furthermore, Mehrabian and Russel (1974), indicate that information from others can influence a customer's evoked set, since the latter lacks experience of the full suite of service provided by a HEI. In the study, parents only have experience of the application and pre-admission processes, prior to enrolment. Therefore, the field study's focus on the parent’s perspective of a HEI’s corporate reputation based on the information from credible and trustworthy peers (Castellano & Dutot, 2017), leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: There is a positive relationship between information from others and corporate reputation.

Information from the media includes traditional media sources such as newspapers but also digital media sources such as social media. Many parents turn to traditional and especially social media to gather information on a HEI. Nisar, Prabhakar, Ilavarasan, and Baabdullah (2020) refer to information diversity as the diverse opinions and backgrounds of social media users. The terms valence is also defined as the emotions reflected in the reviews and opinions (Nisar et al., 2020).

Information from the media can be both company (HEI) generated, or user generated, and the diverse nature of the content and source increase the probability that parents will evaluate a HEI positively if they gather relevant information about a HEI (Nisar et al., 2020). Lee et al. (2018) state that the increase of emerging interactive media has facilitated the flow of HEI-related information between internal (within the HEI) and external (outside the HEI) sources, which offered parents the ability to evaluate HEI-related information gathered from interactive media sources to determine the strength of a HEI's corporate reputation. Therefore, the following hypothesis is presented:

H3: There is a positive relationship between information gathered from the media sources and corporate reputation.

3.2.2 Organism (O) - an internal interpretation of corporate reputation

In the S-O-R Theory, the organism (O) stage represents an individual's views, perceptions, personal perspectives, emotions, ideas, and sense of belonging related to specific experiences or information about a company (Khan et al., 2020). The S-O-R Theory laid a foundation for external stimuli of service experience, information obtained from others, and information gathered from traditional and online media sources that influence parents' internal interpretation (perspectives) of a HEI's corporate reputation.

The external stimuli affect the emotions and perceived value held by the parent (Aslam & de Luna, 2020). Emotions influence affective feelings and moods of likeness, such as satisfaction, enthusiasm, support, encouragement, and hope. Negative views such as disgust, unhappiness, frustration, and disinterest are the opposite emotions that can be elicited. (Zekarra & Ruiz-Mafé, 2020).

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) has anthropological roots and spans a wide range of subjects, including sociology, social psychology, behavioral psychology, philosophy, and economics (Griffith et al., 2006; Narasimhan et al., 2009). In the literature on interfirm connections, including manufacturer-distributor relationships, supplier-buyer relationships, and inter-partner relationships in strategic alliances, SET has attracted a lot of attention (Kwon, 2008). The SET provides an interdisciplinary framework to explain trust and commitment in organistional relationships (Chao, Yu, Cheng, & Chuang, 2013). Blau (1964) applied the SET to sociology, and today it is recognised as an influential paradigm for understanding workplace behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Drawing from the SET, the influence of corporate reputation on trust and commitment will be explained.

3.2.2.1 Trust

Numerous studies have looked at how trust and business reputation are related, but it has rarely been proven empirically how corporate reputation affects how trust is formed (Walsh et al., 2009). Walsh et al. (2009) refer to trust as:

> A willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence…By trusting a company, customers are likely to think the company is acting fairly, being reliable, and showing concern for its exchange partners, including customers over a period of time.

Against the background of the S-O-R Theory, affective emotions, such as trust, identification, and commitment in this study, are evoked by external stimuli and lead to affective responses (Kim & Lennon, 2013). In addition, the Social Exchange Theory (SET) frequently, though not always, focuses on interactions, underlying mechanisms, and associated results. According to a social exchange perspective, trust is the belief that an exchange partner would act decently and not maliciously based on assumptions about the partner's character and intentions (Coyle-Shapiro & Diehl, 2018). Keh and Xie (2009) found that mutual trust is pivotal in social exchanges between customers (parents) and companies (HEIs). Especially in the early stages of the relationship, an excellent corporate reputation indicates the company's capability, ability, and goodwill (Keh & Xie, 2009). Subsequently, customers are more willing to base their trust on the company's corporate reputation to compare the costs and benefits of a potential transaction (Barone, Manning, & Miniard, 2004). In context of the field study, parents are at the beginning of the relationship and have not yet experienced post-enrollment services. The study focuses on the perspective of parents while in the application or pre-enrollment phase. Given the study's focus on the parent's perspective, as a customer, on the corporate reputation of a HEI, the following hypothesis is presented:

H4: There is a positive relationship between corporate reputation and trust.

3.2.2.2 Identification

The study draws on the primary tenet of the Social Identity Theory and investigates the impact of corporate reputation on the parent's identification with a HEI. Social Identity Theory's basic principle is that people aspire to join groups that boost their self-esteem, thus, functions as a form of reinforcement. People must have confidence in their group's superiority over other groups, drawing a parallel between the Social Identity Theory and the S-O-R Theories based on the internal emotions, views, and attitudes held by the organism or parent (Brown, 2000).

Keh and Xie (2009) aptly observe that corporate reputation positively influences the customers' identification due to its ability to project the identity appeal of the focal company. The authors state, "as favorable reputation directly denotes high prestige corporate reputation is directly related to identity attractiveness." In support of the study's objective, a HEI's quest to build a trustworthy and prestigious identity with which different stakeholders, such as parents, choose to identify, identification should also be a consequence of corporate reputation. Lee et al. (2018), state that parents respond positively to HEIs that have a well-managed reputation, identities, and images. This study attempts to test the effect of a HEI's corporate reputation on identification. Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

H5: There is a positive relationship between corporate reputation and identification.

3.2.2.3 Trust and commitment

Parallel to the SET (Cook & Emerson, 1978), Morgan and Hunt (1994) defined commitment as an exchange partner's belief that an ongoing relationship with another is worthwhile as to warrant making all possible efforts to maintain it (Keh & Xie, 2009). According to Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992), cited in Morgan and Hunt (1992: 23), "Commitment to the relationship is described as an ongoing desire to sustain a valued relationship," which corresponds with their definition. Therefore, commitment is essential for mutual commitment in relational or transactional orientations (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). As the marketing field shifts further away from the transactional exchange perspective and embraces the relational approach, commitment is becoming an important marketing outcome. The Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) states that the interaction between trust and commitment can lead to the developing of a social exchange relationship. As a result, the corporate reputation of the HEI's brand will develop concurrently with a parent's interactions with the HEI and as their connection develops over time. As a result of this development, trust and loyalty start to grow, and the likelihood of committing considerably increases.

Nguyen, Yu, Melewar, and Hemsley-Brown (2015) explain commitment as a persistent desire to preserve a long-lasting relationship and profound connection (identification) with higher education and a particular university. Such dedication demonstrates the parent’s desire to maintain their connection with the HEI by pursuing postgraduate courses there in the future. According to Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992), cited in Nguyen et al. (2015), commitment can only be fruitful and valuable when it is fostered gradually.

The relationship between trust and commitment is key to develop and preserve a long-term relationship between a customer (parent) and a company (HEI) (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed concerning trust and commitment as one chain of relationships consequential to the corporate reputation of a HEI:

H6: There is a positive relationship between trust and commitment.

3.2.2.4 Identification and commitment

Keh and Xie (2007) state that customers satisfy their need for self-definition such as self-enhancement, self-distinctiveness, and self-continuity through the identification with a company. Battacharya and Sen (2003) cited in Keh, and Xie (2007) highlighted that customer identification articulate into the forming and maintaining of deep, meaningful, and committed relationships with a company. In context of the field study, parent identification with a HEI is the second chain of relationships consequential to the corporate reputation of a HEI. Therefore, the following hypothesis is presented:

H7: There is a positive relationship between identification and commitment.

3.2.3 Behaviour responses as consequences of corporate reputation (R)

In line with the S-O-R Theory, Mehrabian and Russel (1974) highlighted that a consumer's behavior and willingness to purchase is a response to consumer emotions. Mehrabian and Russell (1974), proposed that external environmental stimuli could elicit emotional responses from individuals, which could lead to avoidance or avoidance behavior. A series of events, namely stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R), was used to represent the relationship between environmental stimuli and their consequences on people's internal states and behavioral reactions.

Keh and Xie (2007) indicated that the relational factors of trust, identification, and commitment provide the bridge between corporate reputation and behavioral intentions such as word-of-mouth intention and supportive intentions. Given the field study's focus on the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education from a parental perspective, word-of-mouth intention and supportive intentions will be discussed as follows.

3.2.3.1 Word-of-mouth (WOM) intention

Harrison-Walker (2001), cited in Teo and Soutar (2011), describes WOM as "informal, person-to-person communication (R-response) about a brand, product, organisation, or service that occurs between a non-commercial sender and a receiver. WOM can be positive or negative based on the level of satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is pivotal to direct or indirect favorable WOM intentions. In contrast, customers' positive behavioral intentions will decrease when they are dissatisfied (Hwang & Choi, 2019). Teo and Soutar (2011) state that commitment motivated people to participate in WOM activities.

Shamma and Hassan (2009) provided evidence that behavioral intentions such as WOM intentions correlated with a customer’s commitment. In this field study, it is assumed that parents with commitment towards a HEI's corporate reputation based on stimuli (S) and internal emotions, views, and beliefs (O), will become good promotors and advocates (R-response) to recommend the institution to other parents. It is, therefore, realistic to hypothesize that:

H8: There is a positive relationship between commitment and word-of-mouth intention.

3.2.3.2 Supportive intentions

In support of the S-O-R Theory, Shamma and Hassan (2009) outline the interaction and mediation between attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral intentions (R-response) of an organism (O). Shamma and Hassan (2009) identified a positive correlation between corporate reputation and supportive intentions and identified supportive intention as the desire to purchase or re-purchase a service or a product. Supportive intentions and commitment are interrelated, in the sense that the higher the supportive intentions, the more likely commitment increases (Shamma & Hassan, 2009). This study examines parents' supportive intentions based on commitment as a consequence of a HEI's corporate reputation. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H9: There is a positive relationship between commitment and supportive intention.

3.2.3.3 Corporate reputation and word-of-mouth intention

Walsh et al. (2009) state that the influence of corporate reputation on word-of-mouth intention can be illustrated by companies who offer poor product or service quality are penalised by customers through negative word-of-mouth. The opposite is true; customers who view a company to have a positive reputation, will be more willing to exhibit positive word-of-mouth intentions. Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

H10: There is a positive relationship between corporate reputation and word-of-mouth intention.

3.2.3.4 Corporate reputation and supportive intention

Lee et al. (2018: 9) state that parents' "supportive intentions are based on organisational psychology constructs such as identification, commitment, and trust", which form part of the study's conceptual model as the consequences of an HEI's corporate reputation. In their study, Lee et al. (2018) indicated the effect of corporate reputation on supportive intentions. According to the study by Lee et al. (2018) parents form perceptions on the corporate reputation of a HEI, which lead to commitment (Shamma & Hassan, 2009) and specific behavioral intentions or outcomes. Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

H11: There is a positive relationship between corporate reputation and supportive intention.

3.3 HYPOTHESISED MODEL OF THE STUDY

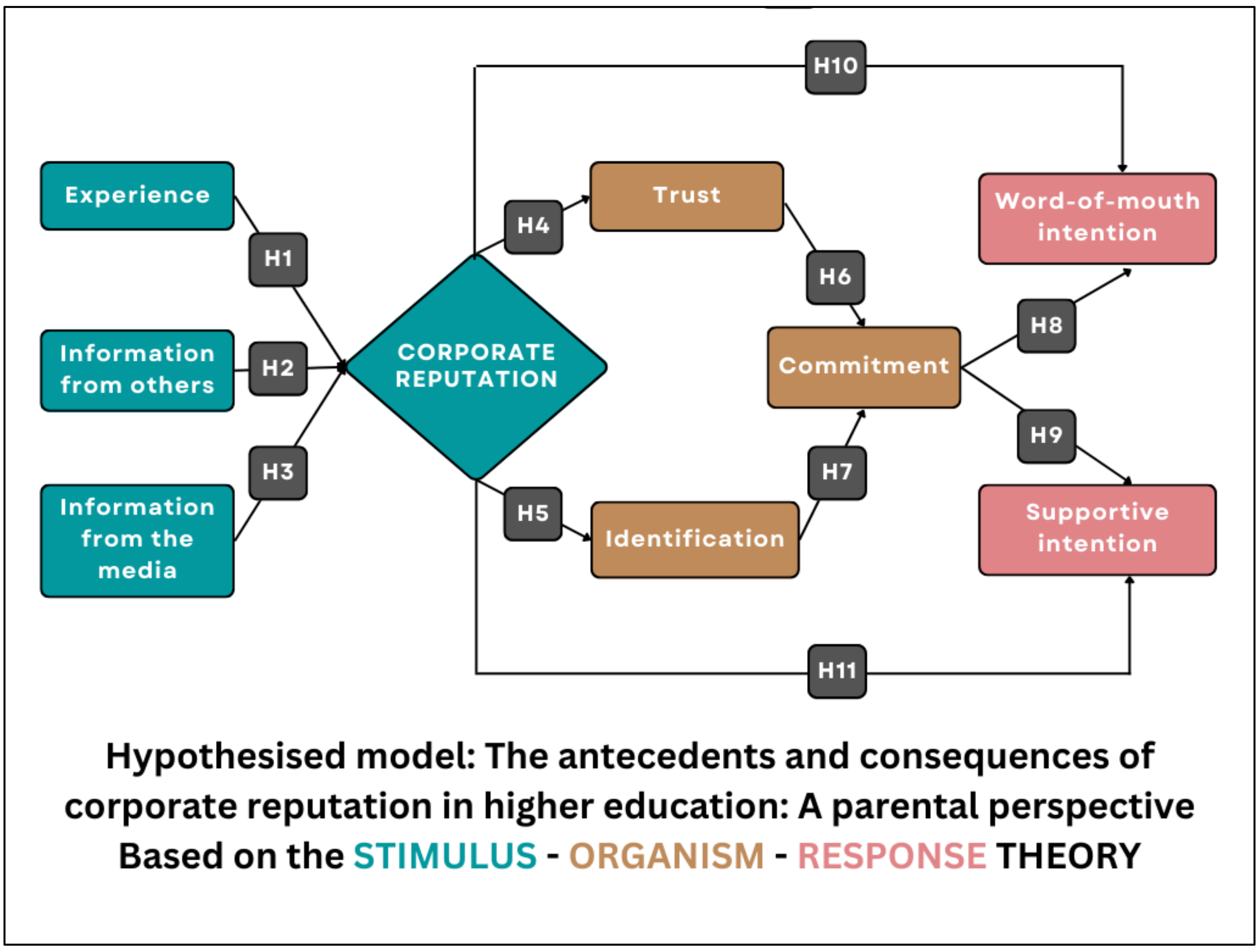

Figure 3.1: Hypothesised model based on the Stimulus (S) – Organism (O) – Response (R) Theory

3.4 CONCLUSION: CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 discussed the theoretical framework that guided the development of eleven hypotheses making up the conceptual model. Each hypothesis represents a relationship in the conceptual model to identify and empirically test the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education from a parental perspective.

The rest of the dissertation is structured, as follows. Chapter 4 deals with the research methodology followed by the empirical quantitative study conducted to test each of the eleven statistical hypotheses. Chapter 5 discusses the analysis of the data obtained through the quantitative study followed by Chapter 6, which deals with the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

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Research methodology

CHAPTER 4

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 provided a synopsis of the intended research on the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education from a parental perspective. Chapter 2 offered an overview of existing and relevant literature on corporate reputation with specific application to HEIs. Chapter 3 identified the respective theories that form the basis of the conceptual model. Chapter 4 will provide an overview of the research methodology that will be used in the study to realise the primary objective.

The research process presents a step-by-step method for executing a business research project. Before diving into the details of the research process, it's critical to have a basic grasp of research and the setting in which it will be conducted. The business research design process comprises three stages: conception or formulation, execution, and analysis (Hair, Page, & Brunsveld, 2020).

The structure of chapter 4 will comprise five sections. Section 1 will deal with a definition of research, characteristics, criteria, assumptions, and research philosophies. Section 2 will discuss three approaches to theory development and methodology choice. Section 3 will elucidate the sampling approach, research study strategy, data collection, and the time horizon. Section 4 will discuss ethical considerations. Section 5 will discuss the data analysis plan, the evaluation of the structural model, and the conclusion.

SECTION 1

4.2. RESEARCH DEFINED

Socrates famously said: "Life without inquiry is not worth living for a human being" (Naidoo, 2011).

For centuries, since the days of Aristotle and Socrates, traditional research concentrated on discovering new knowledge of the unknowns in knowledge domains such as mathematics, philosophy, astronomy, medicine, and logic. Research in its core has evolved through the ages. Current day research seeks to discover and disseminate new and existing knowledge and information into society. It includes a mixture of disciplines or research foci such as natural sciences, biological sciences, engineering sciences, medical and health sciences, business sciences, humanities, and social sciences (Sudhakar, 2015; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019).

There is a distinct difference between information gathering and research, i.e., finding answers (Goundar, 2012) to a question or an unresolved aspect (Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aardt, & Wagner, 2014). In the information economy, everyone with access to the internet instantly becomes a quasi-researcher. Finding information about daily social phenomena hardly represents research but a mere exercise to gather information. On the other hand, social scientific research refers to the focused systematic inquiry "to validate and refine existing knowledge and generate new knowledge. (Naidoo, 2011). Çaparlar and Dönmez (2016) define scientific research as systematically collecting, interpreting, and evaluating data through a planned methodology. Goundar (2012) offers a similar definition of research and describes it as a structured inquiry through an acceptable scientific methodology to find solutions to problems and create new knowledge that can be applied to a general population. Zigmund, Babin, Carr, and Griffon (2010) distinguish between applied and basic business research. Applied business research investigates a particular managerial decision in an organisation and informs decision-making. Basic research aims to expand knowledge of concepts and theories in business management. From these definitions, scientific research is systematic, follows a specific and discipline-appropriate methodology, and collects, analyses, and interprets data.

4.2.1 The nature of business research – an academic quest for knowledge

The field study is related to business and management research with a specific focus on the field of marketing and has a social science orientation (Bryman et al., 2014). Zigmund et al. (2010) and Bajpai (2011) define business research as the academic search for the truth about business aspects using systematic methods and objective analysis (Goundar, 2012). These methods are not intuitive but are precise and focused on theory development, problem definition, hypothesis generation (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013), information gathering, data analysis and interpretation, and communicating the findings related to the underlying theory.

Bryman et al. (2014) state that business research is not isolated from social sciences because it is shaped by business and management realities yet underpinned by philosophies and intellectual traditions of human behavior as explained by social sciences. Greener (2008) explains that business research is a fusion of the multi-disciplines of sociology, economics, mathematics, psychology, politics, language, cultures, history, and physics.

4.2.2 Characteristics of research

Goundar (2014) identifies the following **characteristics** (illustrated in figure 4.1) that must be present in business research; otherwise, it is reduced to a simple information-gathering exercise:

Controlled: The causal relationships between two variables are controlled to minimise the effect of other variables or factors on the relationship,
Rigorous: Procedures to find answers are relevant, justified, and appropriate,
Systematic: The procedure to investigate a phenomenon must be sequenced logically and not followed in a haphazard manner. Some procedures must follow others.
Valid and verifiable: The findings of research must be correct and verified by experts as accurate.
Empirical: The conclusion drawn are based upon solid evidence gathered from the information, either quantitative, qualitative, or a mixed method.
Critical: The process and procedures must withstand critical scrutiny and be free from drawbacks and fool proof.

4.2.3 Criteria in business research

It is imperative to consider quality issues in business research. Three main quality criteria cut across all types of research designs, addressed in paragraph three: reliability, replication, and validity (Bryman et al., 2014).

4.2.3.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of the measures of a concept and deals with stability, internal reliability, and inter-observer consistency factors. Stability deals with the correlation as a measure of the strength between two different variables, while internal reliability deals with the coherence between the different indicators (items used in the questionnaire to measure latent variable). Inter-observer consistency ensures the objective judgment between different observers involved in recording observations (Bryman et al., 2014). Greener (2008) adds that consistency also means repeatability over time and is imperative for research studies. Research designs must be auditable, transparent, and clear – thus triangulated and free from errors and biases from both the participant and the observer.

4.2.3.2 Replication

Replicability refers to replicating the findings and results in one study to the findings and results in another study, albeit in a different context. It is highly valued in business research following a quantitative method. (Bryman et al., 2014).

4.2.3.3 Validity

Validity is evidence that the indicator(s) measures the concept it intends to measure. According to Greene (2008), face validity, construct validity, and internal validity are imperative. Bryman et al. (2014) describe face validity as an intuitive process that reflects the correlation between the concept's content and the research method. Green (2008) and Bryman et al. (2014) describe **construct validity** as the use of statistical ways to check whether the questions accurately assess the underlying theoretical construct. **Construct validity** is significant in using self-completion questionnaires where the research or primary investigator is not present to avoid any misinterpretation or misunderstanding by respondents. **Internal validity** relates to the causality between the dependent and independent variable and the possibility that other factors might influence the change in a dependent variable (Greene, 2008). Reliability and validity are interrelated, although distinguishable. If a measure is not valid, it cannot be reliable and vice versa.

4.3 RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS AND PHILOSOPHIES

> Whether we are considering the physical sciences, the life sciences, or the social sciences, the research process begins with an interesting thought about the world around us. Without this, there is no research. The interesting thought or research question is the common starting point of all research work in all fields of study. From this point, research is always concerned with the emergence of theory, whereby concepts and notions develop through applying ideas, observing evidence, and evaluating results. It is worth always keeping in mind that the result of the research is to add something of value to the body of theoretical knowledge (Remenyi, 2002).

A robust and explicit research design is imperative for scientific, social, or business research. The conceptual building blocks of the intended research will have a fundamental bearing on the practice of research (Bryman et al., 2014).

To choose and justify the applicable building blocks of the intended research, the well-known research onion (figure 2), developed by Mark Saunders (Saunders et al., Lewis & Thornhill, 2019), is applied. Although the first inclination is to leapfrog to the core of the process, i.e., the data collection method, the correct and systematic manner is to 'peel the onion' from the outer layer towards the core. Thus, it is imperative to delineate and choose the applicable research philosophy (layer 1), approach (layer 2), methodological choices (layer 3), strategy (layer 4), time horizon (layer 5), techniques and procedures (layer 6) that will form the robust building blocks of the methodology to conduct reliable, replicable, and valid research.

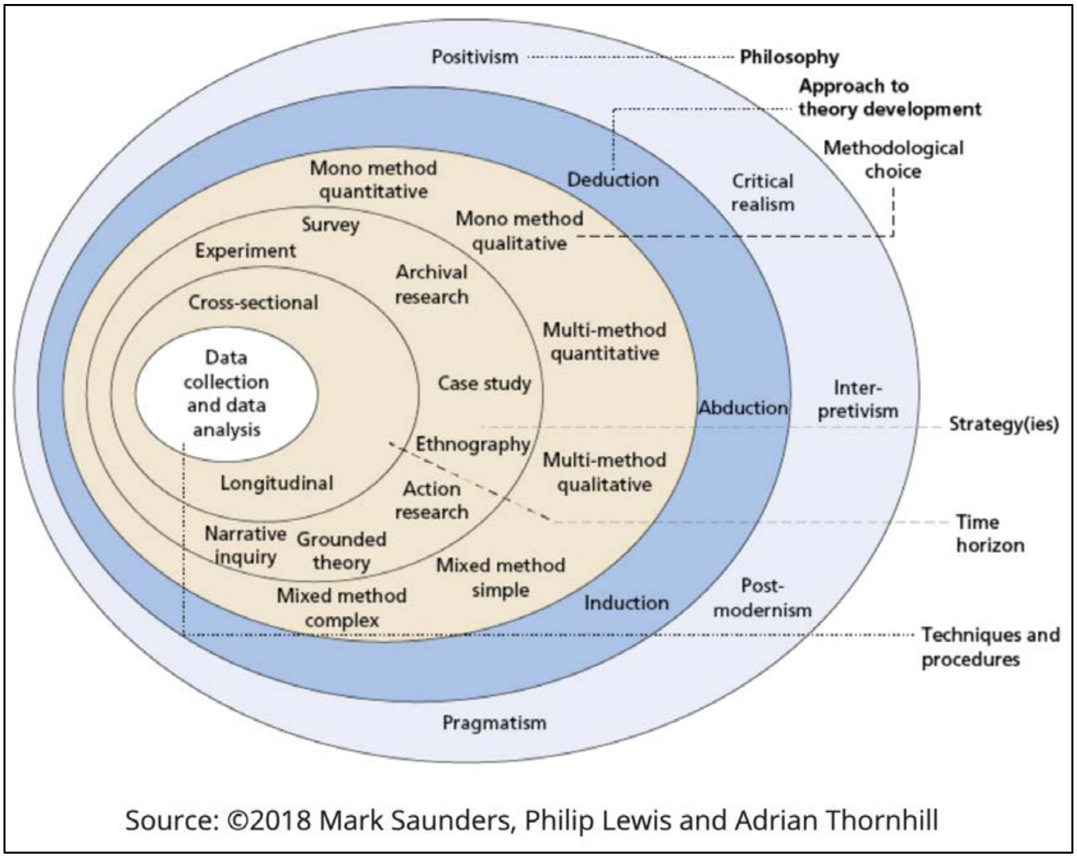

Figure 4.1: Research onion (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.3.1 Beliefs and assumptions

The starting point of the research journey is to understand that the truth about a particular phenomenon is subjected to beliefs and assumptions about the reality of the world around us. For centuries, philosophers and researchers have been fascinated by the nature of knowledge and how the 'truth' is obtained (Sekaran et al., 2013). Saunders et al. (2019) consider three main assumptions relevant to business research: ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

4.3.1.1 Ontological assumptions

Ontology is the study of existence or the nature of being. Questions of ontology are related to the general nature of the reality or social phenomenon. Ontology is related to a branch of metaphysics and probes phenomena' nature, cause, and identity. (Bryman et al., 2014; Saunders et al., 2019). Ontological assumptions answer the question, "what is." They shape the view and study of the research subject: organisations, individuals, management, organisational artifacts, and events (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.3.1.2 Epistemological assumptions

This branch of assumptions deals with what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable, valid, and legitimate knowledge in a particular discipline and how this knowledge can be obtained (Bryman et al., 2014; Saunders et al., 2019). Epistemological assumptions answer the questions beginning with "what" and "how." The variety of epistemologies (perceptions, sensations, reasoning, intuition, and faith) offers a plethora of methods to govern research towards acceptable, valid, and legitimate knowledge (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.3.1.3 Axiological assumptions

The role of ethics and values underpin axiological assumptions. The researcher's values and beliefs find their way into the choices of the research topic, philosophy, methodology, and data collection techniques. A decision to follow either a quantitative or a qualitative approach reflects a decision based on values and beliefs. It is crucial that the researcher is aware of and explicitly recognises their values and beliefs during the research study from start to finish.

4.3.2 Research philosophies

All research is centered on the world we live in, and the view of what truth constitutes differs from researcher to researcher (Sekaran et al., 2013). It is essential to distinguish between the different philosophies or perspectives for modern-day research in business-related fields to gain further insight into the assumptions. The following section will briefly differentiate between the perspectives of objectivism, constructivism, and pragmatism, which fall under the ontology assumptions. It is followed by another brief distinction between positivism, realism, and interpretivism, related to the epistemology assumption.

4.3.2.1 Objectivism

Bryman et al. (2014) and Saunders et al. (2019) define ontology as a perspective that positions a social phenomenon as objective, independent, or external to the social actors. This perspective encompasses that knowledge is objective and is determined by the reality. The reality is not influenced by the thoughts a social actor might have; however, the reality influences or impacts the opinions and values of a social actor or groups of social actors.

4.3.2.2 Constructivism

Constructivism asserts that social actors or groups of social actors continually produce social phenomena through social interaction. Human interactions, behavior, and decisions are central to constructivism. This perspective implicates that reality is subjective and in a constant state of flux. Many truths can co-exist (Bryman et al., 2014).

4.3.2.3 Pragmatism

Pragmatism acknowledges that theory and practice are linked and asserts that constructivism and ontology are excellent and practical approaches to research (Saunders et al., 2019). Sekaran et al. (2013) state that pragmatists believe that research can produce useful knowledge from both objective and subjective phenomena depending on the research questions. Pragmatism focuses on practical, applied research in which different viewpoints on research and the topic of study can be beneficial in discovering a solution to a business problem. In the pragmatic view, research is constructed socially; researchers can have different explanations about what is going on around them. Pragmatists gain a deeper understanding of the world by looking at things from different perspectives, ideas, and theories, thus supporting pluralism and eclecticism.

4.3.2.4 Positivism

The first stance under the epistemological assumption is positivism, which applies natural science methods to the study and understanding social phenomena. Positivism aims to generate and test research questions emanating from existing theory. The validity of the propositions is assessed through deduction, and research generated by positivism can be replicated in other studies with similar or the same quantifiable results from statistical analysis (Bryman et al., 2014; Saunders et al., 2019). Sekaran et al. (2013) state that according to a positivist's view of the world, science and scientific research are the path to understanding objective truth and can be used for prediction and control. Positivists believe the world is governed by laws of cause and effect that can be observed through scientific study. Researchers who favor positivism value rigor and replication and observational reliability, and generalizability. Their theories are based on deductive reasoning.

Based on the information discussed to this point, the study followed an ontological assumption and a positivism approach.

4.3.2.5 Realism

Realism is similar to positivism because it supports the same research methods applied to social and natural science research. The scientist's conceptualization of reality is a way of knowing reality, and new research methods by other scientists will contribute to acceptable knowledge of the reality (Bryman et al., 2014; Saunders et al., 2019). Empirical realism and critical realism are two forms of this perspective (Bryman et al., 2014).

4.3.2.6 Interpretivism

Interpretivism is different from positivism and realism in the sense that the involvement of the researcher is vital in interpreting the collected data, which is usually a qualitative method (Saunders et al., 2019). The understanding, explanation, and interpretation of human action and the differences between people underpin the subjective meaning of the actions of and between social agents and are central to the interpretivism perspective (Bryman et al., 2014).

The following table 4.1 provides an overview of the different approaches and philosophies related to business research.

Table 4.1: Overview of research assumptions, philosophies, and methods (Adopted from Saunders et al., 2019)

ONTOLOGY (nature of reality or being)	EPISTEMOLOGY (what constitutes acceptable knowledge)	AXIOLOGY (role of values)	TYPICAL METHODS
POSITIVISM			
• Real, external, independent • One true reality (universalism) • Granular (things) • Ordered	• Scientific method • Observable and measurable facts • Law-like generalisations • Numbers • Causal explanation and prediction as contribution	• Value-free research • Researcher is detached, neutral, and independent of what is researched and maintains an objective stance	• Typically deductive, highly structured, large samples, measurement, typically quantitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be analysed
CRITICAL REALISM			
• Stratified/layered (the empirical, the actual and the real) • External, independent, and intransient • Objective structures • Causal mechanisms	• Epistemological relativism • Knowledge historically situated and transient • Facts are social constructions • Historical causal explanation as contribution	• Value-laden research • Researcher acknowledges bias by world views, cultural experience, and upbringing • Researcher tries to minimise bias and errors and is as objective as possible	• Retroductive, in-depth historically situated analysis of pre-existing structures and emerging agency • Range of methods and data types to fit subject matter
INTERPRETIVISM			
• Complex and rich • Socially constructed through culture and language • Multiple meanings, interpretations, and realities • Flux of processes, experiences, and practices	• Theories and concepts too simplistic • Focus on narratives, stories, perceptions and interpretations • New understandings and worldviews as contribution	• Value-bound research • Researcher is part of what is researched and subjective • Researcher's interpretations key to contribution • Researcher reflexive	• Typically inductive • Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be interpreted
POSTMODERNISM			
• Nominal complex, rich socially constructed through power relations • Some meanings, interpretations, realities are dominated and silenced by others • Flux of processes, experiences, practices	• What counts as 'truth' and 'knowledge' is decided by dominant ideologies • Focus on absences, silences and oppressed/repressed meanings, interpretations, and voices • Exposure of power relations and challenge of dominant views as contribution	• Value-constituted research • Researcher and research embedded in power relations • Some research narratives are repressed and silenced at the expense of others • Researcher radically reflexive	• Typically deconstructive – reading texts and realities against themselves • In-depth investigations of anomalies, silences and absences • Range of data types, typically qualitative methods of analysis
PRAGMATISM			
• Complex, rich, and external • 'Reality' is the practical consequences of ideas • Flux of processes, experiences and practices	• Practical meaning of knowledge in specific contexts • 'True' theories and knowledge are those that enable successful action • Focus on problems, practices and relevance • Problem solving and informed future practice as contribution	• Value-driven research initiated and sustained by researcher's doubts and beliefs • Researcher reflexive	• Following research problem and research question • Range of methods: mixed, multiple, qualitative, quantitative, action research • Emphasis on practical solutions and outcomes

SECTION 2

4.4 APPROACH TO THEORY DEVELOPMENT

The fifth layer of the research onion deals with the approach to theory development. Kurt Lewin (Zikmund et al., 2010) described theory as:

> Like all abstractions, the word "theory" has been used in many different ways, in many different contexts, at times so broadly as to include almost all descriptive statements about a class of phenomena, and at other times so narrowly as to exclude everything but a series of terms and their relationships that satisfies certain logical requirements (Zikmund et al., 2010).

Building a theory can be done by reviewing previous findings and knowledge generated from comparable studies or understanding related theoretical areas. A theory may be developed with deductive, inductive (Zikmund et al., 2010), or abductive (Saunders et al., 2019) reasoning. The two approaches will be briefly described.

4.4.1 Deductive theory approach

Researchers who use deductive theory approaches develop a specific hypothesis based on literature reviews, then empirically (Bryman et al., 2014) test this hypothesis within a particular context for accuracy (Greener, 2008). The deductive theory represents the most common view in terms of the relationship between theory and research. Concepts that need to be studied will be embedded in the hypothesis. Theory and the hypothesis deduced from it are the first steps in the research process and inform data gathering, which usually constitutes a quantitative research approach (Bryman et al., 2014).

To realise the objective of the study, the study followed a deductive theory approach.

4.4.2 Inductive theory approach

By contrast, the inductive theory is the logical process that begins with a general proposition (Zikmund et al., 2010) based on observations, and then new theories are derived from them (Greener, 2008). The inductive theory approach is typically linked with a qualitative research approach (Bryman et al., 2014).

4.4.3 Abduction theory approach

Researchers from various research theories can utilize the abduction or retroduction approach because of its flexibility. Some claim that because pure deduction or induction is difficult or even impossible to achieve practically, most management researchers employ some form of abduction. An abductive approach integrates both the deductive and inductive approaches. On the other hand, a well-developed abductive approach is most likely to be based on pragmatism or postmodernism, but it can also be based on critical realism (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.5 METHODOLOGY CHOICE

The fourth layer of the research onion constitutes the methodological choice for conducting research and identifies five methods as combinations of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods or strategies (Saunders et al., 2019). The research approach implicates the general approach to conducting research (Bryman et al., 2014).

Saunders et al. (2019) suggest three options, i.e., mono-method, mixed-method, and multi-method research. The mono-method is a study that uses only one method. The mixed-method approach is based on combining two or more research methods, and it most usually relates to the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Finally, the multi-method employs a broader range of techniques.

It is not uncommon to find disputes in social science regarding the superiority or inferiority of qualitative research over quantitative research. It is a pointless argument as quantitative and quality research often go hand in hand. For example, developing valid survey measures begins with a clear understanding of the theory to be measured and how the theory is expressed in everyday language.

4.5.1 Quantitative research

A quantitative research method is described as one that employs numerical measures and analysis methods to achieve research objectives and follows a linear and structured process.

Quantitative research is defined as a separate research approach that involves collecting numerical data, considers the relationship between theory and study to be deductive, favors a natural science approach, adopts positivist practices and norms, and considers the social reality of being an external and objective reality. Criteria for quality measures include reliability, validity, and replicability (Bryman et al., 2014).

The study followed a quantitative research method.

4.5.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research can easily stand on its own and is non-linear and unstructured since it requires fewer resources (Zikmund et al., 2010). It pivots around non-numerical data such as interviews, pictures, and actions (Bryman et al., 2014). Researchers that prefer a qualitative approach follow an induction approach informed by interpretivism and constructivism. Criteria for quality measures are difficult to achieve reliability, replicability, and validity. Some researchers prefer other criteria such as trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and triangulation to establish reliability and validity in qualitative research (Bryman et al., 2014).

SECTION 3

4.6 SAMPLING

4.6.1 Target population or sampling frame

The entire collection of units pertinent to the research study is the target population. They're important since they have the data that the research investigation is looking for (Hair et al., 2020). The target population must be adequately specified at the start of the sampling process to identify the appropriate sources for obtaining the data. Answering questions about the population's key features are standard for determining the target population (Zikmund et al., 2010) or sampling frame (Hair et al., 2020). A sampling frame is thus a list of all the units from which the sample is drawn that is as complete as possible (Hair et al., 2020).

The target population of the study was parents of Grade 12 learners high/secondary schools in Bloemfontein. To participate in the study, parents had to meet the following criteria:

- The parent must have a child/dependant in Grade 12 in 2022.
- The parent's child/dependant must be in Grade 12 in a high/secondary school in Bloemfontein, Free State Province, Republic of South Africa.
- The parent has engaged or interacted with a HEI.
- The parent's child/dependant considered or has applied for undergraduate studies at a HEI in 2023.

4.6.2 Sampling strategy

The next layer of the research onion (Saunders et al., 2019) speaks to the different sampling strategies to select individuals for participating in the study through a probability or non-probability approach. The population sample is defined as a segment or subset of the whole population. The selected sample must represent the total population (Bryman et al., 2014).

All researchers must carefully consider bias by avoiding a biased sample when personal judgments, availability of a population segment, or the criteria for inclusion influence the sampling process. A step to limit bias to an absolute minimum is to deploy either a probability or a non-probability sampling approach (Bryman et al., 2014).

4.6.2.1 Probability sampling techniques

Probability sampling is significant in social survey research because it allows researchers to extrapolate findings from a sample to the entire population (Bryman et al., 2014). Chance or random selection mechanisms underpin all probability sampling approaches (Zikmund et al., 2010) so that everyone in the population has a known probability of being picked. Probability sampling reduces sampling error and provides a sample that usually represents the general population. A representative sample represents the population accurately, displaying the same distribution of features or variables as the entire population. (Greener, 2008). It's important to note that the term "random" refers to the technique for selecting the sample, not the data within it. The term "randomness" refers to a technique whose outcome is unpredictable due to chance. Randomness is the foundation of all probability sampling approaches and should not be seen as unplanned or unscientific (Zikmund et al., 2010).

4.6.2.2 Non-probability sampling techniques

Random selection is not applied in non-probability sampling resulting in some units in the population having a better chance of being chosen than others (Greener, 2008). The various non-probability sampling methods are convenience sampling, snowball sampling, and quota sampling (Bryman et al., 20014).

To pick the elements in the sample, the researcher uses subjective approaches such as personal experience, convenience, and expert judgment. As a result, the likelihood of picking a research element is unclear. Furthermore, for a non-probability sample, there are no statistical ways of calculating sampling error. As a result, unlike with random sampling, the researcher cannot confidently generalize the results to the target population, which does not preclude using the non-probability sampling technique.

A specific type of non-probability sampling technique called convenience sampling, often referred to as availability sampling, collects data from population members who are easily available to take part in the study. Convenience sampling is a type of sampling in which the research will rely solely on the first primary data source that is available. To put it another way, this sampling technique entails gathering people anywhere they can be found and usually wherever it is convenient. Everyone is encouraged to take part. It is, in fact, the recommended option in some research studies. This approach can be used in business research to gather early primary data on specific topics, such as how consumers perceive a particular brand or how prospective buyers feel about a new product design. However, in some circumstances, convenience sampling may be the sole choice (Hair et al., 2020).

Not all high/secondary schools participated in the dissemination of the self-completion questionnaires, therefore, not all parents had an equal chance to participate. A convenience sampling strategy (non-probability sampling) was applicable. Convenience sampling enabled the principal investigator to access the population due to its availability (Bryman et al., 2014). It was estimated that approximately 200 participants will respond.

4.6.2.3 Sample size

Time and money are usually constraints on the sampling size. In probability sampling, however, the sample size is critical. The larger the sample, the more likely it is to be representative (Bryman et al., 2014). Six public high schools in Bloemfontein agreed to assist with the dissemination of the link to the online self-completion questionnaire or the dissemination of the hard copy questionnaire to the parents of Grade 12 learners. There is approximately 100+ Grade 12 learners in each school. The higher Quintile schools, i.e., 4, 5, and 99, have databases with parents' email addresses, while the lower Quintile schools, i.e., 1, 2, and 3, do not have reliable email addresses of parents. The absence of reliable email addresses in the lower Quintile schools provides a challenge of an electronic survey as the sole means of data collection, which will be addressed in paragraph 8. It is important to note that the approval from the Department of Education, Free State Province, is not required for ethical clearance since the sample units are parents and not the learners themselves or even teachers.

The bias inherent in non-probability sampling processes is eliminated because the probability sampling process is random (Bryman et al., 2014). The various probability sampling methods are simple random, systematic, stratified random, and multi-stage cluster sampling (Bryman et al., 2014).

4.7 RESEARCH STUDY STRATEGY

The next layer of the research onion (Saunders et al., 2019) deals with the strategy to identify an appropriate data collection instrument. Action research, experimental research, interviews, surveys, case study research, or a comprehensive literature review are some of the tactics suggested by the Saunders et al. (2019). In exploratory research, narrative or visual data is obtained through focus groups, personal interviews, pictures, video diaries, or observations of events or behaviour, which is a qualitative data set. Small samples or case studies are typical in these types of investigations. In contrast to the tiny samples used in qualitative research, descriptive or causal research necessitates substantial quantitative data acquired through surveys conducted or electronic databases (Hair et al., 2020).

The research strategy is determined by the data needed for the research and the study's primary and secondary objectives, as referred to in Chapter 1.

Face-to-face interviews, telephone surveys, mall intercepts, and mail surveys were the principal data collection methods not long ago. The use of digital technologies has become the norm for data collection. Compared to traditional approaches, a large volume of quantitative and qualitative data may be gathered and integrated into databases very quickly and at a low cost. Questionnaires sent by email or pop-up windows, electronic data collecting at the point of sale, social listening, and social media mining are all examples of digital technology (Hair et al., 2020).

Since the study was in quantitative in nature, the most suitable technique to collect numerical data was to distribute self-completion questionnaires electronically and in hard copy to schools for dissemination to the parents of Grade 12 learners. Paragraph 9.2 elucidates more on the participation of schools.

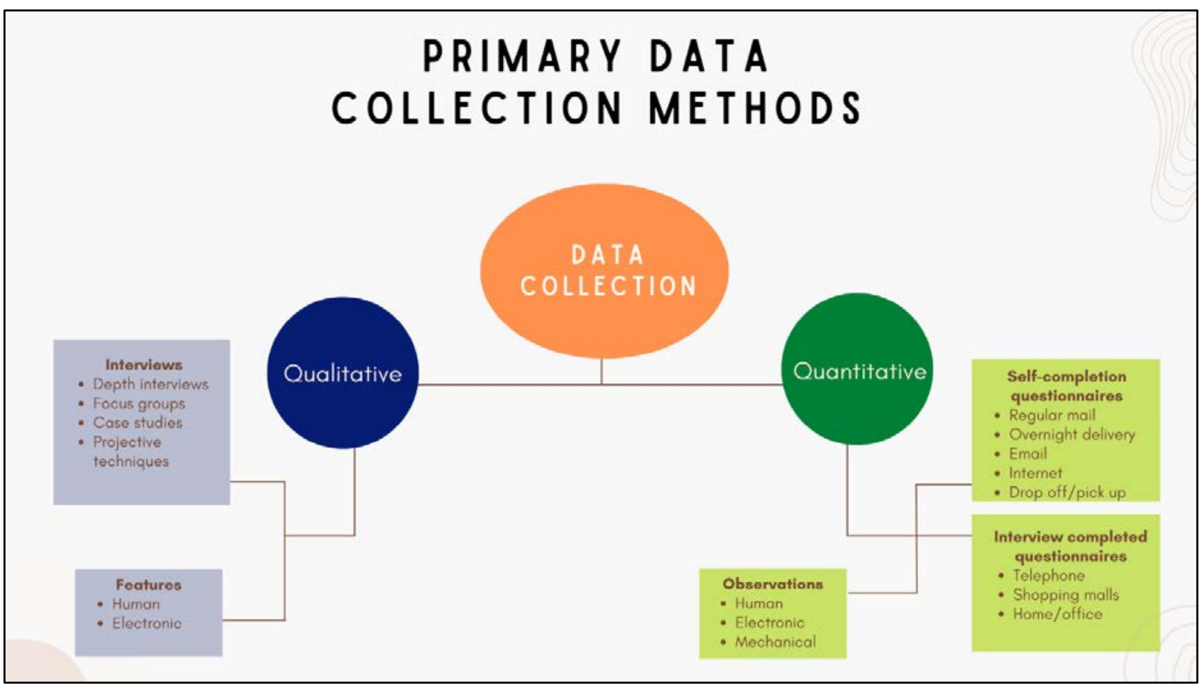

Figure 4.2: Primary data collection methods. (Adopted from Hair et al., 2020)

4.7.1 Questionnaire design and structure

According to Hair et al. (2020), a self-completion questionnaire is a structured instrument to capture data from respondents. A self-completion questionnaire is a scientifically produced tool for assessing essential qualities of businesses, events, people, and other phenomena. To maintain data accuracy, excellent survey research necessitates good questionnaires. Several associated activities must be considered while undertaking a questionnaire-based study: the overall design, validation of the questionnaire, and the manner through which the questionnaire is administered. A questionnaire comprises a series of open-ended and or close-ended questions, the answers to which are usually confined to several predetermined, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive options. Mutually exclusive means that each answer has a different response category, whereas exhaustive means that every potential answer has a response category. The language of the questionnaire is crucial for accuracy. Frequently, questionnaires are completed in the absence of the researcher.

4.7.1.1 Measurement scales

Regarding the measurement scales used in questionnaires, a vertical or horizontal Likert scale is frequently used to gauge people's attitudes and opinions. A five-point or seven-point scale is used to quantify the level of agreement or disagreement with a statement on a Likert scale. A label for every point on the scale represents the intensity of a respondent's feelings. Other numerical and non-numerical scales can also be used (Hair et al., 2020; Bryman et al., 2014). Seven-point scales are desirable since responders rarely choose the end scales, reducing, e.g., a five-point scale to a three-point scale. To increase measurement variability and precision, a larger number of scales is progressively being used (Hair et al., 2020). In addition to the number of scales, the category labels of scales are also important. According to Hair et al. (2020), category labels can be numerical, verbal, or unlabelled choices.

The research deployed a self-completion questionnaire with open-ended questions in the beginning to ask screening and background questions. Then the questionnaire deployed close-ended questions to ascertain the respondents' beliefs about corporate reputation of a HEI according to a horizontal Likert-scale. The questionnaire took 15 minutes to complete. The online version provided buttons per statement which the respondent had to click to select. The printed version presented the questions in a table format. The respondent had to circle the value in the appropriate column that represented his/her evaluation.

4.7.1.2 Number of categories and questions

The self-completion questionnaire will be designed and structured according to the conceptual model proposed in Chapter 3.

The research followed the order of the conceptual model and according to a seven-point vertical Likert scale and deployed the numerical category labels as follows:

1 = strongly disagree | 2 = somewhat disagree | 3 = disagree | 4 = neutral | 5 = agree | 6 = somewhat agree | 7 = strongly agree

The categories, code, related measurement items, and the sources from the literature review are now presented in table format:

Table 4.2 Category ES: Experience of service:

Code	Measurement item	Source
ES1	HEI X (indicated at the start of section B) has employees who treat me fairly	Walsh et al. (2009)
ES2	HEI X (indicated at the start of section B) has employees who treat me courteously	
ES3	HEI X (indicated at the start of section B) has employees who care about my needs	
ES4	HEI X (indicated at the start of section B) service delivery meets their promise	

Table 4.3: Category IO: Information from others (friends and family):

Code	Measurement item	Source
IO1	The HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B) has a good reputation within my community	Plewa et al. (2016)
IO2	The HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B) is a well-respected university in my community	
IO3	I have heard positive things about the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B)	
IO4	The HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B) is looked upon as a prestigious institution	

Table 4.4: Category IM: Information from the media:

Code	Measurement item	Source
IM1	Gathered from media reports, the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B) appears to have a clean image	Narteh and Braimah (2017)
IM2	Gathered from media reports, the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B) appears to develop innovations	
IM3	Gathered from media reports, the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B), I am willing to engage with it due to its reputation	

Table 4.5: Category CR: Corporate reputation:

Code	Measurement item	Source
CR1	I have a good feeling about the higher education X (indicated at the start of Section B)	Lee et al. (2018)
CR2	The higher education X (indicated at the start of Section B) looks like a HEI with strong prospects for future growth	
CR3	The higher education X (indicated at the start of Section B) attracts highly motivated, intelligent students	
CR4	The higher education X (indicated at the start of Section B) offers high quality education	
CR5	The media reports of the higher education X (indicated at the start of Section B) are in general, positive	
CR6	The higher education X (indicated at the start of Section B) looks like a responsible member of the community	

Table 4.6: Category TR: Trust:

Code	Measurement item	Source
TR1	HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B) can generally be trusted	Walsh and Beatty (2007)
TR2	I have great confidence in the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B)	
TR3	The behavior of higher education X (indicated at the start of Section B) reflects integrity	

TR4	The behavior of higher education X (indicated at the start of Section B) reflects reliability	

Table 4.7: Category ID: Identification:

Code	Measurement item	Source
ID1	What others think about the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B) is important to me	Keh and Xie (2008)
ID2	When someone praises the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B), I feel proud	
ID3	If someone criticizes the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B), I feel embarrassed	

Table 4.8: Category CO: Commitment:

Code	Measurement item	Source
CO1	I feel committed to maintaining a relationship with the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B)	Nguyen et al. (2015)
CO2	I feel that a relationship with the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B) is important	
CO3	I intend to continue my relationship with the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B) is important	

CO4	I plan to maintain a relationship with the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B)	

Table 4.9: Category IWM: Word-of-mouth intention:

Code	Measurement item	Source
IWM1	I have only good things to say about the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B)	Teo and Soutar (2011)
IWM2	I am proud to tell others that my son or daughter applied at HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B)	
IWM3	I often recommend the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B) to others	
IWM4	In general, I speak favorable about the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B)	
IWM5	I talk to people more about the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B) than I do about other HEIs	
IWM6	I seldom miss an opportunity to tell others about the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B)	
IWM7	When I tell others about the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B), I tend to talk about it in great detail.	

Table 4.10: Category SI: Supportive intentions:

Code	Measurement item	Source
SI1	If my son or daughter attends the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B), I would be highly interested in this institution.	Lee et al. (2018)
SI2	If my son or daughter attends the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B), I would be highly interested in giving a referral about this institution.	
SI3	In the future, my choice of the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B) for my other children would be highly possible	
SI4	If my son or daughter attends the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B), I would trust this institution.	
SI5	If my son or daughter attends the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B), I would be highly interested in providing financial support to this institution by attending events.	
SI6	If my son or daughter attends the HEI X (indicated at the start of Section B), I would be highly interested in providing financial support to this institution by donating money.	

4.7.1.3 Response rate and sampling error

Some people in the sample invariably do not participate in social research. The response rate is the percentage of people who agree to participate in a survey. However, not everyone who responds will be included: if a respondent answers only a few questions, or if there are apparent signs that the questionnaire was not seriously considered, it is preferable to use only the number of useable questionnaires as the numerator (Bryman et al., 2014).

According to Wilson (2014), the response rate is the proportion or number of people who agree to participate in the research study from the initial sample. It can be expressed as a percentage or a number. In most studies, a response rate of 100% is never attained. The response rate is critical since each non-response has the potential to skew the final sample. A high response rate is needed if the researcher wants to extrapolate the findings to a larger group. As a result, keeping track of the reactions is critical. Non-response rates are expected in sample surveys, leading to sampling error (Bryman et al., 2014).

Some strategies can keep the response rate as high as possible. One such strategy is a chase-up step to nudge and encourage users to respond to increase the response rate (Wilson, 2014). Another strategy is the delivery of the self-completion questionnaire, such as an online survey tool. The University of the Free State has a license to both SurveyMonkey and Evasys online survey tools. The researcher chose the Evasys online survey system. For participants in the lower Quintile schools (1, 2, 3) who have limited access to online platforms, the researcher will drop off and collect hard copy questionnaires to schools for distribution to the Grade 12 parents. See paragraph 9.1 for more details regarding the distribution of the self-completion questionnaires.

4.8 TIME HORIZON

The time horizon speaks to the length of time the study will be conducted. There are two types of observations based on temporal horizons: cross-sectional and longitudinal. When all observations are for a single moment in time, such as in most surveys or questionnaires, cross-sectional data is employed. On the other hand, longitudinal data refers to observations for a specific variable that span numerous years, quarters, months, or days (Saunders et al., 2019). The research followed a cross-sectional time horizon.

4.9 DATA COLLECTION

The central or last circle of the research onion (Saunders et al., 2019) deals with data collection and data analysis. Data gathering is done through various methods. Surveys through self-completion questionnaires, which follow a quantitative method, and structured interviews, which follow a qualitative method, are the two methods to collect data.

4.9.1 Request to schools to assist in questionnaire distribution

As stated in paragraph 4.6.2.2, not all schools have their parents' email addresses on a database or have reliable contact details of their parents since the details frequently change. To obtain a large sample size and avoid sampling bias, an electronic self-completion questionnaire and a hard copy questionnaire were made available to schools for dissemination to the parents of Grade 12 learners. The Protection of Private Information Act Nr 4 of 2013 prohibits the researcher from accessing any identifiable information about the population to distribute the self-completion questionnaires and is thus restricted to accessing the population. Therefore, the researcher does not have access to the contact detail of Grade 12 parents. Thus, schools in Bloemfontein are approached to support the intended research and assist the researcher in acting as a conduit or gatekeeper to reach the Grade 12 parents on their respective databases.

The researcher relied on the willingness of high schools in Bloemfontein to disseminate the link to the self-completion questionnaire and a self-explanatory letter about the objective of the research to the Grade 12 parents for the intended research study to be successful. Participating high schools must agree in writing on the school's letterhead to disseminate the link to the self-completion questionnaire and a self-explanatory letter.

Only those schools who agreed to disseminate the self-completion questionnaires either through emailing the link to the online survey or the hard copy questionnaire, were included in the screening questions at the start of the questionnaire. Grey College, Fichardt Park Hoërskool, Hoërskool Sentraal, and C&N Sekondêre Meisieskool Oranje disseminated the link to the online self-completion questionnaire, while Jim Fouche Hoërskool and Navalsig High School disseminate the hard copy self-completion questionnaires.

A total of 190 respondents agreed to participate in the study, of which only 163 responses were used for statistical analysis. 27 Responses could not be included in the statistical analysis as these participants did not meet the criteria.

4.9.2 Data collection errors

Valid and accurate data collecting instruments such as questionnaires are required for proper data gathering. These instruments are used to ask questions and keep track of data collected during the research process. To ensure that the findings are valid, replicable, and reliable, the questionnaires must have the right questions in the correct order (Hair et al., 2020).

There are numerous ways for errors and inconsistencies to arise in data collecting. Non-sampling mistakes are errors that occur from causes other than the sampling procedure. The first step after gathering data is to look for mistakes. Missing responses may occur if a respondent fails to comprehend the question or follow the instructions (Hair et al., 2020). Bryman et al. (2014) add that the researcher following a quantitative design must keep error to a minimum to ensure that the variation is true and not because of question formulation, question sequence, or the data collection instrument.

SECTION 4

4.10 ETHICS IN BUSINESS RESEARCH

According to Wilson (2014), the researcher has a moral obligation to do research in an exact and truthful manner. Ethical considerations should be incorporated into the research study's conceptualization or formulation. Bryman et al. (2014) state that ethical issues relate directly to the integrity and values of any research. Students at many schools and institutions who do social or business research involving human beings must first acquire ethical approval before proceeding with the study. At the University of the Free State, it is no different. Ethical clearance is required to move to the next stage of the study, data collection. Ethical clearance was approved General Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State Protocol Number: [UFS-HSD2022/1060/22]. The next section will deal with ethical considerations concerning the field study research.

4.10.1 Nature of ethics in business research

Ethics can be described as the standards, norms, values, and conduct that govern a group of people or, in this case, a research study. Wilson (2014) considers ethics in business research from the researcher's perspective and the perspective of the individuals participating in the research study. Greener (2008) suggests that a researcher should foresee moral decisions and challenges that may arise from their research and endeavor to find adequate ethical solutions to them. Protection from harm, objectivity, informed consent, rights and obligations of the researcher, and confidentiality form the basis of ethics in business research (Bryman et al., 2014).

4.10.2 Protection from harm

Researchers should do everything possible to protect research subjects from physical or psychological damage (Zikmund et al., 2008) and ensure their welfare (Wilson, 2014). Psychological harm is defined by Bryman et al. (2014) as harm to a participant's self-esteem or growth, job prospects or future employment, or encouraging individuals to engage in abhorrent behavior. During interviews, participants may reveal sensitive material, necessitating the researcher's discretion in determining the potential repercussions of releasing sensitive information. The researcher must also be protected from physical or psychological danger, especially when dealing with sensitive research topics like child abuse (Wilson, 2014).

The researcher was aware of the ethical principles related to the protection of the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of the participants and the gatekeepers and took care to deploy discretion, sensitivity, and care to protecting any participant and gatekeeper from potential harm.

4.10.3 Informed consent

Participants must give their informed, uncoerced consent to participate in research. Participants should be informed of the research's goals and implications and any considerations that could reasonably be expected to impact their willingness to participate in plain language. It can be difficult to provide complete background information to potential participants without compromising their responses to questions (Bryman et al., 2014). Informed consent necessitates documentation explaining the research's purpose, participants' role in the study, what will happen to the data obtained, and what they agree to. It also specifies how the data will be stored, and privacy will be maintained. If the consent form is in paper copy, the participants must sign it or express their approval by clicking on an agreement button on a digital questionnaire. No undue pressure should be applied to any participant or gatekeeper because this will influence their participation in the study and will be unethical as well as invalidate results (Greener, 2008).

The gatekeepers in the study were the school principals. Informed consent on the prescribed UFS form, provided by the UFS Business School, was obtained from the six gatekeepers to send out the link to the online self-completion or the hard copy for physical distribution. A letter addressed to the respondent explained to the respondent the purpose and main aspects, as well as the contact details of the researcher. Informed consent was also be obtained either digitally on the online platform or in hard copy from parents who agreed to participate in the research study.

4.10.4 Confidentiality and anonymity

The participants' and gatekeepers' right to privacy and confidentiality must be safeguarded. Whether it's a self-completed questionnaire or records from an interview, ethical guidelines recommend that the researcher protect the anonymity of the confidentiality of participants' records (Bryman et al., 2014). Everyone should have the option of remaining anonymous. When a participant or respondent requests anonymity, it means he or she does not want their name revealed. They don't want their names associated with the answers or opinions they supply in the survey, especially if it's a sensitive one. Anonymity may not be a major concern if a large questionnaire-based research method is undertaken (Wilson, 2014). Bryman et al.

(2014) state that the focus of confidentiality is on the data being collected. As a condition of receiving access to conduct research, companies may develop a non-disclosure or confidential agreement that the researcher and/or a university representative must sign. There may be a condition stating that after the study has been written up, the company must be given access to it.

The researcher did not capture the names of the respondents. Thus, anonymity was ensured. Digital receipts of online completed questionnaires were not retrieved and thus the identity and confidentiality of digitally completed questionnaires were ensured.

4.10.5 Honesty and objectivity

Honesty and objectivity are values that should be present in presenting results. **It is not negotiable**. Honesty throughout the research process underpins the researcher's integrity, the institution (University of the Free State), and the research project. The researcher should maintain high standards to ensure that the data is accurate. A test's statistical correctness should be expressed clearly, and the interpretations of the results should not be exaggerated or minimized. Hiding flaws or deviations from standard methods skew the results and cast a shadow over the study (Zikmund et al., 2010).

SECTION 5

4.11 DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

The statical software package SmartPLS version 4.0 was used to test the hypotheses in the conceptual model. SmartPLS is a structural equation modelling programme that is based on variance. This statistical software programme takes the total variance of the indicators into account and utilises it to estimate parameters in the structural model (Hair et al., 2019). The choice of PLS-SEM in this investigation was based on the small sample size. PLS-SEM can provide robust results when small samples are analysed as it computes measurement and structural model relationships separately instead of simultaneously (Hair et al., 2019). In this study, the population size of parents of Grade 12 learners of Grey College, Fichardt Park

Hoërskool, Hoërskool Sentraal, C&N Sekondêre Meisieskool Oranje, Jim Fouche Hoërskool, and Navalsig High School, was n = 1 250.

The use of PLS-SEM to evaluate structural models comprises two steps (Hair et al., 2019): the assessment of the measurement model, followed by the assessment of the structural model. The measurement model in this study is specified as reflective, as the factors in the measurement model exist independently of the items and are not a composite of the items (Coltman, Devinney, Midgley, & Venaik, 2008). Following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2019), item reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were used to assess the reflective measurement model of the conceptual model.

4.11.1 Item reliability

Evidence of item reliability is outer loadings higher than 0.708 and statistically significant (Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). This condition is based on the notion that an outer loading higher than 0.708 indicates that the construct explains more than 50% of the variation in the item. Outer loadings smaller than 0.708 are prevalent in measurement models, according to Hulland (1999). Items with outer loadings greater than 0.4, according to (Hair Jr et al., 2017), can be retrained in the measurement model if they do not threaten the construct measure's internal consistency, reliability, or convergent validity.

4.11.2 Internal consistency reliability

Internal consistency reliability of a construct measure is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and the composite reliability (CR) index. Ideally, the reliability values should be 0.7 or higher. According to Hair et al. (2019), the true reliability of a scale is somewhere between the scale's Cronbach's Alpha and CR values. Cronbach's Alpha is a conservative index of a scale's internal consistency reliability, while the CR value is an overly optimistic internal consistency reliability estimate. Alternatively, researchers can use rhoA (Hair et al., 2019). rhoA lies between Cronbach's Alpha and CR, providing a good compromise between the two indices.

4.11.3 Convergent validity

Convergent validity is the extent to which a construct converges to explain the variance of the items (Hair et al., 2019). The average variance extracted (AVE) of the items measuring a construct is used to assess the construct's convergent validity. The AVE of a construct measure must be higher than 0.5.

4.11.4 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the HTMT ratios of correlations. Evidence of discriminant validity is when the HTMT ratio between two constructs does not exceed 0.85 or 0.9 for conceptually similar constructs (Hair et al., 2019).

4.12 EVALUATION OF STRUCTURAL MODEL

After establishing adequate internal consistency reliability of the construct measures, as well as convergent validity and discriminant validity, the structural model can be tested. The following PLS-SEM results were used to evaluate the structural model (Hair et al., 2019).

4.12.1 Variance inflation factor (VIF)

A VIF close to 3.0 and lower indicates that the correlation between an independent variable influencing the dependent variable is not biasing the results.

4.12.2 R^2 of endogenous constructs

The R^2 shows the in-sample predictive accuracy of the independent variables influencing a dependent variable. R^2 values range from 0 to 1. Values closer to 1 indicate better in-sample predictive accuracy. R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are respectively considered substantial, moderate, and weak in-sample predictive power (Hair et al., 2019).

4.12.3 Path coefficients and p-values

A positive path coefficient indicates a positive relationship between the independent and dependent variables. A negative coefficient indicates that the dependent variable decreases when the independent variable increases. PLS-SEM uses to generate the t-statistic, p-value (two-tailed), and the confidence interval for each path coefficient. The percentile bootstrapping procedure was used in this study to calculate t-statistics, p-values (two-tailed) and 95% bootstrap confidence intervals and 5 000 subsamples were used (Hair Jr et al., 2017). The path coefficients' statistical significance was determined at $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed).

4.12.4. Ad hoc analysis

A mediation analysis was additionally conducted to complement the main effects analysis. PLS-SEM mediation analysis requires determining each indirect effect's statistical significance and the direct effect's statistical significance using the bootstrapping procedure and 95% percentile confidence intervals (Matthews, Hair, & Matthews, 2018). When the direct effect is not statistically significant when the mediating variable is included, but the indirect effect is, full mediation can be reported. When the direct impact is statistically significant after including the mediator and the indirect effect is statistically significant, partial mediation is reported.

4.13 CONCLUSION: CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 explained the research theory, research design, research methodology, sampling approach, research study strategy, data collection, ethical considerations, data analysis plan, and the assessment of the structural model required to achieve the primary objective of the intended study. Chapter 5 will follow and will highlight the data derived from the collected data.

Data analysis

Chapter 5

MBRP 7900

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 described in the research theory, research methodology, sampling, research study strategy, time horizon, data collection, research ethics, data analysis plan, and the assessment of the structural model. Chapter 5 addresses the data analysis.

The General/Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State approved the research study amongst parents of Grade 12 learners in Bloemfontein, with reference number: UFS-HSD 2022/1060/22. The data collection process started by requesting all school principals of high schools in Bloemfontein to distribute the self-completion questionnaire to the parents of their respective Grade 12 learners. Six school principals of high schools in Bloemfontein agreed to act as gatekeepers to distribute either the link to the online self-completion questionnaire or the hard copy self-completion questionnaire to the Grade 12 parents. A convenience sampling strategy was applied. The population size of the six high schools who agreed to disseminate the self-completion questionnaire totals to 1 250. Refer to Appendix A for the self-completion questionnaire.

5.2 COLLECTED DATA

Four high schools in Bloemfontein distributed the link to the online self-completion questionnaire to the Grade 12 parents of their respective databases. The Evasys Online Survey System was used to collect the data from the four schools. These schools were Grey College Secondary School, Fichardtpark Hoërskool, Sentraal Hoërskool, and Sekondêre Meisieskool Oranje. Two high schools in Bloemfontein, Jim Fouché Hoërskool, and Navalsig High School distributed the hard copy self-completion questionnaire to the Grade 12 parents. Each respondent provided voluntary consent to participate in the study. The data was collected over a four-week period and allowed parents to participate and complete the questionnaire at a convenient time.

5.2.1 Frequency tables

190 Responses were received and the statistical analyses that follow are based on the responses with clean, valid, and usable data, which total 163 responses *(n)*. 27 Responses contained insufficient and or invalid data and were excluded from the statistical analysis.

The self-completion questionnaire consisted of three sections, which were (A) screening questions, (B) background questions, and (C) beliefs on the corporate reputation of a HEI.

5.2.1.1 Section A: Screening questions

Four screening questions were asked in Section A of the self-completion questionnaire. The first question established the Grade 12 status of the parents. All the 163 respondents (100%) of the clean, valid, and usable data indicated that they are parents of a Grade 12 learner. The second screening question established the school in which the Grade 12 learner currently is. Table 5.1 provides a breakdown of the distribution of respondents per high school:

Table 5.1: Breakdown of respondents per high school

Coding	High School	N	%
1	Grey College Secondary School	19	11.7%
2	Hoërskool Fichardtpark	17	10.4%
3	Hoërskool Sentraal	6	3.7%
4	Jim Fouché Hoërskool	38	23.3%
5	Navalsig High School	76	46.6%
6	Sekondêre Meisieskool Oranje	7	4.3%

As indicated in Table 5.1, parents from Navalsig High School were the highest number of respondents constituting 46.6 % of the sample, followed by Jim Fouché Hoërskool with 23.3%, Grey College Secondary School with 11.7%, and Hoërskool Fichardtpark with 10.4%. Parents from Hoërskool Sentraal and Sekondêre Meisieskool Oranje denoted the two lowest number of responses with 3.7% and 4.3% respectively.

The third screening question established whether the Grade 12 learner considered post-school studies at a HEI. All the respondents of the clean, valid, and usable data, n = 163, indicated that their child considered post-school studies at a HEI. The fourth screening question determined if the Grade 12 learner applied for undergraduate studies at a HEI to which the total sample of the clean, valid, and usable data n = 163 respondents indicated yes.

5.2.1.2 Section B: Background questions

Five background questions were asked, which established the demographic profile of the sample. The first background question determined the age distribution of the sample as indicated in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Age distribution of sample

Coding	AGE	N	%
1	35 – 39 years	13	8.0 %
2	40 – 45 years	38	23.3%
3	46 – 50 years	52	31.9%
4	51 – 55 years	43	26.4%
5	56 – 60 years	10	6.1%
6	61+ years	7	4.3%

As seen in Table 5.2, the most respondents were in the age range of 46 – 50 years totaling 52 respondents or 31.9% of the sample. The second highest number of respondents (n = 43) indicated they are in the age range of 51 – 55 years, while the 40 – 45 years age group denoted n = 38 or 23.3% of the total sample. The remaining three age groups, which are 35 – 39 years, 56 – 60 years, and 61+ indicated the lowest number of responses of 13 or 8 %, 10 or 6.1%, and 7 or 4.3% respectively.

The second background question related to the gender distribution of the sample. The female respondents were the majority with n = 117 or 71.8%. The male respondents and the category of parents who preferred not to indicate the gender denoted 45 or 27.6 % and 1 or 0.6% respectively.

To determine the home language profile of the respondents, all nine official languages of South Africa and an option to specify other language were listed from which the respondents could choose. Table 5.3 provides the distribution of the home language.

Table 5.3: Home language distribution of sample

Coding	HOME LANGUAGE	N	%
1	Afrikaans	86	52.8%
2	English	1	0.6%
3	isiNdebele	0	0%
4	isiSwati	0	0%
5	isiXhosa	13	8%
6	isiZulu	0	0%
7	Sesotho	50	30.7%
8	Tshitsonga	1	0.6%
9	Tshivenda	0	0%
10	Other	11	6.7%
	Did not answer	1	0.6%

Referring to Table 5.3, the majority of the respondents, n = 86 or 52.8% was Afrikaans speaking, followed by Sesotho speaking respondents, n = 50 or 30.7%. isiXhosa denotes the third highest home language with n = 13 or 8%. English and Tshitsonga represented only one respondent or 0.6% respectively of the sample. 11 respondents indicated that they had a home language which was not included in the table.

The fourth background question ascertained the highest level of educational qualification, and the results are depicted below in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4: Distribution of highest levels of education of sample

Coding	HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION	N	%
1	Attended school, but did not complete matric / Grade 12	17	10.4%
2	Matric / Grade 12	62	38%
3	Post high school certificate	12	7.4%
4	Post high school diploma	27	16.6%
5	Bachelor’s degree	36	22.1%
6	Postgraduate degree	9	5.5%

As indicated in Table 5.4, the highest level of education falls in the matric / Grade 12 qualification with n = 62 or 38%. The second highest level of education is represented by a bachelor’s degree with 22.1% or n = 36, followed by a post high school diploma with 16.6% or n = 27. 10.4% of the respondents did not complete matric / Grade 12, while 7.4% has a post high school certificate. From the sample, only 9 respondents or 5.5 % hold a postgraduate degree.

The final question established the employment status of the sample. Table 5.5 depicts the employment status distribution as follows:

Table 5.5: Employment distribution of sample

Coding	EMPLOYMENT STATUS	N	%
1	Unemployed	39	23.9%
2	Employed	124	76.1%
3	Retired	0	0%
4	Other	0	0%

As per Table 5.5, the majority of the respondents, n = 124 or 76.1% of the respondents were employed, while n = 39 or 23.9% were unemployed at the time of completing the questionnaire.

5.2.1.3 Section C: Beliefs on the corporate reputation of a HEI

Section C of the self-completion questionnaire determined the agreement or disagreement with the statements However, to align a value with each statement, the respondent had to reflect on the engagements and interactions with the HEI his/her Grade 12 child applied to or planned to apply to for undergraduate studies. In the statements that followed, corporate reputation referred to the HEI that the respondent selected for the Grade 12 child's post-school studies. Table 5.6 provides the distribution of the HEIs that the respondents selected.

Table 5.6: Distribution of selected HEIs

Coding	HEI	N	%
1	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	3	1.8%
2	Central University of Technology, Free State	40	24.5%
3	Durban Institute of Technology	0	0%
4	Mangosuthu University of Technology	0	0%
5	National Institute for Higher Education, Northern Cape	0	0%
6	National Institute for Higher Education, Mpumalanga	0	0%
7	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	2	1.2%
8	Northwest University	15	9.2%
9	Rhodes University	0	0%
10	Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University	0	0%

11	Sol Plaatje University, Northern Cape	0	0%
12	Tshwane University of Technology	1	0.6%
13	University of Cape Town	8	4.9%
14	University of Fort Hare	1	0.6%
15	University of the Free State	77	47.2%
16	University of Johannesburg	8	4.9%
17	University of KwaZulu-Natal	0	0%
18	University of Limpopo	0	0%
19	University of Mpumalanga	0	0%
20	University of Pretoria	2	1.2%
21	University of South Africa	1	0.6%
22	University of Stellenbosch	5	3.1%
23	University of Venda	0	0%
24	University of the Western Cape	0	0%
25	University of the Witwatersrand	0	0%
26	University of Zululand	0	0%
27	Vaal University of Technology	0	0%
28	Walter Sisulu University	0	0%
29	Other	0	0%

As per Table 5.6, n = 77 or 47.2% of the respondents selected the University of the Free State as the preferred HEI for their Grade 12 child to attend. The second highest preferred HEI was Central University of Technology, Free State with 24.5% or n = 40. Northwest University denotes the third place with n = 15 or 9.2%, while University of Stellenbosch denotes the fourth highest response with n = 6 or 3.1%.

A seven-point Likert scale was applied to test the statements related to the constructs of the conceptual model and the respective hypotheses, which were identified in Chapter 3. The following conventions were applied to each statement:

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = somewhat disagree; 4 = neutral (neither agree nor disagree); 5 = somewhat agree; 6 = agree; 7 = strongly agree. Table 5.7 indicates the constructs and the number of statements which were posed to the participants:

Table 5.7: Constructs and number of statements per construct

CONSTRUCT	ACRONYM AND NUMBER OF STATEMENTS					
Experience of Service (ES)	ES1	ES2	ES3	ES4		
Information from others (IO)	IO1	IO2	IO3	IO4		
Information from the media (IM)	IM1	IM2	IM3			
Corporate reputation (CR)	CR1	CR2	CR3	CR4	CR5	CR6

CONSTRUCT	ACRONYM AND NUMBER OF STATEMENTS						
Trust (TR)	TR1	TR2	TR3	TR4			
Identification (ID)	ID1	ID2	ID3				
Commitment (CO)	CO1	CO2	CO3	CO4			
Word-of-mouth intention (IWM)	IWM1	IWM2	IWM3	IWM4	IWM5	IWM6	IWM7
Supportive intentions (SI)	SI1	SI2	SI3	SI4	SI5	SI6	

Refer to Appendix A for the detailed self-completion questionnaire. The hypotheses, as determined in Chapter 3, are:

H1: There is a positive relationship between experience of service and corporate reputation.
H2: There is a positive relationship between information from others and corporate reputation.
H3: There is a positive relationship between information gathered from the media sources and corporate reputation.
H4: There is a positive relationship between corporate reputation and trust.
H5: There is a positive relationship between corporate reputation and identification.
H6: There is a positive relationship between trust and commitment.
H7: There is a positive relationship between identification and commitment.
H8: There is a positive relationship between commitment and word-of-mouth intention.
H9: There is a positive relationship between commitment and supportive intention.
H10: There is a positive relationship between corporate reputation and word-of-mouth intention.
H11: There is a positive relationship between corporate reputation and supportive intention.

5.3 ASSESSMENT OF THE MEASUREMENT MODEL

The initial assessment of the measurement model yielded acceptable item reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity. However, the measurement model did not support discriminant validity based on the HTMT ratios of correlations. The HTMT ratio between corporate reputation and information from media was 0.871. The ratio between corporate reputation and trust was also higher than 0.9, it was 0.916. Of the remaining estimated HTMT ratios, five of the ratios were between 0.85 and 0.9. Based on the conceptual similarity between certain constructs, HTMT ratios less than 0.9 were deemed adequate evidence of discriminant validity.

To lower the HTMT ratio between corporate reputation and information from media, and corporate reputation and trust, correlations between the items measuring corporate reputation, information from the media and trust were inspected. Calculation of the average correlations between the items measuring corporate reputation and trust showed that CR2, CR5 and CR6 had the highest average correlation with the measures of trust (the average correlations ranged from 0.693 to 0.689). All three items were excluded from the measurement model to reduce the HTMT ratio between corporate reputation and trust to lower than 0.9. This modification to the measurement model also resulted that the ratio between corporate reputation and information from the media was less than 0.9.

The results of the measurement model assessment are provided in Table 5.8 and Table 5.9. The results in Table 5.8 show that most of the outer loadings were higher than 0.708 and statistically significant, except the outer loading of ID1 and ID3 (0.616 and 0.571, respectively). The two outer loadings were statistically significant. Therefore, considering that most of the outer loadings met the criterion of item reliability, and that outer loadings less than 0.708 are typical in measurement model results, it was concluded that the measurement model showed adequate item reliability. The measurement model also showed suitable internal reliability consistency based on rhoA and the CR values for each construct. The AVE of each construct also exceeded 0.5, which is evidence of sufficient convergent validity. The discriminant validity results in table 5.9 show that the HTMT ratios between the constructs were less than 0.9. Based on the results of Table 5.8 and Table 5.9, it was decided to proceed with testing the hypotheses.

Table 5.8: Measurement model results

	Item	Outer loading	t-statistic	p-value (two-tailed)	Cronbach's alpha	rhoA	CR	AVE
Commitment	CO1	0.898	43.927	0.000	0.919	0.919	0.943	0.806
	CO2	0.874	24.279	0.000				
	CO3	0.933	70.713	0.000				
	CO4	0.884	30.459	0.000				
Corporate Reputation	CR1	0.901	50.402	0.000	0.874	0.874	0.923	0.799
	CR3	0.884	32.053	0.000				
	CR4	0.896	41.201	0.000				
Experience of Service	ES1	0.902	38.839	0.000	0.907	0.923	0.934	0.780
	ES2	0.864	24.079	0.000				
	ES3	0.895	47.396	0.000				
	ES4	0.870	39.134	0.000				
Identification	ID1	0.616	6.742	0.000	0.571	0.796	0.748	0.509
	ID2	0.906	37.889	0.000				
	ID3	0.571	5.261	0.000				
Information from media	IM1	0.889	42.795	0.000	0.863	0.864	0.916	0.785
	IM2	0.887	34.214	0.000				
	IM3	0.882	41.195	0.000				
Information from others	IO1	0.842	22.345	0.000	0.852	0.855	0.900	0.693
	IO2	0.842	26.716	0.000				
	IO3	0.788	19.888	0.000				
	IO4	0.856	35.576	0.000				
Intentional word-of-mouth	IWM3	0.826	30.345	0.000	0.895	0.900	0.923	0.705
	IWM4	0.862	33.057	0.000				
	IWM5	0.868	44.106	0.000				
	IWM6	0.796	21.473	0.000				
	IWM7	0.844	33.681	0.000				
Supportive intention	SI1	0.86	25.834	0.000	0.885	0.888	0.921	0.744
	SI2	0.918	58.586	0.000				
	SI3	0.824	22.08	0.000				
	SI4	0.845	21.585	0.000				
Trust	TR1	0.926	68.501	0.000	0.942	0.943	0.958	0.852
	TR2	0.93	76.256	0.000				
	TR3	0.923	61.783	0.000				
	TR4	0.914	57.433	0.000				

Table 5.9: HTMT Results

	CO	CR	ES	ID	IM	IO	IWM	SI
CR	0.737							
ES	0.337	0.506						
ID	0.801	0.545	0.399					
IM	0.630	0.871	0.548	0.600				
IO	0.579	0.825	0.547	0.515	0.896			
IWM	0.744	0.714	0.447	0.679	0.576	0.513		
SI	0.872	0.735	0.360	0.765	0.619	0.550	0.857	
TR	0.697	0.891	0.546	0.582	0.863	0.843	0.695	0.703

5.4 ASSESSMENT OF THE STRUCTURAL MODEL

Following the analysis plan in the previous chapter, the VIFs were evaluated. The highest VIF was for the influence of information from the media on corporate reputation (2.587). Thus, all VIFs were below the ideal cut-off of 3.0.

The three factors hypothesised to influence corporate reputation explained 61.9% of the variance in corporate reputation. Thus, these three factors provide substantial in-sample predictive power of corporate reputation. Likewise, corporate reputation explained substantial in-sample predictive power of trust (R^2 = 65.5%). However, corporate reputation provided weak in-sample predictive power of identification (R^2 = 24.4%). The in-sample predictive power of trust and identification on commitment was substantial (R^2 = 55.6%). Lastly, commitment also provided moderate and substantial in-sample predictive power of WOM intention and supportive intention (R^2 = 46.2% and R^2 = 61.9%, respectively).

The results of the hypothesis testing are as follows:

- The influence of service experience on corporate reputation was not statistically significant (p = 0.159). Therefore, H1 was not accepted.
- The influence of information from others on corporate reputation was positive and statistically significant (ß = 0.302; p = 0.003). Thus, H2 was accepted.
- The influence of information from media on corporate reputation was positive and statistically significant (ß = 0.488; p = 0.000). Therefore, H3 was accepted.

- The influence of corporate reputation on trust was positive and statistically significant (ß = 0.809; p = 0.000). H4 was also accepted.
- The influence of corporate reputation on identification was positive and statistically significant (ß = 0.495; p = 0.000). Thus, H5 was accepted.
- The influence of trust on commitment was positive and statistically significant (ß = 0.414; p = 0.000). Thus, H6 was accepted.
- The influence of identification on commitment was positive and statistically significant (ß = 0.435; p = 0.000). Therefore, H7 was accepted.
- The influence of commitment on word-of-mouth intention was positive and statistically significant (ß = 0.447; p = 0.000). H8 was accepted.
- The influence of commitment on supportive intention was positive and statistically significant (ß = 0.638; p = 0.000). Therefore, H9 was accepted.
- The influence of corporate reputation on word-of-mouth intention was positive and statistically significant (ß = 0.354; p = 0.000). H10 was accepted.
- The influence of corporate reputation on supportive intention was positive and statistically significant (ß = 0.224; p = 0.004). Therefore, H11 was accepted.

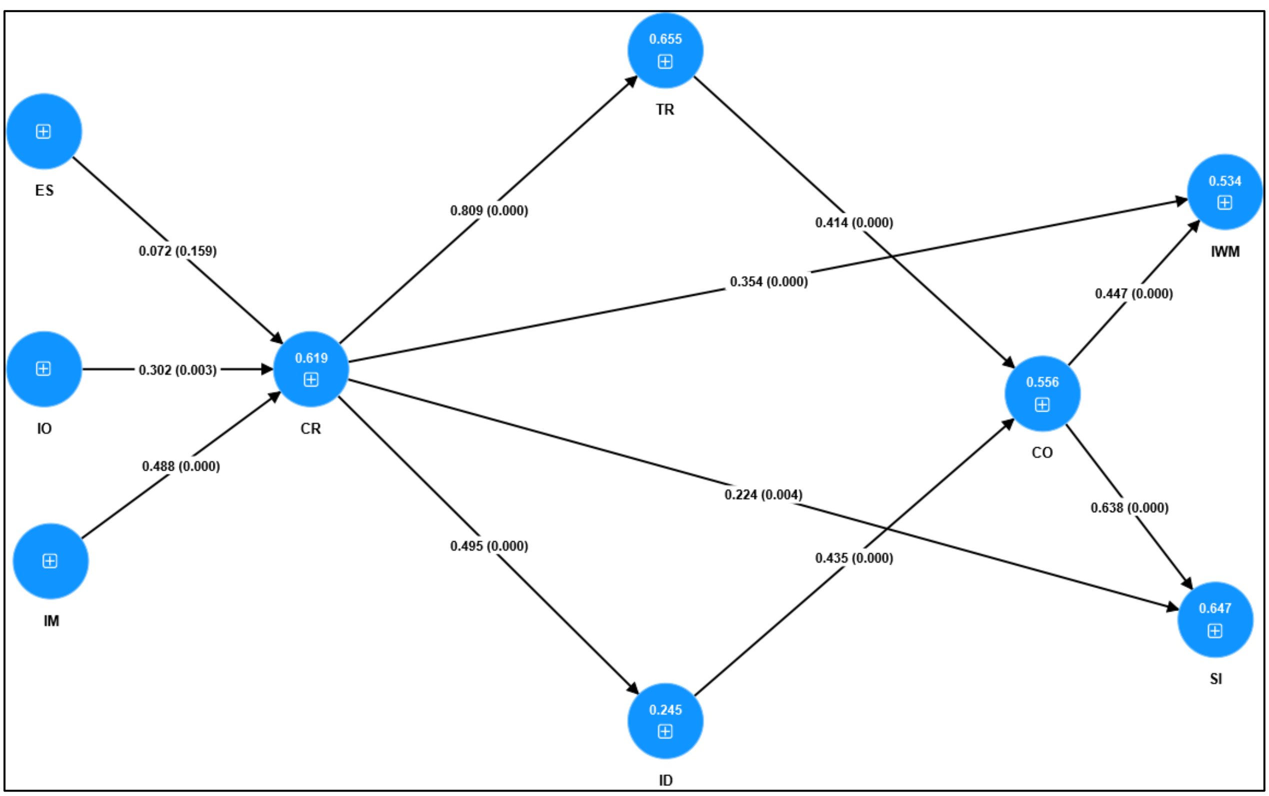

Figure 5.1: Assessment of the structural model.

5.5 AD HOC ANALYSIS

In addition to the main effects presented in the previous section, the indirect influence of corporate reputation on word-of-mouth intention and the supportive intention was also tested. The results in Table 5.11 show that corporate reputation's direct influence on word-of-mouth intention is statistically significant. The indirect influence of corporate reputation on word-of-mouth intention through trust and commitment (ß = 0.150; p = 0.000), and through identification and commitment (ß = 0.096; p = 0.000), was statistically significant. Therefore, the conclusion is that trust and commitment, and identification and commitment, partially mediate the influence of corporate reputation on word-of-mouth intention.

The results in Table 5.10 show that the influence of corporate reputation on supportive intention is also partially mediated by trust influencing commitment, and identification influencing commitment. The direct effect of corporate reputation on supportive intention was 0.224 (p = 0.000). The indirect effect via trust and commitment was 0.214 (p = 0.000). The indirect effect through identification and commitment was also statistically significant (ß = 0.137; p = 0.000).

Table 5.10: Results of the testing of the indirect effects

RELATIONSHIP	EFFECT	p-value (two-tailed)	2.50%	97.50%
CR -> IWM (total effect)	0.600	0.000	0.475	0.715
CR -> IWM (direct effect)	0.354	0.000	0.174	0.524
CR -> TR -> CO -> IWM	0.150	0.000	0.083	0.232
CR -> ID -> CO -> IWM	0.096	0.000	0.056	0.148
CR -> SI (total effect)	0.576	0.000	0.509	0.764
CR -> SI (direct effect)	0.224	0.004	0.074	0.377
CR -> TR -> CO -> SI	0.214	0.000	0.135	0.298
CR -> ID -> CO -> SI	0.137	0.000	0.089	0.200

Note: The abbreviations indicated in the table are as follows:

CR: Corporate Reputation; IWM: Word-of-mouth intention; TR: Trust; CO: Commitment; ID: Identification; SI: Supportive intention

5.6 CONCLUSION: CHAPTER 5

The data analysis was conducted as planned in Chapter 4. The empirical research found that from the eleven hypotheses, only one hypothesis, i.e., the positive relationship between corporate reputation and experience of service of a HEI from a parental perspective, was not statistically significant. For the field study, a conceptual model from a parental perspective was developed that suggested that corporate reputation of a HEI is influenced by three antecedents, which are experience of service, information from others, and information from the media. The conceptual model suggested that trust, identification, commitment, word-of-mouth intention, and supportive intention are consequences based on the parental perspective of corporate reputation of a HEI.

Chapter 6 will discuss the findings, conclusions, and offer recommendations for HEIs managerial interventions to manage corporate reputation with specific focus on parents of Grade 12 learners. Chapter 6 and the field study will thereafter be concluded.

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Findings, conclusions, and recommendations

Chapter 6

MBRP 7900

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 introduced the background of the field study and identified the primary and secondary objectives that directed the study. Thereafter the research methodology was briefly. The field study aimed to identify the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education from a parental perspective. Chapter 2 provided a review of the literature on how parents regard corporate reputation of HEIs, while also addressing the drivers, risks, antecedents, and consequences thereof. Chapter 3 offered a discussion on the theoretical framework on which the field study was based and introduced eleven hypotheses and a conceptual model. Chapter 4 provided a discussion on the research theory, research methodology, sampling approach, research study strategy, time horizon, data collection, the data analysis plan, and the assessment of the structural model. Following the data analysis plan described towards the end of Chapter 4, Chapter 5 provided the results of the data analysis.

Chapter 6 will discuss the findings and conclusions drawn from the field study's data analysis, and recommendations for HEIs' management teams to effectively manage corporate reputation to improve the parental perspective. The chapter and the field study will be concluded at the end.

6.2 HYPOTHESES FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Paragraph 5.6 alluded to the assessment of the structural model and provided results of the hypotheses testing following the empirical study. The results of the eleven hypotheses or discussed as follows.

6.2.1 The influence of service experience on corporate reputation (H1)

The results of the structural model assessment showed that service experience does not influence corporate reputation ($p = 0.159$). Therefore, H1 was rejected.

Conclusion: The conclusion is that corporate reputation is not influenced by service experience in the relationship between a HEI and a parent.

6.2.2 The influence of information from others on corporate reputation (H2)

The influence of information from others on corporate invitation was positive and statistically significant (ß = 0.302; p = 0.003). Therefore, H2 was accepted.

Conclusion: The information that parents receive from other individuals could enhance or lower their corporate reputation perceptions of a university.

6.2.3 The influence of information from media on corporate reputation (H3)

The p-value (two-tailed) = 0.000 and ß = 0.488. Therefore, the influence of information from the media on corporate reputation was positive and statistically significant.

Conclusion: There is a positive relationship between information from the media and corporate reputation of a HEI from a parental perspective, therefore, H3 was accepted.

6.2.4 The influence of corporate reputation on trust (H4)

The influence of corporate reputation on trust was positive and statistically significant as ß = 0.809 and p-value (two-tailed) = 0.000.

Conclusion: There is a positive relationship between corporate reputation of a HEI and trust from a parental perspective, therefore, H4 was accepted.

6.2.5 The influence of corporate reputation on identification (H5)

The influence of corporate reputation on identification was positive and statistically significant as ß = 0.495 and the p-value (two-tailed) = 0.000.

Conclusion: There is a positive relationship between corporate reputation of a HEI and identification from a parental perspective, therefore, H5 was accepted.

6.2.6 The influence of trust on commitment (H6)

The influence of trust on commitment was positive and statistically significant as ß = 0.414 and the p-value (two-tailed) = 0.000.

Conclusion: There is a positive relationship between trust in a HEI and commitment to a HEI from a parental perspective, therefore, H6 was accepted.

6.2.7 The influence of identification on commitment (H7)

The influence of identification on commitment was positive and statistically significant as ß = 0.435 and the p-value (two-tailed) = 0.000.

Conclusion: There is a positive relationship between identification with a HEI and commitment to a HEI from a parental perspective, therefore, H7 was accepted.

6.2.8 The influence of commitment on word-of-mouth intention (H8)

The influence of commitment on word-of-mouth intention was positive and statistically significant as the ß = 0.447 and the p-value (two-tailed) = 0.000.

Conclusion: There is a positive relationship between commitment to a HEI and word-of-mouth intention from a parental perspective, therefore, H8 was accepted.

6.2.9 The influence of commitment on supportive intention (H9)

The influence of commitment on supportive intention was positive and statistically significant as ß = 0.638 and the p-value (two-tailed) = 0.000.

Conclusion: There is a positive relationship between commitment to a HEI and supportive intention from a parental perspective, therefore, H9 was accepted.

6.2.10 The influence of corporate reputation on word-of-mouth intention (H10)

The influence of corporate reputation on word-of-mouth intention was positive and statistically significant since the ß = 0.354 and the p-value (two-tailed) = 0.000.

Conclusion: There is a positive relationship between corporate reputation and word-of-mouth intention, therefore, H10 was accepted.

6.2.11 The influence of corporate reputation on supportive intention (H10)

The influence of corporate reputation on supportive intention was positive and statistically significant since the ß = 0.224 and the p-value (two-tailed) = 0.004.

Conclusion: There is a positive relationship between corporate reputation supportive intention, therefore, H10 was accepted.

6.3 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The findings of the field study support some prior studies on corporate reputation in higher education.

6.3.1 Antecedents of corporate reputation

The statistical insignificance of the influence of **experience of service** on parental perspectives of corporate reputation was understandable. Parents have not yet experienced the full suite of services offered by a HEI and was exposed to only the initial phase of a relationship i.e., application phase. The study did not focus on further downstream processes such as admission and enrolment, which is an opportunity for future studies to identify the influence of service experience on corporate reputation. The positive and statistical influence of **information from others** on parents' perspective of a HEI's corporate reputation supports the study findings of Plewa et al. (2016). Both studies found that HEI's corporate reputation in the community, whether the HEI is well-respected, positive feedback from other about a HEI, and the prestige of a HEI are important for parents to form a perception on a HEI's corporate reputation. The positive and significant statistical influence of **information from the media** on parents' perspectives of a HEI's corporate reputation supports the study of Narteh and Braimah (2017).

6.3.2 Consequences of corporate reputation

The field study found **trust** is a consequence of corporate reputation. The findings correlate with a study by Walsh and Beatty (2007). Parents are more likely to trust a HEI if they trust a HEI, have confidence in a HEI, and if the HEI's behavior reflects integrity and reliability.

The study by Keh and Xie (2009) highlighted the willingness of customers to **identify** with a reputable company. The findings of the field study correlate with the findings of the previous study. However, interestingly parents regarded identification with a HEI as a consequence of corporate reputation not as important as trust in a HEI as a consequence of corporate reputation. This specific finding offers an opportunity to future studies to investigate factors related to parental identification with a HEI as a consequence of corporate reputation.

The field study’s findings were also consistent with the findings in the study by Nguyen et al. (2016) about **commitment** as a consequence of corporate reputation. The study highlighted the relationship between trust and identification and word-of-mouth intention and supportive intention. The field study’s findings on the influence of parents’ commitment to a HEI on behavioral intentions, was consistent with a study by Teo and Soutar (2011), which studied **word-of-mouth intention** and a study by Lee et al. (2008), which studied **supportive intention**.

The indirect effects of corporate reputation on word-of-mouth intention, supportive intention via trust and commitment offer valuable insights into the role that corporate reputation plays in the formation of trust, which leads to commitment, and to word-of-mouth intention, and supportive intentions.

To create a novel conceptualisation and empirical validation of parental perspectives of the antecedents and consequences that may result in high levels of HEI corporate reputation, this field study contributes to the body of existing literature. The field study provides valuable insights on the relationship between the corporate reputation and parents of prospective students as a key stakeholder of any HEI.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGERIAL INTERVENTIONS

Based on the findings obtained through the field study, the following managerial interventions are recommended to improve the corporate reputation of a HEI amongst parents of Grade 12 learners.

6.4.1 Identify and operationalise functional reputation drivers

HEI management teams need to understand that corporate reputation management requires resources and a strategic approach with a long-term view. It is therefore recommended that all academic and support functions identify and operationalise reputation drivers within their respective contexts that will result in elevated levels of trust, commitment, word-of-mouth, and supportive intentions. In addition, HEI management teams need to identify mechanisms to mitigate potential reputational risks from the external and internal environments to acceptable levels.

6.4.2 Form parent reference groups

The influence of information from others or the informal social networks that consist of friends and family on corporate reputation is statistically significant. To enhance the influence of information obtained from informal social networks, HEIs will benefit from the formation of reference groups consisting of parents of Grade 12 learners representing the different Quintile school classification system in South Africa, international schools, as well as private schools. Deepak and Jeyakumar (2019: 13) define a reference as:

> A reference group includes individuals or groups that influence our opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. They often serve as role models and inspiration. Marketers view reference groups as important because they influence how customers interpret information and make purchasing decisions. Reference groups influence what types of products you will purchase and which brand of product you choose.

Reference groups consisting of parents of Grade 12 learners will benefit a HEI by influencing other parents positively to choose a specific HEI. In view of student movement across boundaries, it would be beneficial to also form a reference group per country that shows student recruitment potential. Reference groups will provide a credible platform for sharing information amongst parents that will influence the corporate reputation of a HEI. In addition, a reference group of parents offers a reciprocal relationship as it is the voice of an important stakeholder for any HEI, and it is worthwhile to listen to feedback from a reference group.

6.4.3 Leverage the media

Information obtained from the media significantly influenced the parental perspective on corporate reputation of the HEI. Indeed, the results of this study showed that information from the media is a stronger predictor of corporate reputation than information from others. Therefore, HEIs should leverage the media to create a unique corporate reputation. Regular media briefings, and press releases, and constant profiling of academic quality amongst research and staff, are recommended to strengthen the relationships with the media in to create endorsement and positive reviews that the prospective parents of first-year students will consume and will form a positive perception of the HEI of interest.

6.4.4 Establish a parent-focussed programme

The influence of corporate reputation on trust and identification was strong. HEIs will yield increased trust and identification that amplify the core perspectives into commitment if they focus resources towards a carefully crafted parent-focussed programme.

It is recommended that such a programme includes amongst others, a tool to prepare parents for the transition from school to university, a parent satisfaction survey, establish a partnership relationship between the HEI and the parent, and develop a broad-spectrum parent support mechanism to build trust. Furthermore, it is recommended that HEIs implement specific virtual engagements to address concerns, issues, questions that parents might have. The virtual engagements should be scheduled at a convenient time for parents to attend. In addition, parent open days and campus tours to residences, lecture halls, faculties, gardens, and social spaces to showcase campus facilities to parents.

Pugsley and Coffey (2002) state that parents are concerned for the safety of their children on campus. Therefore, it is recommended that HEIs management teams should promote campus safety directly to parents through communication, advertisements, campus tours, and an institutional narrative on safety measures and improvements promoted in the traditional and social media.

In addition, it is recommended that HEIs invest in attracting qualified and excellence-orientated academic and support staff to improve corporate reputation through academic and business credibility. The implementation of the above recommendations for a parent-focussed programme will influence parents’ identification and trust that are carried over to commitment.

The study also proved that the indirect effect of corporate reputation on the word-of-mouth intention and supportive intentions through the trust and commitment constructs was significantly higher than the indirect effect of corporate reputation through the constructs of identification with and commitment to a HEI. Therefore, it is recommended that HEI management teams consider targeted and contextualised marketing tactics to enhance trust, identification, and commitment. One such tactic addresses financial transparency and wellness co-creation for the child. Upfront and detailed information on tuition fees, accommodation fees, book costs, costs of living, campus levies, and transportation would assist the parent to prepare financially for the duration of tertiary studies, which will translate into trust and commitment.

6.4.5 Strengthen identification with HEIs

The influence of corporate reputation on identification was positive and statistically significant. It is essential for HEI management teams to understand the effect of identification with a HEI on the parents' commitment, word-of-mouth intention, and supportive intentions. Therefore, it is recommended that HEI management teams craft a differentiating narrative to promote the values, ethos, and culture of the HEI with which the parents identify. In addition, the use of prominent alumni to publicly endorse the HEI on traditional and digital platforms will elevate the prestige of a HEI and provide validation for parents to identify with a HEI. In addition, specific wellness programmes and student-centred support programmes will instil identification with a HEI and offer peace of mind for parents that the HEI is a partner in the emotional and physical wellbeing of their child, which will translate into commitment. A HEI demonstrates the promise of care and support in a tangible way, which will yield positive parental perspective on the HEI's corporate reputation.

Trust and identification both positively and statistically influence commitment. Competitiveness amongst HEIs was highlighted in Chapter 2. Parents gather information from external stimuli to form a perception of a HEI's corporate reputation and compare it against the corporate reputation of other HEIs. Therefore, it is recommended that HEI management teams focus on promotional campaigns to secure parental commitment, identification, and commitment to select and maintain a relationship with a HEI for post-school studies for their Grade 12 child.

6.4.6 Corporate reputation capital value chain

The hypotheses testing showed that the significant influence that corporate reputation has on the parents' formation of trust, identification, commitment, word-of-mouth intention, and supportive intention. As per the final element of the S-O-R Theory, which formed the theoretical basis of the study, word-of-mouth intention and supportive intentions represent the responses (R) of parents' behavior.

As indicated in Chapter 2, corporate reputation is built through all levels of a HEI and at all touchpoints during the parents' journey to search for and select a HEI that is suitable for their Grade 12 child's post-school education. For effective corporate reputation management, it is recommended that HEI management teams prioritise:

- Training programmes for academic and support staff to step up parental care and support.
- Deploy social listening technologies to address feedback of parents on digital platforms.
- Engage with parents to influence the sharing of information in the informal social networks.
- Set up specific management structures to strategically craft, review, maintain, and measure its corporate reputation.
- Acknowledge and incentivise parents' intentions and actions to show support.

6.5 ACHIEVEMENT OF FIELD STUDY OBJECTIVES

The primary and secondary objectives were described in Chapter 1 and are presented in Table 6.1:

Table 6.1: Evidence of the achievement of field study objectives

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE	**EVIDENCE**
To identify the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in the higher education context from a parental perspective.	Chapter 2 identified the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation from the reviewed literature, which the field study aimed to empirically research.
SECONDARY OBJECTIVES	**EVIDENCE**

To identify from literature the antecedents of corporate reputation of tertiary institutions of higher education	As discussed in Chapter 2, the following antecedents of corporate reputation of tertiary institutions in higher education from a parental perspective were identified from the literature: • Service experience • Information from the media, and • Information from others
To identify from literature the consequences of corporate reputation of tertiary institutions in higher education	As discussed in Chapter 2, the following consequences of corporate reputation of tertiary institutions in higher education from a parental perspective were identified from the literature: • Trust • Identification • Commitment • Word-of-mouth intention • Supportive intention
To determine the extent which corporate reputation influences parents in selecting a HEI	Chapter 6 provided the findings on the extent which corporate reputation influences parents in selecting a HEI.
To develop a conceptual model on the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in the higher education environment	Chapter 3 provided the theoretical framework which led to the development of a conceptual model on the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in the higher education environment from a parental perspective.
To empirically test the conceptual model	Chapter 4 provided the research methodology and planned data analysis to test the conceptual model. Chapter 5

	illustrated the quantitative data collection and statistical analysis to test the hypothesized model, which included eleven hypotheses. Except for H1, all the other hypotheses were accepted.
To recommend interventions, based on the research results, the HEIs can introduce to improve corporate reputation amongst parents of Grade 12 learners.	Chapter 6 concludes the study with an analysis of the findings, recommendations for managerial interventions to improve corporate reputation amongst Grade 12 parents.

As indicated in Table 6.1, the field study was able to identify the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education from a parental perspective.

6.6 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The geographical demarcation of the study is limited to the Grade 12 parents of high or secondary schools in Bloemfontein, Free State Province, South Africa and is a sample representing HEIs in South Africa. The perceptions of parents of Grade 12 learners in high or secondary schools in rural areas have not been included in the field study. Possible limitations of the study which offer future research opportunities is the geographical and population boundary of Bloemfontein parents and the generalisation of the findings to all universities, universities of technology, parent populations throughout South Africa, and in other countries. Furthermore, parents' perception on specific South African HEIs' corporate reputation is another limitation of the study and provide an opportunity to further studies. The parental perspective on experience of service as an antecedent of a HEI's corporate reputation as well as needs further investigation of the factors related to parental identification with a HEI as a consequence of corporate reputation are opportunities to obtain further insights.

6.7 CONCLUSION: CHAPTER 6

The field study set out to identify antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education from a parental perspective. The findings empirically prove the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation that influence the perspectives of Grade 12 parents about a HEI. The parental perspective on the corporate reputation of a HEI does not reflect adequately in the literature reviewed. Therefore, HEI management and marketing teams will benefit from the insights gained from the field study to acknowledge and target parents with specific corporate reputation interventions.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Self-completion questionnaire

RE: RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPATION **DATE: SEPTEMBER 2022**

Dear respondent

You are invited to participate in this research project. The study investigates **the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education from a parental perspective.** If you have any questions or concerns about the study, contact Mrs Ilze Bakkes (the principal investigator) at 083 414 3113 or bakkese@ufs.ac.za. The study's findings will be disseminated for a Master's in Business Administration study and academic journals.

To participate in the study, you must meet the following criteria:

- You must have a child/dependant in Grade 12 in 2022.
- Your child/dependant must be in Grade 12 in a high/secondary school in Bloemfontein, Free State Province, Republic of South Africa.
- You have engaged with a HEI.
- Your child/dependant considers **or** has applied for undergraduate studies at a HEI in 2023.

The main aspects of the study are the following:

- The study aims to identify the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education (universities, universities of technology) from a parental perspective.
- The study has received approval from the General Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State Protocol Number: [UFS-HSD2022/1060/22].
- Your participation only requires you to complete the following hard copy questionnaire if you consent to participate in the study. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.
- Completing the questionnaire poses no inconvenience or risk to a participant.
- Participants can complete the hard copy questionnaire at a time that does not lead to a loss of work time.
- Participation in the study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. You are free to withdraw at any time. You are not obligated to hand it back to the school for collection by the principal investigator.
- The hard copy consent form requires your name and signature. This information will not be captured at any stage during the receipt of the completed questionnaire, analysis, writing up, or publication of findings. No personal information of respondents will be shared with any party.
- The captured data from the hard copy questionnaire will be stored on a password-protected computer. The principal investigator will store the completed hard copies of the questionnaire for five years in a secure, access-controlled storeroom in the Wekkie Saayman Building, UFS Bloemfontein Campus, for future research or academic purposes.

- The study's findings will be used only for the disclosed purposes of the dissemination of the findings for academic purposes.
- A detailed information leaflet is available. Contact the principal investigator if you require the detailed information leaflet (bakkese@ufs.ac.za | 083 414 3113).

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in the research study.

Principal investigator: Ilze Bakkes

+27 83 414 3113 | bakkese@ufs.ac.za

Promotor: Prof Jacques Nel

+27 51 401 2727 | nelj@ufs.ac.za

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY BY COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

I, the undersigned, __________________________ (*participant's full names to be included*), (the "**Participant**") confirm that I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study referred to as the:

The antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation in higher education: A parental perspective (the **"study**") in relation to obtaining a Master's degree in Business Administration, and which Study is being conducted by Mrs Ilze Bakkes (the "**researcher**").

I, the undersigned Participant, further confirm that–

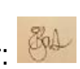
1. the researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the study.
2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the attached information sheet.
3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.
4. I understand that my participation in the study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).
5. I understand that the completed hard copy questionnaire must be received and placed in an envelope by the class teacher and therefore has access to the answers provided.
6. The researcher and the class teacher have a written agreement that prohibits the class teacher to open, read, discuss, copy, record, store or reference any answers provided by myself with any party or any reason outside the study.
7. I voluntarily provide the UFS and the researcher with my personal information and consent to the UFS and the researcher collecting, disclosing, and processing my personal information to conduct the study and any related activities in relation thereto.
8. I hereby acknowledge and confirm that I understand the purpose for which the UFS and the researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise process, as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein.
9. I am aware that the findings of the study will be **anonymously** processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings and that my personal information will be aggregated and deidentified at such stage.
10. I also give the UFS permission to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at the UFS or other HEIs. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, **anonymity/confidentiality**, safekeeping of information, and other issues listed above applying.

I, the Participant, agree to participate in the research study by selecting the "Agree" box on the hard copy self-completion questionnaire.

AGREE TO PARTICIPATE ☐ **DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE** ☐

Full Name of Participant: ____

Signature of Participant: _______________________ Date: ___________________

Full Name of Researcher: Elizabeth Bakkes Signature of Researcher: 

TITLE: THE ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF CORPORATE REPUTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A PARENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Definition of a HEI (Act 101 of 1997): A HEI means any institution that provides higher education on a full-time, part-time or distance basis.

Definition of corporate reputation: Halleck (2015) defines corporate reputation as the collective opinion and the overall value that an individual places towards an enterprise (HEI), based on that enterprise's (HEI's) current and past actions and events.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Kindly read the questions carefully and answer each one by selecting the most appropriate and honest opinion you hold. <u>Select only one value per question and mark your answer with a 'X'.</u> There is no right or wrong answer.

For example:

Do you have a child currently (2022) in Grade 12?

Yes	X
No	

SECTION A:

1. Do you have a child currently (2022) in Grade 12?

Yes	
No	

If you answered 'NO', you do not need to continue with the survey.

2. In which school is your Grade 12 child?

Grey College	
Hoërskool Fichardtpark	
Hoërskool Sentraal	
Jim Fouché Hoërskool	
Navalsig High School	
Sekondêre Meisieskool Oranje	

3. Is your child in Grade 12 considering post-school studies at a HEI in 2023?

Yes	

No	

If you answered ‘NO’, you do not need to continue with the survey.

4. Has your child applied for undergraduate studies at a HEI in 2023?

Yes	
No	

SECTION B:

1. ***Please indicate your age in years***

35 – 39 years	
40 – 45 years	
46 – 50 years	
51 – 55 years	
56 – 60 years	
61+ years	

2. ***Please indicate your gender***

Female	
Male	
Prefer not to say	

3. ***Please indicate your home language***

Afrikaans	
English	
isiNdebele	
isiSwati	
isiXhosa	
isiZulu	
Sesotho	
Tshitsonga	
Tshivenda	
Other, please specify	

4. ***Please indicate your highest level of educational qualification***

Attended school, but did not complete matric / Grade 12	

Matric / Grade 12	
Post high school certificate	
Post high school diploma	
Bachelor's degree	
Postgraduate degree	

5. Please indicate your employment status

Unemployed	
Employed	
Retired	
Other, please specify	

SECTION C:

To indicate your agreement with each of the statements in this section, **you must think of your engagements and interactions with the HEI your child applied to or planning to apply to for undergraduate studies**. Select or provide the name of the HEI you most want your child to study at in the space below. **Select only one HEI.** In the statements that follow, corporate reputation refers to the HEI that you select below with a 'X':

Cape Peninsula University of Technology	
Central University of Technology, Free State	
Durban Institute of Technology	
Mangosuthu University of Technology	
National Institute for Higher Education, Northern Cape	
National Institute for Higher Education, Mpumalanga	
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	
Northwest University	
Rhodes University	
Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University	
Sol Plaatje University, Northern Cape	
Tshwane University of Technology	
University of Cape Town	
University of Fort Hare	
University of the Free State	
University of Johannesburg	
University of KwaZulu-Natal	
University of Limpopo	
University of Mpumalanga	

University of Pretoria	
University of South Africa	
University of Stellenbosch	
University of Venda	
University of the Western Cape	
University of the Witwatersrand	
University of Zululand	
Vaal University of Technology	
Walter Sisulu University	
Other, please specify:	

INSTRUCTIONS:

Kindly read the questions carefully and answer each one by selecting the most appropriate and honest opinion you hold. Circle only one value per question to represent your answer. There is no right or wrong answer.

For example:

	Strongly disagree			**Neutral**			**Strongly agree**
HEI X (indicated above) has employees who treat me fairly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please note:

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = somewhat disagree

4 = neutral (neither agree nor disagree)

5 = somewhat agree

6 = agree

7 = strongly agree

QUESTION 1:

	Strongly disagree			**Neutral**			**Strongly agree**
HEI X (indicated above) has employees who treat me fairly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree
HEI X (indicated above) has employees who treat me courteously	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
HEI X (indicated above) has employees who care about my needs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
HEI X (indicated above) service delivery meets their promise	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

QUESTION 2:

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree
The HEI X (indicated above) has a good reputation within my community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The HEI X (indicated above) is a well-respected university by my community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have heard positive things about the HEI X (indicated above)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The HEI X (indicated above) is looked upon as a prestigious institution	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

QUESTION 3:

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree
Gathered from media reports, the HEI X (indicated above) appears to have a clean image	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Gathered from media reports, the HEI X (indicated above) appears to develop innovations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Gathered from media reports, the HEI X (indicated above), I am willing to engage with it due to its reputation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

QUESTION 4:

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree
I have a good feeling about the HEI X (indicated above)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The HEI X (indicated above) looks like a HEI with strong prospects for future growth	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The HEI X (indicated above) attracts highly motivated, intelligent students	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The HEI X (indicated above) offers high quality education	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The media reports of the HEI X (indicated above) are in general, positive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The HEI X (indicated above) looks like a responsible member of the community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

QUESTION 5:

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree
HEI X (indicated above) can generally be trusted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have great confidence in the HEI X (indicated above)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The behaviour of HEI X (indicated above) reflects integrity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The behavior of HEI X (indicated above) reflects reliability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

QUESTION 6:

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree
What others think about the HEI X (indicated above) is important to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When someone praises the HEI X (indicated above), I feel proud	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If someone criticises the HEI X (indicated above), I feel embarrassed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

QUESTION 7:

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree
I feel committed to maintaining a relationship with the HEI X (indicated above)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel that a relationship with the HEI X (indicated above) is important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I intend to continue my relationship with the HEI X (indicated above)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I plan to maintain a relationship with the HEI X (indicated above)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

QUESTION 8:

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree
I have only good things to say about the HEI X (indicated above)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am proud to tell other that my son or daughter applied at HEI X (indicated above)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I often recommend the HEI X (indicated above) to others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
In general, I speak favorable about the HEI X (indicated above)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I talk to people more about the HEI X (indicated above) than I do about other HEIs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I seldom miss an opportunity to tell others about the HEI X (indicated above)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When I tell others about the HEI X (indicated above), I tend to talk about it in great detail	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

QUESTION 9:

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree
If my son or daughter attends the HEI X (indicated above), I would be highly interested in this institution.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If my son or daughter attends the HEI X (indicated above), I would be	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly disagree			Neutral			Strongly agree
highly interested in giving a referral about this institution.							
In the future, my choice of the HEI X (indicated above) for my other children would be highly possible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If my son or daughter attends the HEI X (indicated above), I would trust this institution.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If my son or daughter attends the HEI X (indicated above), I would be highly interested in providing financial support to this institution by attending events.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If my son or daughter attends the HEI X (indicated above), I would be highly interested in providing financial support to this institution by donating money.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The principal investigator thanks you for your participation.

End of the questionnaire