



Reputation in Higher Education: A Systematic Review

Marelby Amado Mateus* and Fernando Juarez Acosta

Business School, Universidad del Rosario, Bogotá, Colombia

Published research on corporate reputation has increased in the last 10 years in various sectors. The higher education sector is no stranger to this growth; however, theoretical developments and empirical research have been conducted across various disciplines of knowledge and theoretical approaches, which has made it difficult to theorize about it. In addition to this, the dimensionality of the construct, its dependence on the perception of public interest, and the difficulty of its measurement have made it a challenge for universities. This article develops a systematic review of reputation in higher education institutions. While there is evidence of contributions in the development of the theory and its conceptualization, these have occurred in other sectors such as banking, service industries, retailing, tourism and hospitality, and are not specifically focused on the higher education sector. As such, we seek to identify and characterize how reputation has been studied in this sector, highlighting conceptual and theoretical approaches that have supported the studies, which will help to overcome the fragmentation of the same from an integral definition applied to the education service.

Keywords: reputation, higher education, systematic review, reputation management, reputation theory, university reputation

INTRODUCTION

The concept of *corporate reputation* dates back to the 1970s when the relevance of the different assessments made by stakeholders of the company's reputation began to be identified (Spence, 1973) and the importance of public reputational signals for company performance and competitiveness became evident (Caves and Porter, 1977). Reputation is beginning to be understood as a group of attributes and characteristics of an organization that are the result of its past actions (Weigelt and Camerer, 1988), of the evaluation of the organization's performance (Rao, 1994; De Quevedo et al., 2005) and the perceptions that stakeholders have of them (Fombrun, 1996, p. 72), through a process of legitimization (Miotto et al., 2020).

Thus, a positive reputation can impact financial performance, customer behavior (Jung and Seock, 2016), competitiveness (Fombrun, 1996), stakeholder decision-making (Hemsley-Brown, 2012), corporate survival and success (Christensen and Gornitzka, 2017) as well as the integration of general management functions (Goldring, 2015). As such, it is important to know how to manage reputation and better invest resources to improve stakeholder perceptions (Lafuente-Ruiz-de Sabando et al., 2018).

Within the university context, reputation is defined as the sum of the impressions received by stakeholders from the communication and interaction they have with the university (Rindova et al., 2005), therefore it is evaluative, reflects consensus judgments (Roberts and Dowling, 2002),

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*Correspondence:

Marelby Amado Mateus
marelby.amado@urosario.edu.co

Specialty section:

This article was submitted to
Higher Education,
a section of the journal
Frontiers in Education

Received: 21 April 2022

Accepted: 01 June 2022

Published: 29 June 2022

Citation:

Amado Mateus M and Juarez
Acosta F (2022) Reputation in Higher
Education: A Systematic Review.
Front. Educ. 7:925117.
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2022.925117

is related to a “strong tradition” (Chevalier and Conlon, 2003) and, like organizational reputation, it takes time to consolidate a positive reputation in its stakeholders and therefore requires an institutional commitment to excellence in educational processes and results, as well as in research results (Roberts and Dowling, 2002; Arambewela and Hall, 2009; Delgado-Márquez et al., 2013). Although reputation is linked to research productivity, this indicator is widely criticized because of its limitation, in addition, as expressed by Nicholas et al. (2015), reputation is evaluated with only one activity, which is research, the product of which are articles and the product of these articles, citations.

Reputation is built through the student’s experience with the university (Chen and Esangbedo, 2018), and influences student attraction (Plewa et al., 2016), student selection of the university (Lafuente-Ruiz-de Sabando et al., 2018), faculty attraction (Christensen and Gornitzka, 2017), the knowledge held by stakeholders (Vogler, 2020a) both internally and externally (Verčič et al., 2016), as well as the valuation and rating of universities (Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2019). In addition, previous studies have found that reputation requires management and has an important impact on the internal processes carried out by the university, including university reforms (Steiner et al., 2013), which have a significant effect on the quality of the university’s educational service. Within such management, the media play an important role, because they provide the channel and space where stakeholders know, identify, give their opinion and discuss the reputation of an institution (Deephouse, 2000). This is why more and more universities faced with a competitive context, turn to marketing to improve the perception of their image and reputation, in order not only to attract students, but also teachers and financial resources (Wilkins and Huisman, 2014).

From this perspective, as stated by Reznik and Yudina (2018), reputation is a public evaluation, product of the opinion that stakeholders have of the university, and that can be divided into internal and external, the internal referring to the faculty, administrative staff and students, and external referring to representatives of the external environment. Therefore, *reputation management* implies an important knowledge of how it is built, and how the different stakeholders (both internal and external) perceive and evaluate it (Ressler and Abratt, 2009). In short, it is essential to know how to respond and meet the expectations and needs of each stakeholder and make it a strategic priority for university managers.

However, inconsistencies have been evidenced in the conceptualization of reputation in the *higher education* sector given the rules of operation in the education sector are different to those in the other corporate sectors (Verčič et al., 2016) and the absence of a consensus in the literature (Plewa et al., 2016; Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2019) in management research (Ali et al., 2015; Veh et al., 2019), as well as its proximity to other terms such as identity and image (Alessandri et al., 2006; Lafuente-Ruiz-de Sabando et al., 2018) which are different but interconnected constructs. The identity is a multidimensional construct composed of communication and visual identity, behavior, culture, and market conditions (Melewar and Akel, 2005), and image is also a higher order multidimensional concept that can be managed to influence other variables such

as student satisfaction and loyalty (Lafuente-Ruiz-de Sabando et al., 2018). Additionally, other factors that make its definition difficult are intangibility (Nguyen and Leblanc, 2001a), given the reputation of the university is the result of the provision of the education service that is essentially intangible and difficult to evaluate in advance. The multidimensionality (Verčič et al., 2016) since the reputation is composed of multiple dimensions such as performance, product, service, leadership, governance, workplace, citizenship, and innovation (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007), especially with regard to origins of corporate reputation research (Veh et al., 2019), and the assessments of the different stakeholders (Plewa et al., 2016) that respond to their different expectations (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007).

Although the contributions found in the *systematic review* conducted by Lafuente-Ruiz-de Sabando et al. (2018) who have sought to differentiate the concepts of image and reputation in higher education institutions (HEIs), the analyses carried out allowed them to conclude that the stakeholders of a university’s academic offerings, such as teaching and research resources, graduate education, and affective image have a positive and significant influence on the image of the university, and that this assessment varies to the extent that the various perspectives of the stakeholders are adopted, and even more so when citizens of other countries are included. The contributions of Rashid and Mustafa (2021) who have studied the background of corporate reputation of higher education institutions by recognizing it as an intangible asset in all types of organizations, including HEIs, from the employees’ perspective, and Prakash (2021) who conducted a literature review on the concept of service quality in higher education institutions where he inquired among several things on the methodologies to measure quality, and found that in some of them, reputation is an important dimension to measure to operationalize it. However, it is necessary to continue investigating its conceptual development, characteristics, tools and relationships with other variables within the context of higher education.

Given the above factors, and the diversity and fragmentation of this concept specifically in the context of higher education, where the contributions are still insufficient (Watkins and Gonzenbach, 2013; Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2019), it is necessary to conduct a systematic review on reputation in universities (HEIs) with three objectives. First, to understand how empirical reputation research [these studies might be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods studies (Creswell, 2014)] in these institutions has been characterized. This will be conducted through a bibliometric analysis using the SciVal tool of Elsevier; second, to identify the variables and/or constructs related to reputation. This will be performed through an analysis using the VOSviewer tool and a direct review of the documents; third, to determine how reputation has been conceptualized in HEIs. This will also be approached through a direct review of documents using the four-eyes principle to avoid bias. These objectives will provide an overview of the construct, and a comprehensive picture to improve the understanding of the university’s reputation.

This article begins with a description of the methodology used, then presents the characterization of the articles reviewed,

followed by an analysis of the relationships found concerning reputation. This is followed by a compilation of the definitions of corporate reputation—specifically those applied to higher education—and its benefits and weaknesses. Finally, the conclusions, limitations of the research, and the agenda for future research are presented.

METHODS

This paper will use a systematic literature review based on previous studies, as a method of analysis of empirical research conducted on reputation in HEIs. This allows a broad and continuous review of the literature, providing a frame of reference to compare the results of this study with previous ones (Creswell, 2014, p. 60). Such a study is also used to find relevant information in the selected context (Aveyard, 2014) and is fundamental in academic works (Lunde et al., 2019), and scientific activities (Mulrow, 1994) in management. Among the benefits of conducting a systematic literature review is understanding the theoretical relationship between the problem to be investigated, the objectives and, the discussion (Rocco and Plakhotnik, 2009). It also facilitates the identification, evaluation, and summary of findings of relevant studies on the topic, providing a strong foundation for the research, which will result in better development of the different investigations and their relationship with the conclusions (Centre for Reviews Dissemination, 2008).

Petticrew and Roberts (2006) propose a methodology for developing systematic reviews, consisting of the following steps: (1) define the question driving the review, (2) determine the types of studies that need to be addressed to answer the questions, (3) conduct a comprehensive literature search, (4) examine

results with inclusion and exclusion criteria, (5) develop a critical appraisal of the studies included to ensure that key aspects of the study are addressed, (6) synthesize the studies and assess the heterogeneity of the findings, and (7) disseminate the conclusions of the review.

Question Formulation

Step 1. Define the Question That Directs the Review

For the development of the first step, the questions posed that will direct the review are: How have empirical studies of reputation in higher education institutions been characterized? Based on this characterization, with which variables and/or constructs has it been related? How has reputation in higher education services been conceptualized? The results will contribute to the identification of a comprehensive overview in order to improve the academic and administrative community's understanding of the implications of reputation management. **Figure 1** presents a summary of the methodological steps, the questions guiding the work, and the results of the analysis that respond to the questions posed.

Article Selection

Step 2. Determine the Types of Studies to Be Addressed

To comply with the second step, the types of studies included in this review are empirical research articles and systematic reviews applied to the higher education sector and published in journals categorized in quartiles 1 and 2, which represent a higher impact factor and quality (Marín and Arriojas, 2021). Critical analyses, editorials, or essays are omitted.

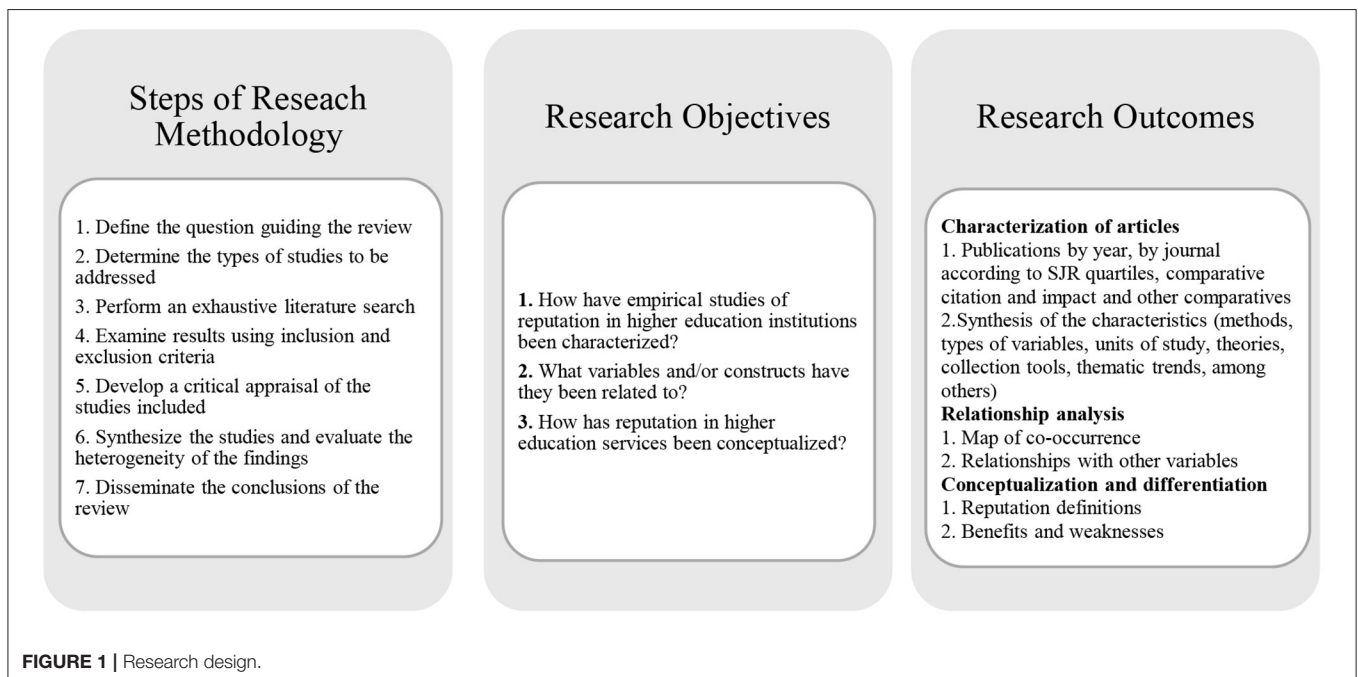
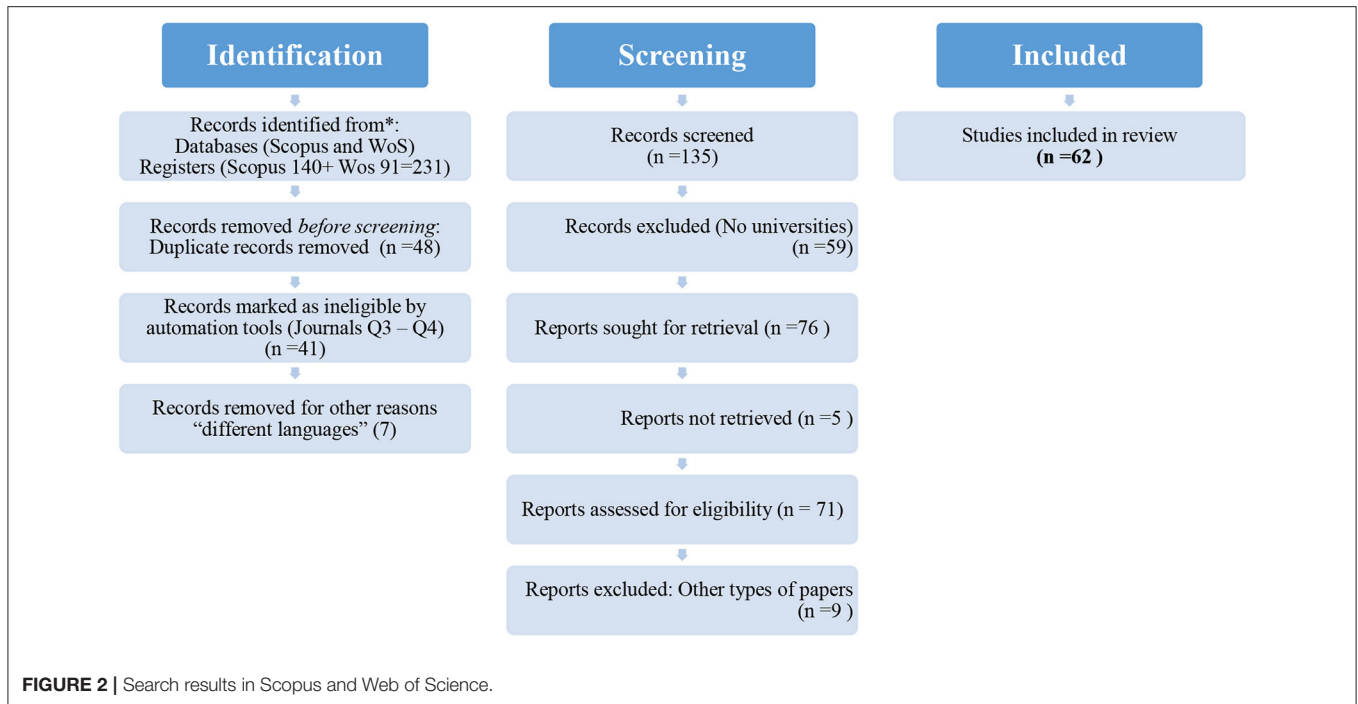


FIGURE 1 | Research design.



Step 3. Conduct an Exhaustive Literature Search

In this step, a search is performed in Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) over a period of 10 years (2010–July 2020), as it is considered sufficiently extensive for the review and is consistent with the indicator of obsolescence of the scientific literature (Price, 1965). Also, these years show the highest number of publications on the subject as will be seen below. The language selected for the review of the articles is English because it is the most recurrent language in the documents of the selected databases considering as keywords: reputation, higher education, university(ies).

In the WoS database, two searches were performed, the first with reputation and higher education, the second with reputation and university; for the Scopus database, reputation, higher education, or universities or university¹ was used. Subsequently, we proceeded to search and download the documents in the WoS and Scopus databases, of which only five could not be accessed.

Step 4. Examine the Results With Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

For the development of the fourth step, **Figure 2** shows the result of the screening and consolidation of the two searches and the selection process of the articles, indicating the inclusion and exclusion criteria that were taken into account following the PRISMA methodology.

¹Boolean code used in Web of Science: TITLE: (reputation) AND SUBJECT: (higher education) and the second TITLE: (reputation) AND SUBJECT: (university). In the Scopus database, the following Boolean code was used: [TITLE (reputation) AND TITLE (higher AND education) OR TITLE (universities) OR TITLE (university)] AND DOCTYPE (ar OR re) AND PUBYEAR > 2009.

Step 5. Develop a Critical Appraisal of the Studies Included

Once the selection process is completed a critical and taxonomic assessment of the 62 selected articles is carried out. This provides relevant information to answer the research questions posed, evolved from the review of the definitions on which the studies are based; the variables with which they are related; the theories on which the studies are based; the measurement methods identified; as well as the benefits and weaknesses found in reputation management. To present the characterization of the 62 articles found from the process described above, this research performs a bibliometric analysis through Elsevier's SciVal tool, used to analyze the behavior of research in a particular field, make comparisons, associations, identify trends and create reports (Elsevier, 2022). We also use the VOSviewer, which is a program created to build and visualize bibliometric networks (VOSviewer, 2022). In addition, we perform an analysis of texts collected by a reviewer and verified by another researcher, using the four-eyes principle, to reduce the risk of bias (Hiebl, 2015).

RESULTS

How Have the Empirical Studies of Reputation in Higher Education Institutions Been Characterized?

Using Elsevier's SciVal tool, in March 2022, we analyzed the publications per year within the time range addressed in the study (2010–July 2020), the citation behavior, the Field-Weighted Citation Impact (FWCI), which is the impact of citations obtained compared to the average number of citations expected in the subject field (Elsevier, 2020), citation behavior data by

TABLE 1 | Citations, FWCI, and international collaboration, by year of publication.

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Citation count	117	219	4	82	74	50	191	46	57	54	16
Field-Weighted citation impact	2.43	3.88	2.81	0.88	1.37	0.78	3.89	1.1	1.07	2.21	1.51
International collaboration (%)	0	50	0	0	50	16.7	50	12.5	23.1	0	16.7
Total articles published	2	4	1	7	4	6	6	8	13	12	11

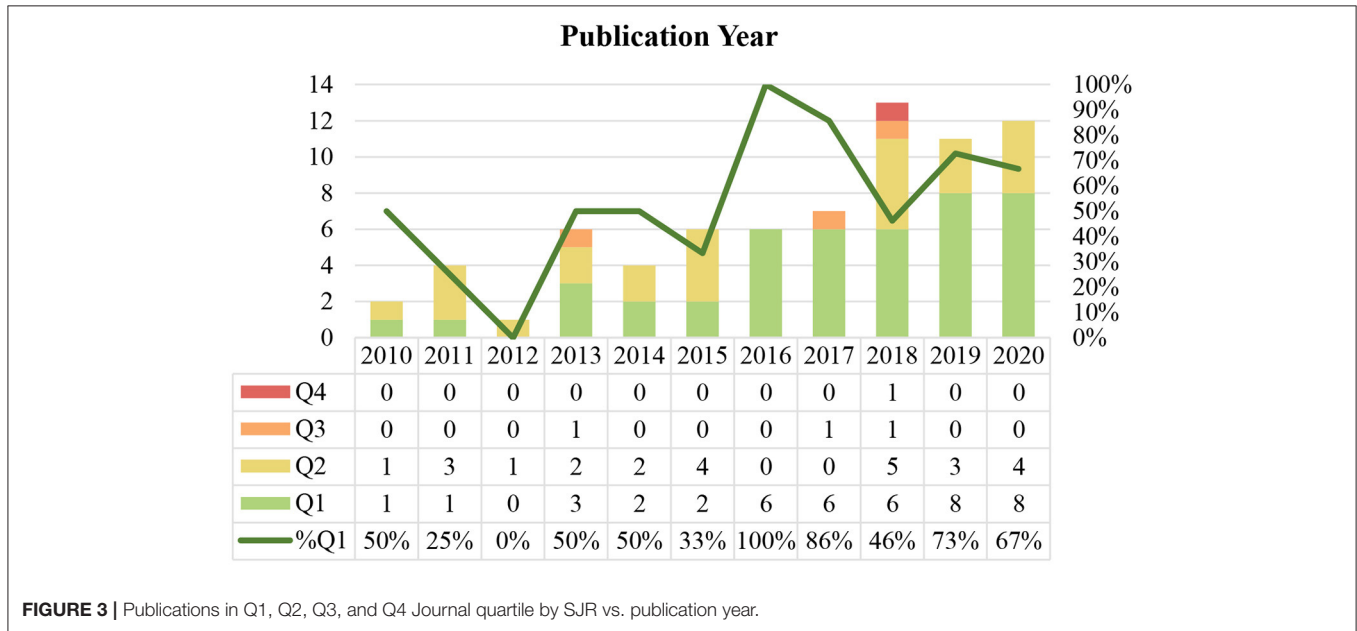


FIGURE 3 | Publications in Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4 Journal quartile by SJR vs. publication year.

year, publications by journal quartile, and an analysis of the institutions, their type, country of publication and journals.

The number of articles on reputation in higher education institutions has been increasing in the last 10 years, as shown in **Table 1**, where it is evident that the year with the highest number of articles is 2018 with 13 publications, followed by 2019 with 12 publications, and 11 publications as of July 2020.

It is observed that the years with the highest number of citations were 2011 (219 citations) and 2016 (191 citations), as shown in the table. This trend had an impact on the weighted citations per field, which are 3.88 in 2011, and 3.89 in 2016, the highest evidenced in the period studied. This shows the importance of reputation in the field of study, which may be due to the international collaborations that occurred in those years, as can also be seen in **Table 1**.

In turn, a review of the impact of the quartiles in the publications analyzed within the period studied was carried out, showing that 90.3% of the articles on their date of publication were in journals categorized within the Q1 and Q2 quartiles² (37 and 19 articles, respectively). It should be clarified that on the date the quartiles of the publications were searched, some of them had improved their performance, placing them in the first two

quartiles. Since 2018 there is a growth in the number of articles published on this subject, and in 2016 all published articles are in the Q1 category, as evidenced in the results presented in **Figure 3**.

In contrast, the institutions with the highest academic production, citations, and authors researching and writing on the subject of reputation were reviewed, and it was found that the University of Turku in Finland, the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos in Spain, and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor in the United States had the highest academic production with three articles each. However, the articles from the University of Michigan are the most cited of the three universities. It also had the highest number of citations among the institutions analyzed, followed by the University of Notre Dame with 227 citations, and Rice University and the University of Georgia with 116 citations each, as shown in **Figure 4**. In terms of the number of authors per institution publishing the most on reputation are Florida State University with five authors, and Mount Royal University, University of Salerno, Indonesia University of Education and, Zhejiang Sci-Tech University with four authors each.

Within this same analysis, a review was made of the publications by each country, their academic production, and the Field-Wide Citation Impact (FWCI). **Figure 5** shows 26 countries where research has been done on reputation in higher education institutions, with the most representative in terms of academic production being the United States (32),

²Taking into account the SCImago Journal Rank (SJR), which weights the value of a citation based on the subject field, quality and reputation of the source (Elsevier, 2020).

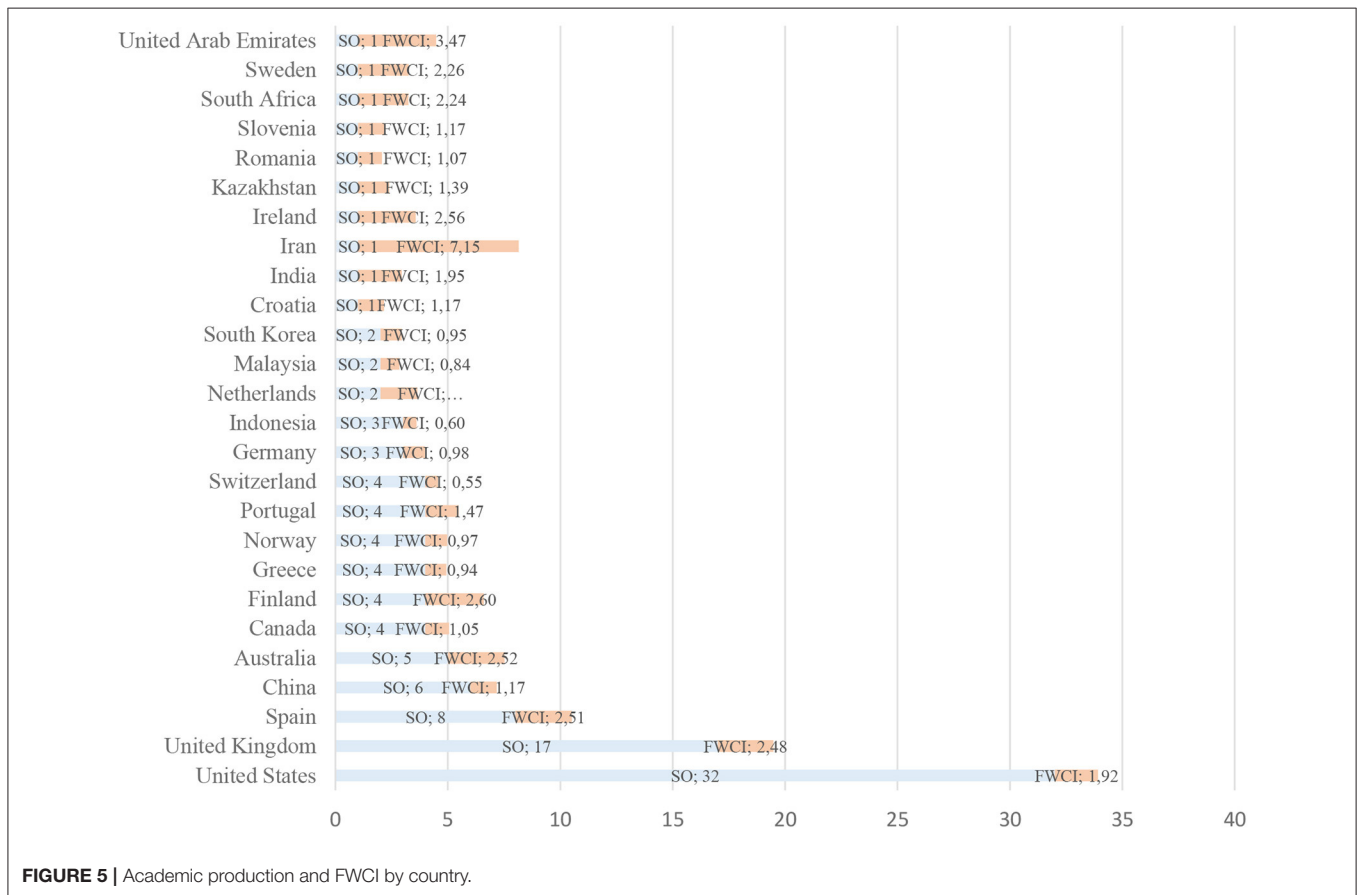
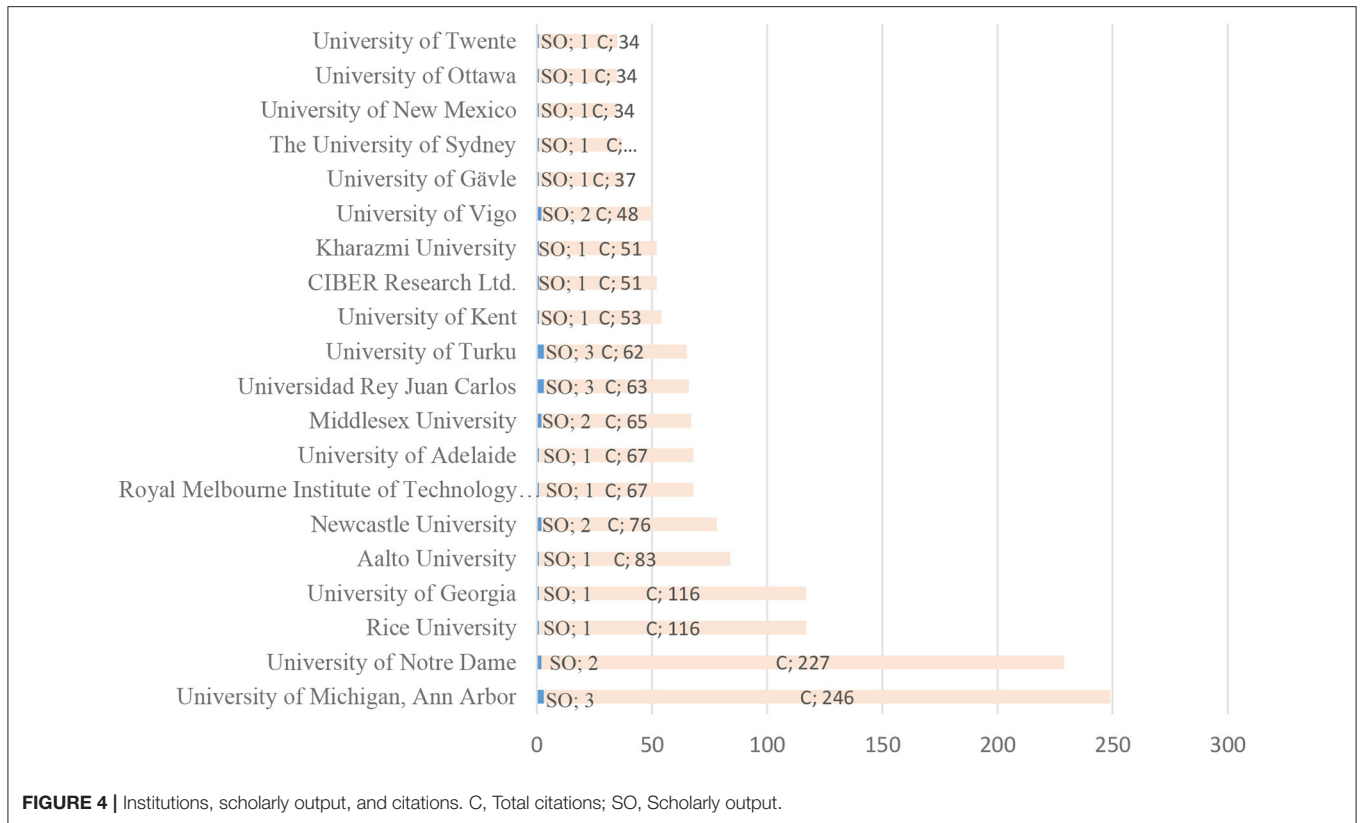


TABLE 2 | Characteristics of the articles reviewed.

Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative (39 papers) • Qualitative (11 papers) • Mixed (12 papers)
Variable types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation as a: • Dependent variable (38 papers) • Independent variable (25 papers)
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students (17 papers) • Universities (13 papers) • Databases and rankings (11 papers) • Internal stakeholders (two or more) (10 papers) • External stakeholders (2 papers) • Teachers (3 papers) • Employers (2 papers) • Graduates (2 papers) • Literature review (2 papers)
Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University, academic, media and corporate reputation theory (Delgado-Márquez et al., 2013; Drydakis, 2015; Fine and Wohl, 2018; Vogler, 2020b) • Stakeholder theory (Lafuente-Ruiz-de Sabando et al., 2018; Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2020; Foroudi et al., 2020) • Institutional theory (Martin et al., 2018; Miotto et al., 2020) • The neo-institutional theory (Bastedo and Bowman, 2010; Christensen and Gornitzka, 2017; Christensen et al., 2020) • Resource-based theory (Steiner et al., 2013; Parente et al., 2015; Plewa et al., 2016) • Signal theory (Lee and Stuenkel, 2016; Bouchet et al., 2017; Kaushal and Ali, 2019) • Theory of strategic alliances and game theory (Steiner et al., 2013) • Configuration theory (Plewa et al., 2016) • Management theory (Finch et al., 2015)
Collection tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary data analysis (26 papers) • Surveys (15 papers) • Mixed methods (e.g., analysis, surveys, interviews, focus group) (12 papers) • Interviews (4 papers) • Literature review (3 papers) • Experimental essays (2 papers)

United Kingdom (17), Spain (8), and China (6). The two countries with the highest impact factor are Iran (7.15) and the United Arab Emirates (3.47), which may be related to academic production or its quality, followed by Finland (2.60), Ireland (3.56), and Australia (2.52). It is worth mentioning that of the 98 institutions that participated in the publication of the articles analyzed, 94 correspond to higher education institutions, three to governmental entities and, one to independent corporate research entity.

Finally, a review of the journals with the highest number of articles on reputation in higher education was carried out, and it was found that *Studies in Higher Education* (Q1), *Corporate Reputation Review* (Q2), *Higher Education* (Q1), *International Journal of Educational Management* (Q2), *Journal of Business Research* (Q1) are the journals that have published the highest number of articles. The four most representative journals that have published at least three articles on the subject of reputation are *Corporate Reputation Review*, *Higher Education*, *International Journal of Educational Management*, and *Journal of Business Research*.

Synthesis of the Articles Reviewed

Step 6. Synthesize the Studies and Assess the Heterogeneity of the Findings

To synthesize the content of the articles found, (Table 2) below summarizes their structural characteristics in terms of the

methods used to approach the research, the types of variables or the way of analyzing reputation, the units of study used in the articles, the theories that underpinned the research and the collection tools.

With Which Variables and/or Constructs Has It Been Related?

To evaluate the heterogeneity of the findings, a descriptive analysis of the concept of reputation is carried out. First, to understand the main relationships and co-occurrence of the terms found in the articles, the co-occurrence map of the VOSviewer tool was used, where the titles and abstracts of the 62 articles were reviewed. The program helped visualize four different but interrelated clusters. Each of the terms found is represented by a node and its size corresponds to its relevance. Each node has a color; in this case, the red node will be called cluster 1, the green node cluster 2, the blue node cluster 3, and the yellow node cluster 4. The intensity of the color will reflect the relevance of the relationship (Cantos-Mateos et al., 2013). Based on this score, 65% of the most relevant terms were selected (5% more than suggested by the system to increase the number of items), with a total of 18 terms grouped as follows: cluster 1, higher education institution, image, legitimacy, relationship, reputation, stakeholder. Cluster 2, academic reputation, college, impact, institution, ranking. Cluster 3, effect, information, news medium, university, university reputation. Cluster 4, reputation management, use. Figure 6 shows the co-occurrence map.

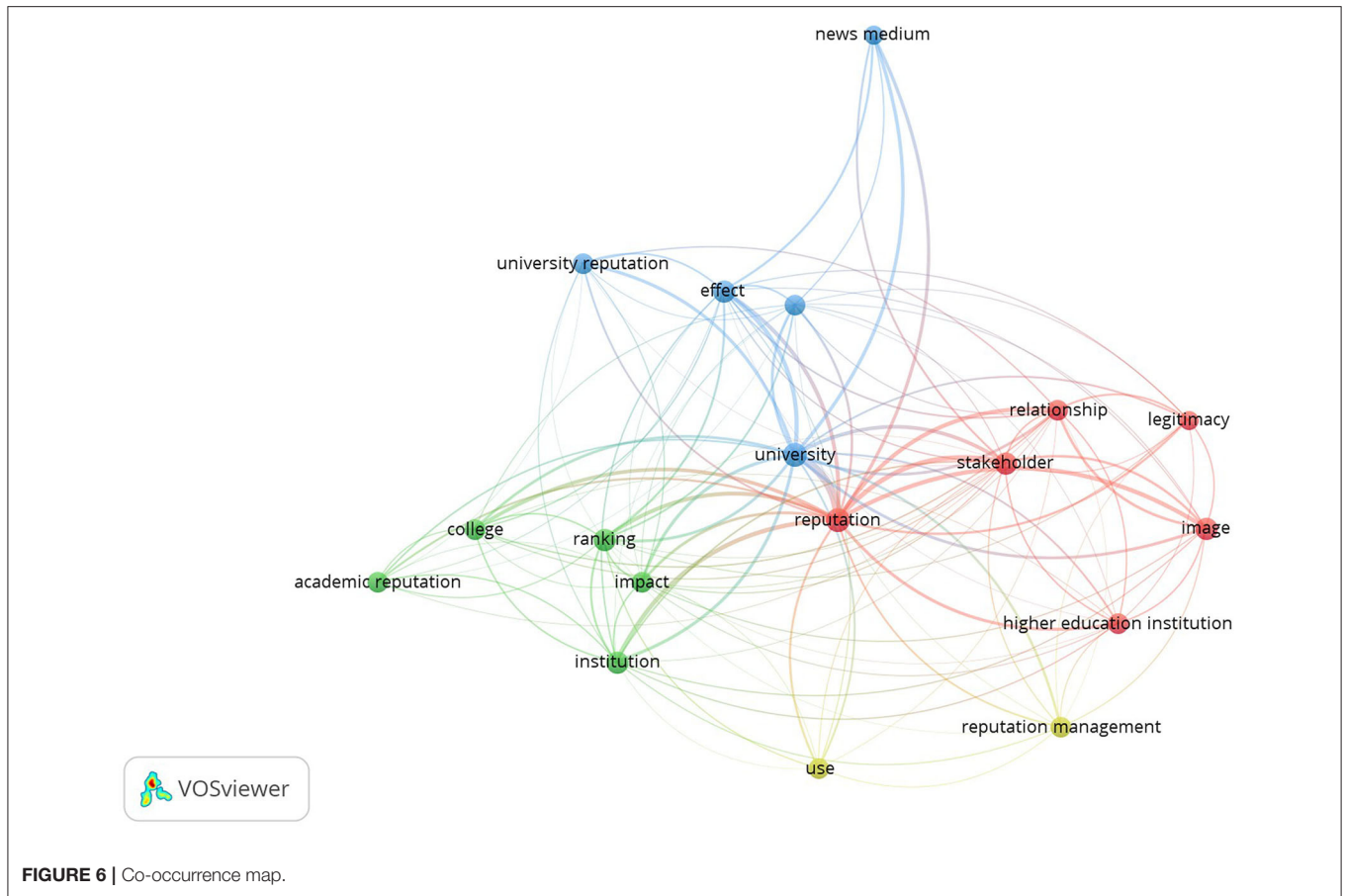


FIGURE 6 | Co-occurrence map.

From a detailed analysis of the composition of each of the clusters based on the thematic focus of the articles, it can be inferred that the articles in *cluster 1 (red)* focus on highlighting the importance of the relationship with stakeholders, the projected image and legitimacy; the articles in *cluster 2 (green)* analyze the impact of rankings on institutions and academic reputation; those in *cluster 3 (blue)* study the effect of information and the media on university reputation; and *cluster 4 (yellow)* includes the management and use of reputation. The following is a proposal that groups the articles reviewed in each of the four clusters found.

Cluster 1: Relationship With Stakeholders, Projected Image, and Legitimacy

In this cluster, we find studies such as the relationship of proximity, stakeholders, and reputation (Finch et al., 2015); the multidimensionality of reputation through stakeholders (Verčič et al., 2016); the use of social networks, reputation, and stakeholders (Carrillo-Durán and García, 2020); the influence of university identity, image on reputation (Steiner et al., 2013); identity and image management on reputation (Maduro et al., 2018); the relationship between image, legitimacy, and reputation (Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2019, 2020); co-creation of value, image

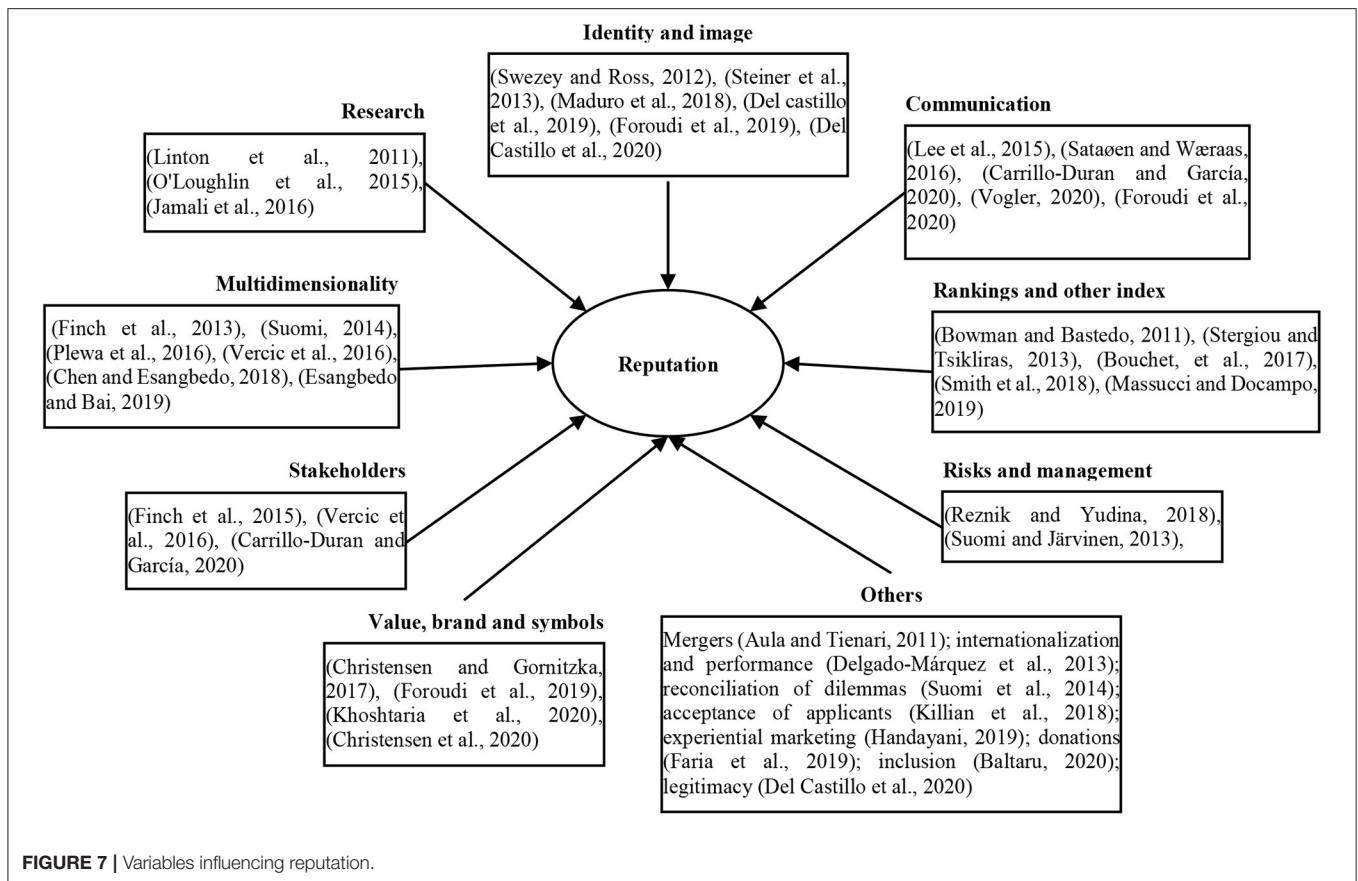
and reputation (Foroudi et al., 2019, 2020); reputation and image (Lafuente-Ruiz-de Sabando et al., 2018).

Cluster 2: The Impact of Academic Rankings and Reputation on Institutions

In this cluster is the influence of rankings on reputation (Bastedo and Bowman, 2010; Bowman and Bastedo, 2011); the Google Ngram viewer and reputation (Stergiou and Tsikliras, 2013); athletic rankings and reputation (Bouchet et al., 2017); the average h-index as a predictor of reputation as measured via the U. S. News & World Report (Smith et al., 2018); reputation as a result of citation networks via PageRank (Massucci and Docampo, 2019); the influence of ranking, credibility signals and reputation on student selection (Haas and Unkel, 2017); the impact of reputation and rankings on teaching income (Wolf and Jenkins, 2018).

Cluster 3: The Effect of Information and Media on University Reputation

The following papers are part of cluster 3: university resources, public relations and news content (Lee et al., 2015); communication strategy and reputation (Sataøen and Wæraas, 2016); the importance of media on reputation and stakeholders (Vogler, 2020a); university mergers influence



reputation (Aula and Tienari, 2011); research-related activities and reputation (Jamali et al., 2016); reputation as a source of information influences managers' (Martin et al., 2018) and students' (Brewer and Zhao, 2010; Priporas and Kamenidou, 2011; Munisamy et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2018) decisions; reputation, tribalism, use of Facebook in relationship building (Liu et al., 2017); effects of reputation in the media on third-party funding (Vogler, 2020b).

Cluster 4: The Management and Use of Reputation

Finally, this cluster is formed by reputation and risk management (Reznik and Yudina, 2018); the identification and management of reputation risks (Suomi and Järvinen, 2013); university performance, reputation and professional staff (Baltaru, 2020); university resource management - multidimensionality of reputation (Suomi, 2014; Plewa et al., 2016; Chen and Esangbedo, 2018; Esangbedo and Bai, 2019); performative, moral and professional symbols as categories of reputation management (Christensen and Gornitzka, 2017).

Relationships Found in the Review of the Articles

To deepen the relationships found in the papers reviewed, an analysis of the typology of the variable reputation or the direction of influence attributed to reputation was performed. In addition, the variables commonly studied together with university reputation were grouped by similar themes. **Figure 7**

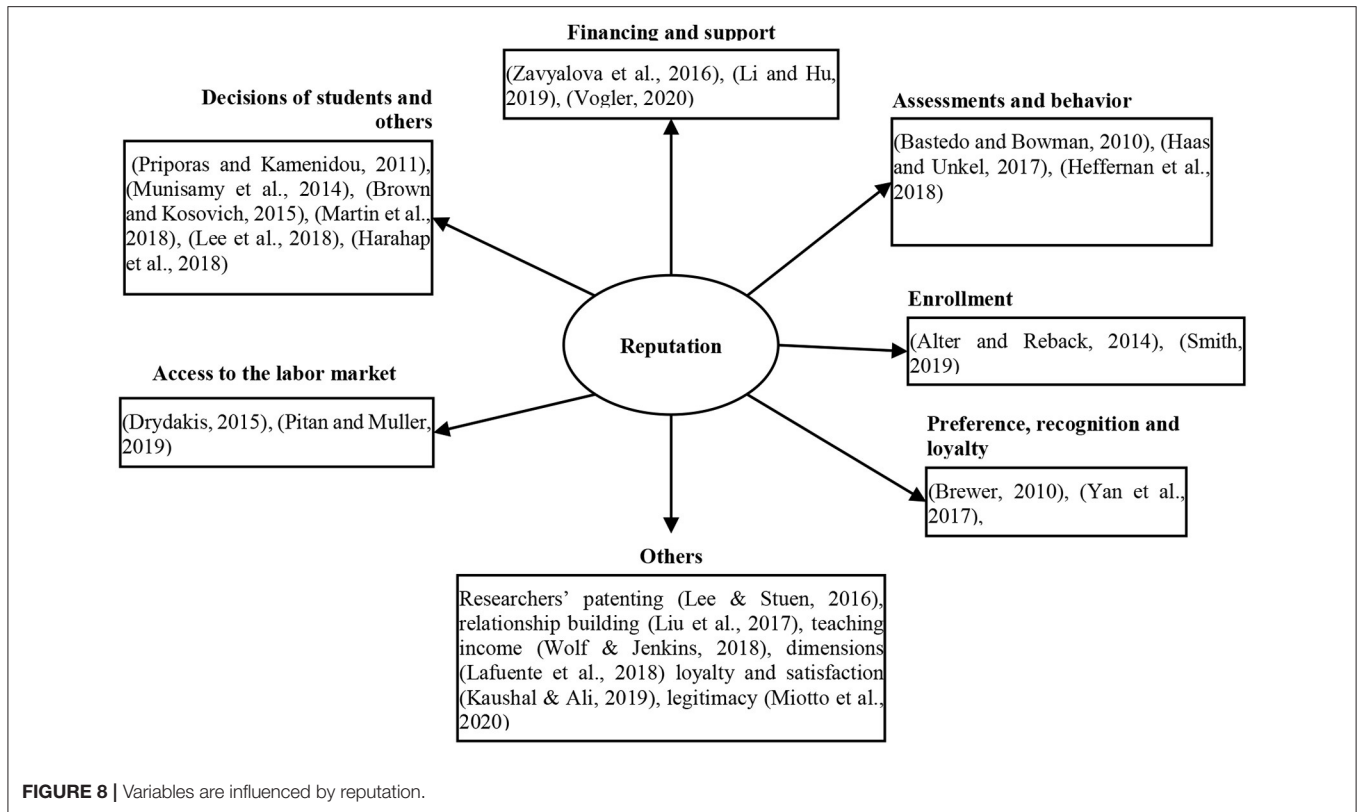
shows the variables that influence reputation and **Figure 8** shows the variables on which reputation has some type of influence.

The following are the variables on which reputation has an influence or impact:

The papers also found other variables to which reputation was related: career prospects (Munisamy et al., 2014); entry standards (Drydakakis, 2015); motivation to study abroad (Lee et al., 2018); tribalism (Liu et al., 2017); voice-to-voice (Harahap et al., 2018); quality of life (Alter and Reback, 2014); personality and brand attachment (Kaushal and Ali, 2019); co-creation (Foroudi et al., 2019, 2020); proximity and strategic character (Finch et al., 2015).

How Has Reputation Been Conceptualized in Higher Education Services?

In each of the 62 articles, the concept of reputation and the authors with the highest number of citations were reviewed; and Fombrun was found to be the most cited author in the literature. Fombrun (1996) has nine direct citations and at least 16 others with various authors: Fombrun and Shanley (1990)—six citations, Fombrun et al. (2000)—four citations, Fombrun and Van Riel (1997, 2003, 2004), Van Riel and Fombrun (2007)—eight citations. They are followed by Rindova et al. (2005) who have at least 14 direct citations not counting those with other authors in 2010. Next is Suomi (Järvinen and Suomi, 2011; Suomi and Järvinen, 2013; Suomi, 2014; Suomi et al., 2014), with nine



citations in total. Then there is Alessandri et al. (2006) who presents eight citations.

Most of these authors, define reputation at the organizational level. As such, it is common to find that their “corporate” definition applies to different sectors of the economy. This behavior was observed in a large part of the articles reviewed since some researchers chose to take up the organizational definition to support their research works that were applied to the higher education sector. In this sense, it is important to mention that globalization and the intensification of competition have caused universities to lose their social and formative focus, and become producers of competitive services by adopting more market-oriented approaches (Maringe and Gibbs, 2009, p. 4). Therefore, a summary of the definitions found was made, which is listed in **Table 3** (the complete list can be found in the **Supplementary Material**).

Although it is common to find the aforementioned definitions in research works, some authors have adapted the definition of reputation and applied it to the higher education service, since they understand the characteristics and particularities that differentiate it from other services. The definitions found in the review focus on showing the importance of the interaction of stakeholders with the university (Rindova et al., 2005; Chen and Esangbedo, 2018) over time (Alessandri et al., 2006, p. 261) and the incidence of opinions of third-party experts (Roberts, 2009). They also focus on showing the social and economic capital it generates (Federkeil, 2009, p. 32), taking into account that it is a valuable asset that influences differentiation

and competitive advantage (Luque-Martínez and Del Barrio-García, 2009). Further, it also serves as a proxy for assessing university quality. Therefore, it influences university selection and evaluation (Hemsley-Brown, 2012; Munisamy et al., 2014) and the trustworthiness of its image (Van Vught, 2008, p. 169), attracting and retaining students (Munisamy et al., 2014). From a student’s perspective, public relations, marketing communication, crisis and/or risk management, and corporate branding perspectives are key (Maringe and Gibbs, 2009). A summary of the definitions of university or higher education reputation is shown in **Table 4** (see **Supplementary Material**).

Benefits and Weaknesses of Reputation

Reputation generates a huge impact both for universities and companies in other sectors. As such, we analyzed its benefits and weaknesses, considering the importance of examining both sides of the coin and identifying where the most important challenges in the conceptualization and management of reputation lie. **Table 5** shows a summary of the main benefits attributed to reputation, and the authors cited.

As regards the weaknesses of reputation referred to in the articles, the authors mention that Reputation Cannot be Improved Quickly (de Chernatony, 1999; Chun, 2005), and Lacks a Common definition regarding which no consensus has been reached yet (Miotto et al., 2020). Further, it presents a lack of clarity regarding its management and remains a challenge for universities (Şontait and Bakanauskas, 2011). It shows a degree of complexity within which the following aspects can

TABLE 3 | Definitions of reputation.

Definition	Authors who cite
Reputation ...	
...is a description of the evaluation and attitude of various people concerned about the state of a company (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990)	Harahap et al., 2018
... has been conceptualized as the public recognition and social approval of an organization (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990)	Zavyalova et al., 2016
... is a social construct defined as the generalized level of esteem for an organization held by a stakeholder (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990)	Finch et al., 2013
...is a collective system of subjective beliefs among the members of a social group (Bromley, 1993, 2000, 2002)	Munisamy et al., 2014
... is a summary of the impressions or perceptions held by external stakeholders (Bromley, 1993)	Lee et al., 2015
... can vary between stakeholders based on each group's perception of the degree to which the organization in question meets their unique expectations (Bromley, 2002)	Aula and Tienari, 2011
... "the perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future expectations that describes the overall first attractiveness for all its key constituents compared to other rivals" (Fombrun, 1996, p. 72). One of the most cited	Finch et al., 2013; Miotto et al., 2020; Vogler, 2020a
...refers to the fact that the term reputation serves to characterize the distribution of opinions (the open expression of the collective image) about a person or entity, by a stakeholder that is constituted over time. It is a valuable intangible asset (Fombrun, 1996)	Maduro et al., 2018
...relates to the general esteem in which constituents hold an organization, incorporating four key elements, which include credibility, trustworthiness, reliability, dependability, and accountability (Fombrun, 1996)	O'Loughlin et al., 2013
...a good reputation is important because of its value-creating potential and the fact that its intangible nature makes it difficult for competing organizations to copy (Roberts and Dowling, 2002)	Suomi et al., 2014
... is based on an overall, global assessment; reputation is reflected in consensus judgments and is evaluative (i.e., good vs. bad) (Roberts and Dowling, 2002)	Delgado-Márquez et al., 2013
... is a collective assessment of an organization's ability to deliver results of value to a representative group of stakeholders (Fombrun et al., 2000)	Heffernan et al., 2018; Miotto et al., 2020
... has been defined as multi-stakeholder assessments of the company's ability to meet its expectations over time (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2003)	Munisamy et al., 2014
...is one of the key antecedents of consumer organization identification (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2003)	Heffernan et al., 2018
...is a collection of perceptions and beliefs, both past and present, that reside in the consciousness of an organization's stakeholders. Reputation = Experience Expectations (Rayner, 2005, p. 1, 69)	Suomi et al., 2014
...refers to the public perceptions of the organization shared by its multiple constituents over time (Sung and Yang, 2008)	Munisamy et al., 2014
... as having three distinct dimensions. First, it includes being known: the general awareness of a subject, i.e., an organization. Second, being known for something, when an organization's reputation is linked to results relevant to a specific audience, is a more strategic approach, and third, widespread favorability (Lange et al., 2011)	Finch et al., 2015; Kaushal and Ali, 2019
...is more of an extrinsic signal, which evolves through the flow of information between users (Loureiro et al., 2017)	Kaushal and Ali, 2019
...is seen as society's opinion about the quality, advantages, or disadvantages of someone, something, person, organization, or product (Reznik and Yudina, 2018)	Reznik and Yudina, 2018
...involves the point of view of both staff (identity) and customers (image). Corporate reputation is more than the image an organization conveys. It is the perception that the different audiences with which a company interacts have about it over time (Maduro et al., 2018)	Maduro et al., 2018

be highlighted: heterogeneity in terms of stakeholders and, as a consequence, differences in their expectations (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007; Suomi and Järvinen, 2013). When reputation is not successfully managed in the organization it is exposed to numerous risks (Suomi and Järvinen, 2013). In universities specifically, where it is understood as the quality of education, reputation is difficult to evaluate before being experienced (Suomi et al., 2014).

Summary of Findings

Taking into account the above findings, an outline is made with the most relevant points in the definition of university reputation. This is done with the understanding that it is the result of assessments made by both internal and external stakeholders of the performance and results obtained in the management of its substantive functions, namely, teaching, research, and

extension during a given period. Internal stakeholders include students, graduates, teachers, researchers, administrative and managerial staff, with the student being the main beneficiary of the educational service (Maringe and Gibbs, 2009, p. 29). External stakeholders include students' families and friends, research centers, private and public business sectors, the state, rankings, and suppliers, among others. **Figure 9** shows the results graphically.

CONCLUSIONS

The methodology developed for the literature search on reputation in higher education resulted in 231 articles. Not all of them were included taking into account the exclusion criteria within the screening process. However, it did allow for observing

TABLE 4 | Definitions of reputation in universities or higher education.

Definition	Authors who cite
University reputation...	
...is a function of information sharing and organizational performance, as prestige in higher education is largely a function of instructional resources and financial performance (Brewer et al., 2001)	Bastedo and Bowman, 2010
... is the result of the accumulation of impressions received by stakeholders due to communication and interaction with universities (Rindova et al., 2005)	Aula and Tienari, 2011; Steiner et al., 2013;
... is conceptualized as a process of continuous evaluation by relevant stakeholders (Rindova et al., 2005)	Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2020
... is considered a valuable intangible asset for organizations due to its relationship with positive performance (Rindova et al., 2005)	
... is defined as the vision, representation, or impression that people form in their minds based on information or data about a university obtained through interaction with the elements or components of the university (Cole and Bruch, 2006)	Chen and Esangbedo, 2018
The collective representations that the university's multiple constituents have of the university over time (Alessandri et al., 2006, p. 261)	Harahap et al., 2018
The reputation of an institution of higher education is defined as the image of quality, influence, and trustworthiness it has in the eyes of others	Stergiou and Tsikliras, 2013
Reputation is the subjective reflection of the various actions an institution takes to create an external image. An institution's reputation and its quality may be related, but they need not be identical. Higher education institutions try to influence their external images in many ways, not just by maximizing their quality (Van Vught, 2008, p. 169)	
The reputation of an institution from the perspective of the consumer (student) who has many choices due to the variety of providers in the educational marketplace. They identified four key perspectives of organizational reputation applicable to the higher learning environment which are public relations, marketing communication, crisis/risk management, and corporate brand perspective (Maringe and Gibbs, 2009)	Munisamy et al., 2014
...is defined not by what universities say about themselves but by the unsolicited opinions of respected third parties (Roberts, 2009)	O'Loughlin et al., 2013
University reputation, which has different meanings for different groups and scientific fields, is a form of social capital within the higher education system that can also be transformed into economic capital (Federkeil, 2009, p. 32)	Stergiou and Tsikliras, 2013
The reputation of HEIs represents an intangible capital and a valuable asset and is recognized as playing an important role in differentiation and competitive advantage vis-à-vis the competition. This competitive environment together with the limitations of public resources for higher education makes the image an essential part of HEI strategic management (Luque-Martínez and Del Barrio-García, 2009)	Maduro et al., 2018
...serves as a critical surrogate for quality, guiding university selection and evaluation (Hemsley-Brown, 2012)	Plewa et al., 2016
... is the subjective reflection of the various actions that an institution undertakes to create an external image	Stergiou and Tsikliras, 2013
Definitions given by the same authors of the paper	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation is described as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions a person has about an object, individual, institution, or organization based on past and current events • University reputation (UR) is an institutional status built as people constructs regarding university goals, ethics, work methods, and treatment received by students • In other words, UR refers to a natural and spontaneous character, expectations, and exchange that people have with the university 	Chen and Esangbedo, 2018

the growing interest in this topic given the impact it has on organizations, in this case, in the higher education sector.

In addition, and as expected, definitions of organizational reputation were adopted and applied to the processes of university reputation management. However, some authors chose to make adaptations of these definitions to the context of higher education institutions, emphasizing the importance of identification and relationship with stakeholders (Finch et al., 2015; Verčič et al., 2016; Zavyalova et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2018; Carrillo-Durán and García, 2020), understanding the differences between the needs and knowledge that each one has of the organization, as well as underscoring the concern over the time it takes to develop a solid reputation in the market (Brewer and Zhao, 2010; Loureiro et al., 2017), which is different and generates value and competitive advantage (Burke, 2011; Feldman et al., 2014; Munisamy et al., 2014; Marginson, 2016). As regards reputation built over time, universities must compete to gain a

position (Chapleo, 2007) in the local, national and international markets, which are becoming more complex, given the impact that rankings—which have become a benchmark of the quality of universities—have on the valuation of stakeholders (Bowman and Bastedo, 2011; Drydakis, 2016; Wolf and Jenkins, 2018).

Therefore, it was found that reputation is decisive in the student's shopping experience (Handayani, 2019; Pitan and Muller, 2019), which includes university selection, influencing, their lived experience in the training process (Sajtos et al., 2015), placement or job attainment rates (Smith et al., 2008; Laker and Powell, 2011; Finch et al., 2013), and development of entrepreneurship (Parente et al., 2015). From the institutional point of view and within the framework of the purchasing experience, reputation management also helps in areas such as retention of students (Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2019), relationships with the business sector, agreements with other educational institutions, advancement of

TABLE 5 | Benefits of reputation.

Benefits	Authors
Reputation...	
Reduces risks, lowers costs, and offers many other benefits such as financial value, the attraction of investors and resources, sustainable competitive advantage, and organizational success	Dierickx and Cool, 1989; Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Barney, 1991; Fombrun, 1996; Deephouse, 2000; Gardberg and Fombrun, 2002; Altbach, 2004; Deephouse and Carter, 2005; Rayner, 2005; Rindova et al., 2005; Chapleo, 2007; Pfarrer et al., 2010; Burke, 2011; Finch et al., 2013; Feldman et al., 2014; Marginson, 2016; Christensen and Gornitzka, 2017; Vogler, 2020a
Serves as a sign of product quality	Dawar and Parker, 1994; Bigné et al., 2001; Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001b; Bolton et al., 2004; Rindova et al., 2005; Jin et al., 2008; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Loureiro and Kastenholtz, 2011; Priporas and Kamenidou, 2011; Hemsley-Brown, 2012; Suomi, 2014
Reduces stakeholders' uncertainty in their decision-making processes by generating confidence in the quality, value, and differentiation of the product	Fombrun et al., 2000; Rindova et al., 2005; Lange et al., 2011; Hemsley-Brown, 2012; Munisamy et al., 2014; Miotto et al., 2020
Shows the company or university as the best place to work, thus attracting the best of employees, teachers, and students; improving their intellectual capital and increasing their tacit knowledge	Deephouse, 2000; Lemmink et al., 2003; Rayner, 2003; Gaultier-Gaillard and Louisoit, 2006; Roberts, 2009; Brown and Whysall, 2010; Pfarrer et al., 2010; Fumasoli and Huisman, 2013
Generates higher levels of stakeholder confidence even in crises	Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Fombrun, 1996; Melewar, 2003; Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa, 2004; Rayner, 2005; Schnietz and Epstein, 2005; Coombs and Holladay, 2006; Csiszar and Heidrich, 2006; Love and Kraatz, 2009; Pfarrer et al., 2010; Lange et al., 2011; Feldman et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2017
Improves the recruitment of graduates as they possess more social, cultural, and human capital	Rindova et al., 2005; Morley and Aynsley, 2007
Is a key factor in a student's choice of university	Dowling, 1994; Bourke, 2000; Conard and Conard, 2000; Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001b; Briggs, 2006; Bowman and Bastedo, 2009; Fumasoli and Huisman, 2013; Munisamy et al., 2014
Contributes to the payment of a higher price to an organization—charging higher rates	Shapiro, 1982, 1983; Rindova et al., 2005; Sauder and Lancaster, 2006; Vidaver-Cohen, 2007; Fowles et al., 2016
Is a driver of university reforms and development work as well as research performance	Steiner et al., 2013; Ho and Peng, 2016
Can be used to measure organizational effectiveness as well as improved financial performance	Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; de Chernatony, 1999; Baden-Fuller and Ang, 2001; Roberts and Dowling, 2002; Kitchen and Laurence, 2003; Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007; Walker, 2010; Feldman et al., 2014
Increases student satisfaction as well as student loyalty	Fombrun, 1996; Bigné et al., 2001; Davies et al., 2002; Palacio et al., 2002; Roberts and Dowling, 2002; Jin et al., 2008; Sung and Yang, 2009; Caruana and Ewing, 2010; Bartikowski et al., 2011; Loureiro and Kastenholtz, 2011; Plewa et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2017
Relates to the positive attitudes of customers toward the company's products	Bartikowski et al., 2011
Can positively affect students' priorities in social and academic life	Arambewela and Hall, 2009; Park, 2009; Delgado-Márquez et al., 2013
Is considered crucial for survival given the stiff competition between universities and creates barriers to entry	Rao, 1994; Alves and Raposo, 2007; Aula and Tienari, 2011; Feldman et al., 2014; Lafuente-Ruiz-de Sabando et al., 2018
Attracts positive media coverage	Rayner, 2005; Suomi et al., 2014
Influences the favorable evaluation of an organization and the positioning of the university	Dodds et al., 1991; Chapleo, 2007; Jin et al., 2008, p. 327; Curtis et al., 2009; Hemsley-Brown, 2012

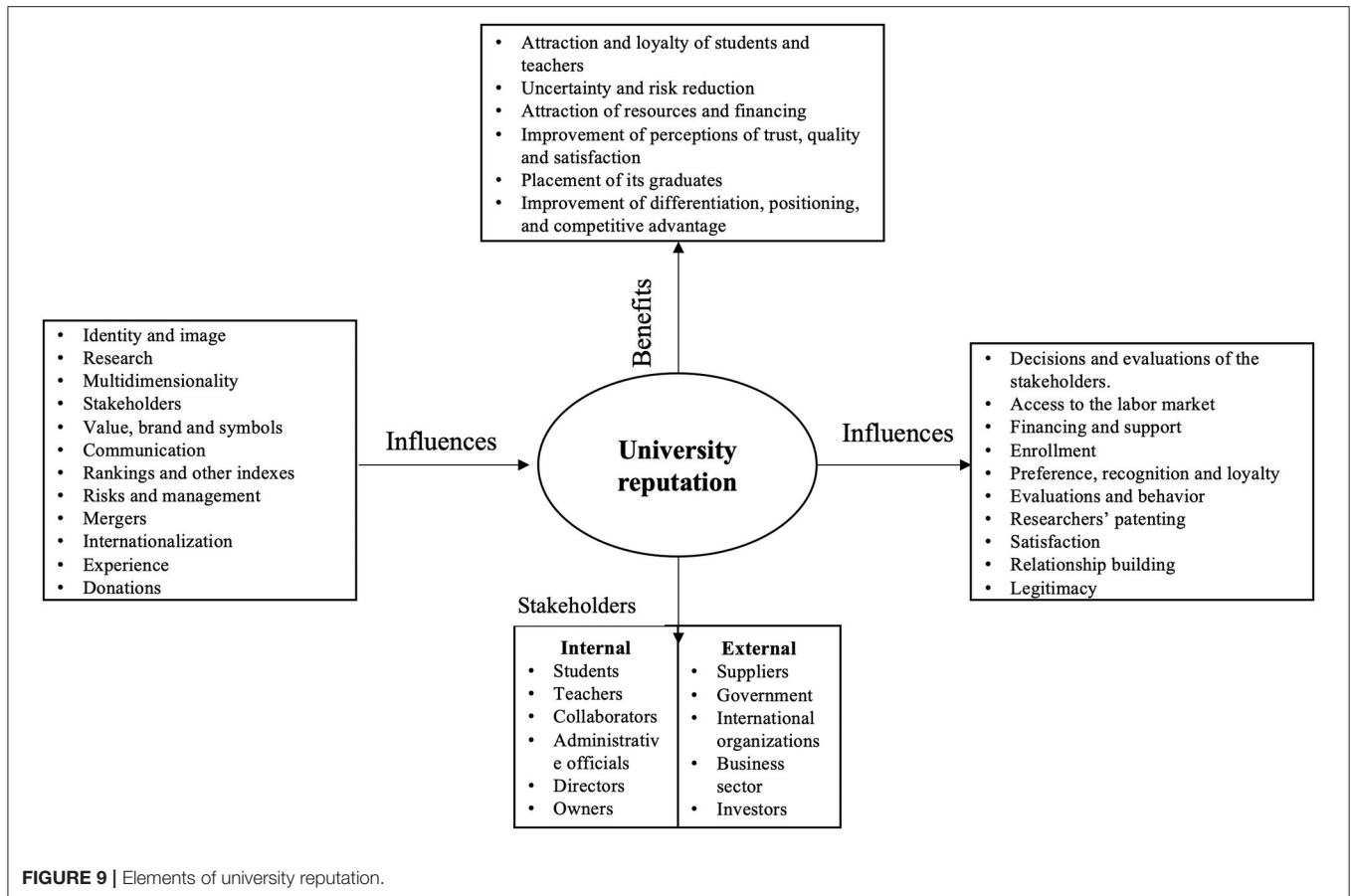
research (Morphew et al., 2016), exchanges at the national and international level (Plewa et al., 2016), and relations with the media (Deephouse, 2000), etc.

To capitalize on each of these findings, **Figure 9** shows a compendium of the points considered most relevant in the search, on the variables that influence reputation, the variables that are influenced by reputation, its benefits, and main stakeholders categorized as internal and external, following Verčič et al. (2016, p. 165). In the evaluations made by external stakeholders, a critical point is the knowledge they have about the university given its proximity which influences their opinions that may be biased but have an impact on the reputation and quality of work of a university (Steiner et al., 2013). For its part, reputation management among internal stakeholders, mainly

students, have a positive impact on their attitudes (Foroudi et al., 2019) and is a key element for the success and survival of universities (Christensen and Gornitzka, 2017), which currently operate in a complex and competitive environment, in which they must compete with other HEIs for access to different resources and meet the expectations of all their stakeholders.

DISCUSSION AND AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The challenges of reputation management in educational institutions are evident in the literature review addressed. Issues such as the increase in academic offerings in terms of scope



and variety of programs (Maringe and Gibbs, 2009), changes in funding structures (Steiner et al., 2013), internationalization of education (Plewa et al., 2016), globalization and mobility of students and faculty (O'Loughlin et al., 2013), as well as the focus on achieving high quality certifications as a strategy to show university differentiation and influence the images received by the various stakeholders, especially the student as the main user of the service, are crucial issues for university competitiveness. In fact, it is important to clarify that reputation and quality are related, but not necessarily identical (Van Vught, 2008). In addition, authors such as Roberts (2009) point out that, in order to achieve the main objective of the university, in terms of offering a high quality service that responds to the needs of society, it is necessary and indispensable to work together and articulate between employees and departments with mechanisms that support management to achieve a positive reputation.

This management implies that universities adapt to these new models and systems of evaluation and measurement to show indicators of academic quality (Steiner et al., 2013), which is why managers also focus their attention on improving their performance in the different rankings (O'Loughlin et al., 2013). Among the prominent rankings to measure the reputation of the most prestigious universities in the world, are the Academic Ranking of World University ARWU (also known as the

Shanghai ranking), the British ranking Times Higher Education -THE, and the Quaquerelli Symonds-QS. Each of them has different indicators and weights in their measurement. The ARWU for example, takes into account graduates and teachers with Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals, the most cited researchers, the amount of indexed articles and their respective citations. However, these rankings have been criticized for their focus on the research capacity of universities and the way in which the individual indicators used to obtain the synthetic indicator are weighted (Parellada and Álvarez, 2017). And indeed they have had an impact on the "publish or perish" message received by university faculty and professors, further evidencing the value of research (Linton et al., 2011). Despite the negative biases of this type of measurement, rankings remain an important variable that influences reputation and, in fact, is consolidated in cluster 2, found in this study.

Subsequent research work can focus on further developing and understanding the multidimensionality of the concept of university reputation, in the light of a theoretical corpus that continues to evolve based on the characteristics and particularities of higher education and the challenges posed by the social, economic, political, and environmental contexts in which it develops its substantive functions. They will also be able to validate the relationships between

the variables found, as well as to propose new variables that have not been contemplated and that may have an important and predictive impact on the performance of the construct.

LIMITATIONS

This review focused on a 10-year period, by analyzing two databases, WoS and Scopus. As such, other databases that might contain articles on university reputation were not considered. Similarly, we did not include languages other than English, given that the number of documents found in the searches was sufficiently extensive only in that language. Besides, as mentioned earlier, most of the literature is in English. Further, articles indexed in journals located in quartiles 3 and 4 were not taken into account. As such, articles that may have contributions or theoretical perspectives different from those found could have been omitted. Furthermore, it is understood that a sample of 62 articles is only a part of all the literature found on reputation in universities and that a broader more inclusive review could generate different conclusions. However, this systematic review was carried out exhaustively, analyzing each of the documents found to generate the results presented here.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/**Supplementary Material**, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

FJ contributed to design of the study and supervised both the development of the research and the manuscript. MA completed the majority of the literature review and wrote the first draft. Both authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

FUNDING

The publication of this article was supported by the Research Department, School of Business, Universidad del Rosario.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2022.925117/full#supplementary-material>

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