REPUTATION OF MOROCCAN UNIVERSITIES: ADOPTION AND ADAPTATION OF STRATEGIC AND MARKETING COMMUNICATION CASE OF ABDELMALEK ESSAÂDI AND HASSAN 1ST

REPUTAÇÃO DAS UNIVERSIDADES MARROQUINAS: ADOÇÃO E ADAPTAÇÃO DA COMUNICAÇÃO ESTRATÉGICA E DE MARKETING CASO DE ABDELMALEK ESSAÂDI E HASSAN IO

Laila DROUICHE
ORCID 0009-0000-1386-9205

Laboratoire de recherche en Sciences de l'Information, de la Communication et du Discours.
LabInfoComDI
ENS Tétouan, UAE
Tétouan, Morocco
l.drouiche@gmail.com

Hassan BAHA
ORCID 0009-0007-5273-0469

Laboratoire de Recherche Langues, Arts et Sciences Humaines
FLASH – Université Hassan 1er
Settat, Morocco
hassan.baha@uhp.ac.ma

Abstract. The competitive environment requires universities to develop and maintain their reputations. The importance of university reputation as a strategic intangible asset has also grown over the past two decades. Although there are studies in the literature that attempt to develop university reputation strategies, they are still in their infancy. The present project attempts to measure the reputation of Moroccan universities by adopting a qualitative methodology, through a review of relevant literature and a documentary analysis of universities' digital interfaces. University reputation is developed and validated through analysis of data extracted from web portals and social networks. The results show that a university's reputation is a multidimensional concept comprising dimensions such as academic competence, institutional mastery and socio-economic attractiveness. The aim of this research is to enrich the literature on university reputation, enabling academics and practitioners to assess the reputation of different universities.

Keywords: Reputation; University; Branding; Communication; Strategy

Resumo. O ambiente competitivo exige que as universidades desenvolvam e mantenham suas reputações. A importância da reputação universitária como um ativo intangível estratégico também aumentou nas últimas duas décadas. Embora existam estudos na literatura que tentam desenvolver estratégias de reputação universitária, eles ainda estão em sua infância. Este projeto tenta medir a reputação das universidades marroquinas adotando uma metodologia qualitativa, por meio de uma revisão da literatura relevante e de uma análise documental das interfaces digitais das universidades. A reputação das universidades é desenvolvida e validada pela análise de dados extraídos de portais da Web e redes sociais. Os resultados mostram que a reputação de uma universidade é um conceito multidimensional que inclui dimensões como competência acadêmica, domínio institucional e atratividade socioeconômica. O objetivo desta pesquisa é enriquecer a literatura sobre reputação universitária, permitindo que acadêmicos e profissionais avaliem a reputação de diferentes universidades.

Palavras-chave: Reputação; Universidade; Marca; Comunicação; Estratégia

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, university reputation has become a ubiquitous and crucial concern in a variety of environments. Faced with rapid and far-reaching changes in the political, cultural, social, technological and economic landscapes, universities are beginning to pay particular attention to their reputation to ensure their success. The concept of reputation significantly influences a university's effectiveness, making it a strategic tool for success. A positive reputation can have a profound impact on a university's achievements. It is an intangible asset resulting from the perceptions of all internal and external stakeholders. A university's reputation includes shared beliefs about its identity and superiority, as well as its transparency and popularity in social and media circles, not to mention the mutual understanding fostered with communities. Corporate identity and image are closely linked to academic reputation.

In recent years, higher education establishments, particularly universities, have explored the concept of reputation. However, few studies have examined its components and associated factors. An institution's reputation represents its collective image over time, both internally and externally. Various communication channels, such as visual identity and communication architecture, contribute to a university's reputation. A positive reputation is associated with numerous advantages for academic institutions. The intangible nature of higher education and the difficulty of assessing its quality prior to experience make reputation an indicator of quality. As an influential variable, reputation fosters stakeholder confidence. In addition, it helps universities compete for financial resources, attract talented students, faculty and staff, facilitate quality development and enhance the institution's standing.

As a result of globalization and internationalization, universities increasingly recognize the importance of a positive image among stakeholders. A university's reputation depends on factors such as emotional appeal, communication strategies, social responsibility, access standards, research and career opportunities, student/faculty ratios, information technology, as well as the quality of teaching and scientific events. To achieve its objectives and missions, identifying the components of a university's reputation is one of the main challenges facing academics.

The importance of university reputation has been highlighted by various sources, but universities have not taken significant steps to acquire a favorable reputation among their stakeholders. This has become a major challenge. There is a need for applied research into university reputation and the crucial aspects of university reputation management. Consequently, the proper management of intangible assets, such as image and reputation, has become inevitable for most universities.

This project will analyze the various forms of strategic communication. We will study the presence and influence of our two universities, Abdelmalek Essaâdi and Hassan1er, by answering the question that forms the problematic: how do the two universities deploy strategic and marketing communication, in order to reinforce their brand image, nurture their reputation and increase their media visibility on a national and international scale?

In this study, we will attempt to identify the reputation-related components of the two Moroccan universities, Abdelmalek Essaâdi and Hassan1er, using a qualitative approach and a reflexive perspective. Previous studies have mainly focused on organizational reputation and, in some cases, international academic reputation, with limited research on this concept towards Moroccan universities. Results are scattered in this respect. Our study will use the method of non-participant observation of the web portals and official Facebook pages of the universities that form the corpus and focuses on two Moroccan universities, Abdelmalek Essaâdi and Hassan1er, offering an innovative perspective on the views of university representations relating to the components of university reputation compared to previous research. For this reason, this is a new study in the field of academic reputation. To achieve this objective, it will be necessary to:

- Review and study the state of the art related to this research;
- Verify approaches closely related to the concept of academic reputation;
- Explore academics' views on the components of academic reputation in Moroccan universities;
- Analyze and conceptualize a comprehensive model of university reputation in Morocco.

2. THE UNIVERSITY REPUTATION IMPERATIVE

Today, institutional reputation is of growing importance. It refers to how an institution compares to similar entities. According to (Carpenter and Krause: 2012), it contains beliefs about the entity's capabilities, goals, background, history and mission, which are perceived by

different audiences. To strengthen its social capacity, the institution must consolidate its reputation. Indeed, institutional reputation is one of the key factors determining the fate of an organization. The absence of a reputation can be considered detrimental to an institution's survival. A solid institutional reputation provides a competitive advantage. For a university, it is simply the belief and public perception of the university, including the perception and apprehension of stakeholders.

Reputation represents, over time, a social recognition that persists in the minds of stakeholders. As educational institutions, universities are not exempt. They have also undergone fundamental changes in response to evolving socio-economic needs. The recent increase in demand for higher education, the globalization of labor supply and the agility of international mobility have created a competitive higher education market. As a result, universities face the challenge of increasing the number of student applications, improving their rankings and the career prospects of graduates. To elevate a university's position in today's competitive academic landscape, reputation has become crucial. In turn, a university's institutional reputation, as perceived by potential students, is positively correlated with their intention to study there.

Several factors have a significant effect on a university's reputation and image, including stakeholders' perceptions of the university's identity, culture, quality of teaching resources, scientific research, infrastructure, university management process, public relations and media coverage of university events (scientific/cultural). In addition, stakeholders' views on all dimensions of the university, (award winners, league tables, performance of individual institutions and departments, performance of academics in dealing with external audiences, accountability, respect and effectiveness of administrative bodies) all contribute to the university's reputation. Consequently, all university activities are strategically oriented and managed to acquire a good reputation through strategic communication. This is based on internal and external communication practices, and the following phenomena explain the evolution of the communication process: (Engwall, 2008: 33)

- Competition: between growing institutions, requiring ideal visibility of institutions and their activities;
- A process of socialization: where professors and administrators provide the most accommodating way of ensuring previously distorted communication practices;
- A tendency towards institutional mimicry, where faculty and administrators currently share “good practice” and distinguish the “communications turn” at university level.

3. THE SOCIAL REPRESENTATION OF REPUTATION

With the emergence of information and communication technologies, reputation has taken centre stage in the media. It is an essential factor in a series of evaluations that impact on the performance of an individual or institution. In sociology, reputation is a central concept, and can be defined as “ a shared, provisional and localized social representation, associated with a name and resulting from more or less powerful and formalized social evaluations”. This representation implies actions on the part of the person or entity in question.

In the context of universities, the collective judgments conveyed/shared by the various actors (faculty, students, administrators, general public) contribute, in one way or another, to their reputation, which determines a university's productivity. This reputation is built on scientific activities, projected image, teaching quality, partnerships and local and international rankings. These performance indicators lay the foundations for a solid, trustworthy reputation, which explains why “reputation is an already-la constructed by third parties and relied upon by others to make judgments or decisions”.

The concept of a university's reputation in sociology is crucial, as it enables it to attract the best students and researchers. This reputation, good or bad, has a direct impact on public and

private funding resources, as well as national and international grants. On scientific reputations, Pascal Ragouet defines them as “a space within which relationships of exchange, cooperation and competition for trophies are forged”. This competition contributes to the socio-economic development of the region in which the university is located, attracting the attention of investors and encouraging international collaborations.

This positioning in the academic world cannot be achieved in the absence of the three main dimensions of a university's reputation: awareness, quality of teaching and research, and brand image. A university's reputation is essentially based on the name of the institution in question and its visibility among the general public and professionals. These two elements are assessed through communication campaigns, media strategies and academic contributions. The quality of teaching and research is distinguished by the curriculum and scientific output. A university's brand image, meanwhile, is associated with the values and implications it conveys to the public, such as the principles of social commitment, the rules of scientific ethics and the role it plays in sustainable development.

Also in the sociology of reputation, Bourdieu sees reputation as a form of symbolic capital. This is “a capital of (social) reasons for existing”. This recognition, alongside the other dimensions of reputation mentioned above, strengthens the university's presence in the academic world, both nationally and internationally. This symbolic capital is a decisive force in the acquisition of the necessary material and immaterial resources. The theory of symbolic capital is not the only one involved in the reputational process of a university. We can also cite the theory of social networks, which involves networks of relationships via collaboration and partnerships with various public and private organizations. Universities can also rely on signal theory to communicate signals to the market about the quality of their teaching and scientific output. These signals take the form of international rankings, the success of its prizewinners, accreditations and research publications.

4. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES: THE AVATAR OF UNIVERSITY REPUTATION

University reputation is not an arbitrary construct. Although it is the product of a social construction in which different actors and factors (stakeholders, community and networking) interact, university reputation above all calls for different approaches, methods and communication strategies. These generate decisive advantages and a stronger reach in an increasingly competitive market. For solid, high-quality communication, these instruments include both traditional and digital communication approaches, known as “e-reputation”, each of which has its own effects and results on the image of universities.

To better manage a university's reputation, it is essential to rely on public relations. Public relations have a direct impact on a university's image and position it in the national/globalhigher education market. This technique of information and promotion enables the university to improve its visibility and maintain its reputation with the public, building trust and creating links with stakeholders. According to the British Institute of Public Relations (IPR), public relations is:

The discipline that deals with reputation with the aim of gaining understanding and support, and influencing opinion and behavior. It is the planned and sustained activity of establishing and maintaining goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.

Public relations promote academic excellence, corporate history and scientific integrity, while fostering the spirit of research and student autonomy. Through well-developed communication plans, public relations develop a brand image, while preparing for potential crises so that reputation is not directly impacted.

For any organization, whether private or public, reputation is a key element in public relations. It determines an institution's image. That's why it implements communications strategies to promote a positive and appropriate image among its stakeholders. This is why universities resort to institutional communications and techniques such as publishing annual reports and press releases, organizing press conferences and participating in scientific events. In “A Guide to Public Relations”, the Royal Canadian Legion shows that:

Public relations involves establishing and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with an organization's public through messages, events and activities that are timely, honest and conducted in the public interest while respecting the organization's brand image, including its core values.

Transparent, structured and effective communication builds trust and establishes credibility with the public. Universities can consolidate their reputation through a variety of communication channels, since their reputation is conditioned by all the actions and initiatives they implement.

The Internet offers a wealth of platforms and tools for nurturing an institution's reputation. Among these are digital social networks, which have become indispensable means of reputation management. With platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter) and Linkedin, virtual life has thus established itself as an astonishing form of expression of the real. It can't be assigned to any spatio-temporal coordinates, it's not fixed to any precise place or time, and in this sense, its mode of existence is nomadic. It blurs the strict boundaries and delimitations of reality, inside and outside become interpenetrated, and the relationship between the private and public spheres is altered.

Universities' presence on social networks helps them to communicate and engage directly with their audiences. The process of sharing news of events, graduations, reports and testimonials from professors, students and administrators enables the university to create an active, ongoing and participatory engagement with the online community. This virtual presence is just one of many ways for the university to proactively manage its reputation.

Another Internet space is the website. Nowadays, it's important, even compulsory, for every company or institution to have its own space on the web. The importance of having online content is paramount for a university, in order to communicate with its public and manage its image and reputation. In the age of Information Technology, virtual communication is one of the keys to an organization's success. All these virtual platforms have become the university's showcase. They facilitate public access to information and represent the university's values, identity and programs, attracting an increasingly diverse and active audience.

5. INTRODUCING THE MARKETING APPROACH TO MOROCCAN UNIVERSITIES

Today, for many reasons, it is important for marketing communication to be integrated into all fields, as “marketing has become the queen discipline or universal model for social communication, and this goes far beyond advertising alone” (Floris, 2001). Marketing is used in many areas of the business world and the public sphere. Because of the diversity of these fields, the authors dealing with these issues consider it necessary to conceptualize and contextualize marketing strategies for each of them.

University-related marketing is the subject of research by a number of authors. Some research (Olszak, 2020) focuses on strategic marketing related to university performance, with an emphasis on marketing planning. Philip Kotler has focused on social marketing, which is “a social and managerial process in which individuals and groups satisfy their needs and desires through the creation, provision and exchange of valuable products with others” (Kotler, Saunders, Armstrong, and Wong, 2007), pointing out that:

"Social marketing is defined as the application of the marketing method to social problems, to organizations concerned with their insertion into society and their relationships with groups and publics in their environment, to public services and communities" (Serraf, 1985).

In addressing the future of university marketing, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of strategic and marketing planning, as well as a detailed study of an integrated communications plan and the creation of a successful university brand.

Strengthening the identity, image and brand of Moroccan universities, and diversifying them, is seen as a key factor in attracting new stakeholders. An organization's identity is closely linked to its brand, awareness, product, distribution and communication with stakeholders. It is, in a way, a projection onto the university. The university's brand and identity are the subject of much research. Indeed, Lowrie discusses "the development of university identity within and between the language of higher education policy and university marketing activities" (Lowrie, 2007), and describes how two different, even antagonistic domains (the university's mission and the marketing approach) affect the identity of these academic institutions. Certainly, the importance of strategic marketing for the development of universities in the context of economic development represents cooperation between the university and the economic sector as a concept of practical innovation. Indeed, those key factors influencing and shaping the success of a university's brand, such as a clear vision, a focus on a leadership position, and the involvement of academics in the creation of a successful brand, are realized through "marketing from the way universities around the world are adopting the corporate communication practices of the business sector" (Askehave 2007: 724).

A higher education institution must provide potential academics with consistent information and a desired image of its identity. All communication activities must be well prepared in the necessary sequence through comprehensive management. The conceptualization shows how the components of a university's marketing communication can be integrated and interlinked. The components represented constitute various marketing activities (Output) which interact with the university activities in (Input).

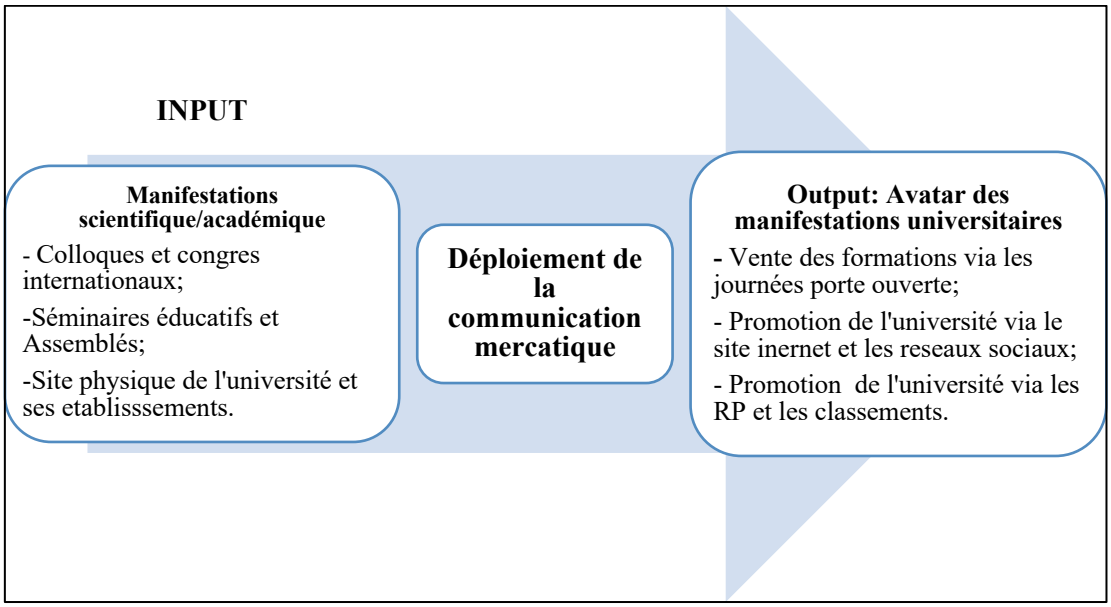

Figure 1. Input/Output conceptualization of marketing communication deployment[1]

[1]Input/Output conceptualization of the deployment of marketing communications carried out by us.

This integrated approach involves not only combining all the components of marketing communication, but also linking all academic activities within each communication element. We then achieve synergy through the interconnection of university input activities and have an output within university communication.

In the same context, university communication is not the only means of conveying information. The website created for the university will, for its part, promote the institution. (Libaert & Johannes 2010: 108) note that " the site provides [...] a permanent exhibition space for institutional information. The site is an information tool, an 'institutional showcase', an official source for the public seeking information ". In the case of corporate websites, (Cochoy, 2003) proposes three 'relational processes' specified by the deployment of the Internet in economic and commercial exchanges on any scale:

- Institutions need to be visible on an international scale, and design the company's 'virtual shop window';
- The Internet has become a tool for achieving anticipation.
- The aim is to forge external commercial links, in particular by strengthening real links and attracting real and virtual customers.

This study focuses on the communicative and marketing strategies of institutional/university reputation. The reason for using these theoretical perspectives is their close relationship with the concept of reputation in higher education. Given that the context studied is new in relation to the selected theories, all perspectives on academic reputation were used in this study. We used a qualitative approach for this research, employing non-participant observation to examine the content of the digital interfaces of the universities that form our corpus.

One of the key factors in successful marketing communication at universities is the choice of an appropriate form of communication. From non-participant observation of the content of the selected universities, it is clear that the key role should be played by web promotion in various forms, such as the university website, social networking presence and university rankings. There are also new forms of marketing communication, which primarily include social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube, as well as other web applications. It's a virtual world that offers a wealth of promotional opportunities.

6. DIGITAL INTERFACES: A STRATEGIC ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK

It's important to point out that, traditionally in Morocco, applicants didn't have to compete to get into university. As soon as they passed their Baccalaureate, they knew which university they were going to attend, which meant that the latter didn't have to make any effort to attract future students. However, the last two decades have seen an increase in competitiveness between universities. To achieve a high ranking, universities must meet several criteria, including the number of students and teaching staff at their institution. This criterion reflects the attractiveness of the university. In addition, website content is considered when determining a university's rating. Websites are becoming increasingly important and significantly influence university ranking indicators in various rating systems.

Today, a university's website is an important tool in the information-gathering phase of the decision-making process for stakeholders (students, professors, partners, etc.). Potential stakeholders' first impressions are digitally influenced by the website. A university's web presence is extremely important, as it turns out that visiting the website in the first place is a precursor to visiting the campus. The need to improve the shopping tool and stakeholder engagement in our case, for better first-page navigation and overall visual appeal, are paramount in website design. It's important to point out that the most important aspects of the website evaluation process are: the history or saga of the university, programs, courses and

location, including accreditations and cooperations. All these elements should be accessible from the very first page of the website. The web page is the gateway to all other forms of communication, and one of the main ways in which stakeholders choose their institution.

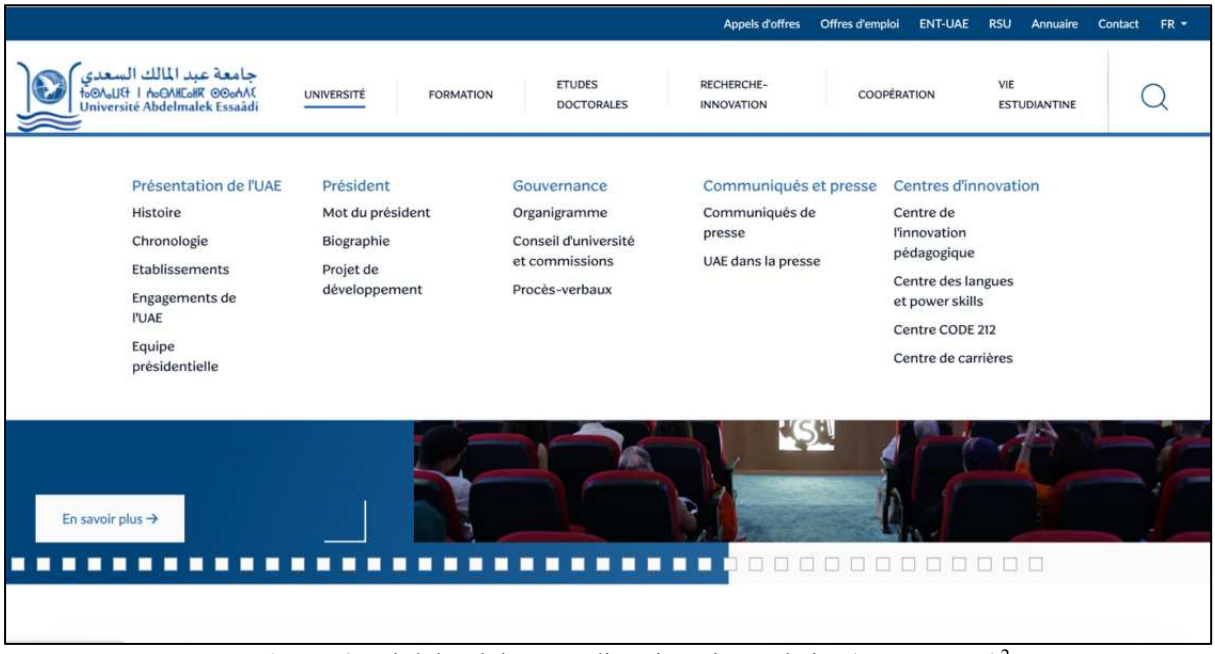

Figure 2. Abdelmalek Essaâdi University website (Home page)[2]

And in the same context of digital connectivity, it was necessary for Hassan1er de Settat and Abdelmalek Essaâdi universities to integrate themselves into the process of digital communication and publish information about the establishment and its academic activities, in order to raise awareness among a more informed public, which could be professionals, students and parents of future university students. On the university website, we find articles on university life, teaching and scientific activities, admission rules, scholarships and partnerships. The communication process is wide-ranging, and the algorithms provide the material needed to make this communication operation a success.

The Hassan1er University website is a platform designed to publish official information about the institution. When we look at the site, we see that it respects the criteria of an institutional site and is faithful to them. As a major element of communication, the institutional site, like that of Hassan1er University, strives to highlight the main tabs to make navigation easier for visitors. This is because the university's site, like any other corporate site, "aims to present the company in all its facets (presentation of the group, mission, professions, company history, finances, recruitment policy, etc.) and to develop the company's reputation and image".

[2] https://www.uae.ac.ma/ (consulted on 14/07/2024)



Figure 3. Hassan1st University website (Home page)[3]

The universities' online presence focuses on seven key areas, divided into sub-areas: university policy and strategy, components (faculties and schools), training, research, cooperation, student life and information. The difference with other (non-institutional) corporate websites is that we don't find customer service, technical support and promotional content. This layout on the platform allows the site to be clear, precise and transparent. This policy consolidates the university's reputation and fosters trust and credibility with stakeholders. By integrating this strategy, the university succeeds in improving its communication strategy. This Internet presence helps to promote educational services, support the university's image and communicate with the professional and scientific communities.

As part of the research, screenshots of university website homepages were analyzed using the visual content analysis method. As digital interfaces are constantly updated communication tools, the screenshots were taken on the same day. Visual content analysis is a research technique used to make reproducible and valid conclusions from data in context.

In this study, the steps of the visual content analysis method were followed. First, the images to be analyzed are determined. Then, based on these images, categories are created for coding lemmas. The images are coded according to the categories obtained, and the results are analyzed. Since most university discourses are generally concerned with the institutional aspect, of which the other points are already a part, let us note the lexicometric analysis of Abdelmalek Essaâdi University.

This analysis covers variables such as development, institutional image, economy, international, student life, program evaluation, campus aesthetics, innovation and value. Checking similar variables in the literature, there are 4 main variables. The homepage of digital interfaces was quantified as part of the variables identified. An analysis was carried out for each website, and these lemmas were placed under the variables in Ana text 2.3 software. The majority of university discourses are generally concerned with the institutional aspect, of which the other points are already a part. Take the example of Abdelmalek Essaâdi University, where the text of the university's development project includes lemmas allied to the academic-economic aspect.

[3] https://www.uh1.ac.ma/ (Accessed 07/14/2024)

Table 1. Lexicometric analysis of the UAE president's word[4]

Rang	Lemme	Fréquence	CorpusRef (par million)	LogLike (spécificité)
1	développement	8	9.64	100.425
2	université	5	28.255	47.261
3	culturel	4	8.335	45.786
4	recherche	5	68.305	38.472
5	région	4	38.615	33.532
6	formation	3	13.97	29.506
7	établissement	3	14.155	29.427
8	scientifique	3	19.075	27.640
9	innovation	2	1.405	27.261
10	international	3	20.555	27.193
11	amélioration	2	2.36	25.170
12	dynamique	2	2.735	24.577
13	universitaire	2	4.825	22.299
14	enseignement	2	9.565	19.561
15	institution	2	11.025	18.993
16	faculté	2	11.69	18.760
17	économique	2	13.865	18.079
18	multidimensionnel	1	0.09	17.898
19	positionnement	1	0.155	16.732
20	instauration	1	0.165	16.600
21	économie	2	20.325	16.555
22	objectif	2	20.845	16.454
23	offre	2	25.355	15.676
24	échelle	2	25.58	15.640

The variables detected as a result of the visual analysis are grouped as:

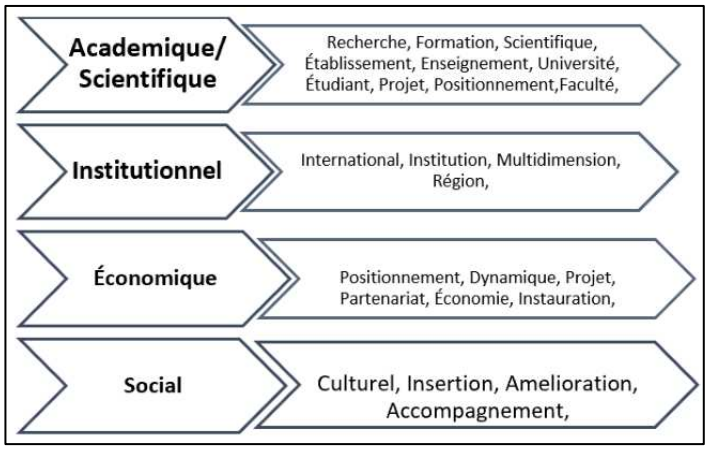

Figure 4. Visual analysis of university website content[5]

[4]http://phraseotext.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/anaText/sessions/18-Jul-24-105421-62/texte.txt.ttg.html
[5] Our visual analysis of university website content

The lemmas were determined under the “academic” theme. This is “Scientific Research”, which includes scientific studies, publications, conferences and congresses carried out by universities. The “Institutional” variable includes quality awards, achievement rankings and university league tables. When the universities' websites are analyzed from the “Social” angle, we find that although almost all of them offer para-university activities, these are generally conferences and workshops organized within their own structures, ensuring integration and interculturality. Scientific studies are followed by quality-related positions. It was noted that universities present their quality certificates and national/international rankings less for quality than for scientific studies. Finally, it was noted that the promotion of university undergraduate and doctoral programs has taken place.

With regard to the general structure of university portals, it is important to note that the home page contains information on current university activities, key news, contact details, administrative announcements and appeals, and a gallery of the various activities organized by the institution. Information on the university includes the history of the institution, facts and figures, student and applicant numbers, detailed reports on governance and the doctoral studies division. There's also information on the university's administration, teaching staff, students, and academic and student life.

The “Components” section presents the various faculties and schools associated with the university, with a link that takes us directly to the sites of these establishments. The “Training” section generally provides information on all levels of study: undergraduate, bachelor, master, postgraduate/doctorate. To attract applicants, the names of the university's departments and programs are presented, along with the requirements for students and the disciplines they can choose from.

The “Research, Cooperation, Student Life and Information” sections provide detailed information on admission, financial support for students and various projects. Information is aimed at applicants, national and international students, faculty and researchers from other universities.

Official university websites are increasingly used to enhance the image of universities, due to their effectiveness and practicality as a means of promotion. They represent a controlled communication tool, enabling universities to produce forms of interaction with the recipient that optimally meet their needs. In addition, the intrinsic quality of websites contributes to the formation of a university's brand image. Thus, the presence of images, fluid navigation, a variety of tabs and diversified, professionally designed media play a crucial role in enhancing the image of both universities.

As we've seen at Hassan 1er and Abdelmalek Essaâdi universities, the right layout of the site influences the target audience. By taking these characteristics into account, universities can exert optimum influence on stakeholders through their content, thereby helping to build brand image and attract applicants. As a result, the site's content represents a showcase for the resources of both universities, structured around texts, images, graphics, videos and similar elements, which fulfil an informative and expressive function.

In the context of digital communication, the websites of the universities forming the corpus play an important role as a source of information about them. A comparative analysis of the various websites of the higher education institutions with the greatest online presence reveals that most have a similar layout. In the sections aimed at stakeholders and applicants, the information put forward is mainly of an advertising and informative nature. On the other hand, in the sections aimed at the general public, the information presented is more informative. Educational information is closed to external users. In the tabs for graduates, the content is more advertising and informative, with a strong emphasis on encouraging further study. However, it is crucial - and this is not the case for Hassan 1er and Abdelmalek Essaâdi University - that higher education establishments have a high-quality English version, in order

Br. J. Ed. Tech. Soc, v.17, n.se4, p.34-49, 2024
DOI http://dx.doi.org/10.14571/brajets.v17.nse4.34-49
ISSN 2316-9907

to communicate about their activities and attract foreign applicants and, why not, teachers, thus improving their position in national and international rankings, as the current educational process requires close international cooperation.

Of particular importance is the growing awareness of the effect of social networks on universities' brand image, and their presence within this community. Social networks are becoming indispensable tools for the strategic positioning of these institutions. To protect their reputations, it's important for them to maintain a presence on these platforms and leverage their influence. Indeed, this virtual presence enables them to establish direct interactions with stakeholders, alongside the promotion of their scientific and educational activities. Such an approach has a positive effect on university engagement, as it provides immediate feedback, helping them to continuously improve their communications strategy. Increased presence on social networks facilitates communication and also helps to reach a diverse audience. Disseminating information, interacting with the public and gathering opinions are all assets of these platforms, helping to preserve and enhance the universities' brand image. From a methodological point of view, a descriptive study was carried out. The Facebook pages of Abdelmalek Essaâdi and Hassan 1er Universities were analyzed. Through this analysis, we collected data and obtained similar variables as the two universities' official website, such as the type of topics posted, the content shared and the type of interaction generated. This communicative approach helps them reach a wide audience, creating a more engaged community, which fosters greater recognition of the institutions and strengthens their position in the education market.

With the Covid-19 epidemic and the organization of events at a distance, the most popular networks in Morocco, such as Facebook, are becoming privileged places for maintaining the image of universities. In Morocco, for many reasons, Facebook is considered the most popular network par excellence. That's why the universities, in this case Hassan 1er and Abdelmalek Essaâdi, have embarked on platforms and maintained a form of interaction with the public, in order to develop their community and nurture their image and reputation.



Figure 5. Hassan1st University Facebook page[6]

[6] https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100057429558711 (Accessed on 07/27/2024)



Figure 6. Abdelmalek Essaâdi University Facebook page[7]

With regard to the number of followers on the official Facebook page of Abdelmalek Essaâdi University, the data show that at the time of the study, it had 50 K followers, which is a significant figure (Figure F). According to the data published and the interactions reached on the Facebook Page, notably the formula for calculating the engagement rate "(total engagement / followers or reach) x 100", the engagement rate obtained is ≃ 1%.

This result reveals a considerable number of posts published by the university on Facebook, but also shows that the level of interaction is not high despite the large number of followers. The data also shows that the university's Facebook posts are mainly images containing a hyperlink to the university's website. These hyperlinks mean that a simple "click" on one of the images displayed takes the surfer to another web page, hence the need to link the institutional website and official social network pages for an effective communication process and a relevant algorithm.

Table 2. Abdelmalek Essaâdi University's Facebook engagement rate for the 2023/2024 academic year[8]

Mois	Nombre de réactions, commentaires et partages	Taux d'engagements
Juillet	1452	2,9 %
Juin	801	1,6 %
Mai	2621	5,2 %
Avril	1586	3,1 %
Mars	2558	5,1 %
Février	2722	5,4 %
Janvier	963	1,9 %
Décembre	872	1,7 %
Novembre	974	1,9 %
Octobre	1036	2 %
Septembre	1207	2,4 %

[7] https://www.facebook.com/UAEofficiel (Accessed 07/27/2024)
[8] Engagement rate for Abdelmalek Essaâdi University, carried out by us

As for Hassan1er University, it has more than 31,000 subscribers. The university publishes, shares and disseminates its scientific activities. On its Facebook page, we note the establishment's commitment with 228 publications for the 2023/2024 academic year, i.e. ≃ 1% presence on the platform. This commitment is still far from imposing their communication strategy and strengthening its reputation.

Table 3. Hassan 1er University's Facebook engagement rate for the 2023/2024 academic year[9]

Mois	Nombre de réactions, commentaires et partages	Taux d'engagements
Juillet	3162	10,2 %
Juin	684	2,20 %
Mai	1672	5,39 %
Avril	549	1,77 %
Mars	994	3,20 %
Février	592	1,90 %
Janvier	300	0,96 %
Décembre	886	2,85 %
Novembre	1210	3,90 %
Octobre	946	3,05 %
Septembre	1305	4,20 %

Hassan1er University's Facebook engagement rate chart for the 2023/2024 academic year reveals striking monthly variations in the number of reactions, comments and shares. The engagement rate peaks in July at 10.2%, while the lowest rate is in January at 0.96%. These variations are linked to specific academic events and communication strategy. Periods of high engagement, such as July, reflect particularly attractive content, which may be linked to important events. To enhance its reputation, the university needs to develop a coherent communications strategy, and tailor its messages to the target audience.

In parallel with the communication strategy on the website and on Facebook, Hassan1er University is adapting to the changes the world has seen in recent years, and inviting opinion leaders in different areas of professional and sporting life. University events have been organized with public figures, politicians, journalists and athletes. Good relations with these opinion leaders help to promote the university's scientific and educational activities by highlighting the successes of their graduates in the professional, scientific and entrepreneurial worlds.

As we have seen, the main advantage of a website and social network over other channels and methods of disseminating information lies in their content, which is designed to achieve a lasting result, displaying a variety of information and helping to build the university's image. Moreover, university websites often feature interactive elements, enabling target groups to react through evaluations, opinion polls, forums and so on.

In short, the content of a university's website helps to build a representation of the institution in the global information network. To successfully nurture their image and reputation, universities need to clarify their communications strategy, which can attract potential students and meet the criteria of university rating and assessment systems.

7. CONCLUSION

The advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Morocco has profoundly transformed the higher education landscape, generating a revolution in

[9] Université Hassan1st 's commitment rate, achieved by us.

communication strategies and modalities. Universities have adopted a new dynamic, characterized by increased competition. This competition has intensified among Moroccan universities, prompting them to become more active in their scientific activities and to (re)adapt their communication strategies. They have thus become part of a competitive dynamic whose primary objective is to attract new student profiles and position themselves favorably in national and even international rankings. This change has resulted in an internal diversification of communication models and a constant (re)adaptation to the demands of the ever-changing educational landscape.

To achieve this goal, in a competitive environment, universities are transcending old practices by breaking out of their comfort zones. To do so, they are relying on a range of instruments, notably those offered by communication and marketing, with the sole aim of staying in the race for image, good reputation and notoriety. Indeed, a university's reputation is closely linked to its ability to set the scene and deploy a strategy (re)adapted to the expectations of today's scientific landscape.

Consequently, competitiveness in the scientific landscape no longer depends exclusively on the academic performance of students or the intrinsic value of the teaching provided. Reputation now hinges on effective communication and a well-developed marketing strategy.

As part of our work, we began with a content analysis and non-participant observation of the presentation and content of the Hassan1er and Abdelmalek Essaâdi University websites. We observed that these platforms presented detailed information on their scientific activities in the form of menus, divided into relevant sections. In the “university” or “about the university” navigation menu, the dominant discourse was one of mass information, science and advertising. The universities studied promoted their scientific achievements, their history, their status and the role they and their graduates played at national level. It's important to note that the websites of both universities follow the same stylistic and visual guidelines of an institutional website. This homogeneity in presentation seems to be aimed at reinforcing a more attractive image of university studies, making a direct impact on the target audience, attracting the attention of potential students and contributing to the image and reputation of these institutions.

The emergence of digital communication has profoundly changed communication strategies and tools for all institutions, including universities. Digital communication, and in particular social networking, is integrating new modalities into current communication practices. The integration of an interactive dimension into this digital communication on social networks gives the public an active role in the communication process. In a second phase of our work, we observed the presence of the two universities on the social network Facebook, the most widely used application in Morocco, which is considered the preferred space for today's youth. The communication strategies of the two universities studied are characterized by a quasi-permanent presence on this virtual platform. With this social network, building a good reputation for the two universities is closely dependent on well-constructed online communication and an effective marketing strategy. To keep pace with the ever-changing educational landscape, universities are called upon to constantly renew themselves. For almost ten years now, Hassan1er and Abdelmalek Essaâdi have been using their communication strategies to get closer to the public and create interactivity to promote their reputations. They offer attractive visual content and activities combining digital strategy, technicality and innovation.

REFERENCES

Agrebi , M, Flores, L. « Quelques enseignements sur la performance des sites web institutionnels », Décisions Marketing, 2013/2 (N° 70), p. 94.

Askehave, I. The impact of marketization on higher education genres - The international student prospectus as a case in point (2007), pp. 723-742

Carpenter, D.P, Krause, G.A Reputation and public administration, Public Administration Review, 72 (1) (2012), pp. 26-32

Chauvin, P.M, « La sociologie des réputations. Une définition et cinq questions », Communications, 2013/2 (n° 93), p. 132. DOI : 10.3917/commu.093.0131.

Cochoy, F. (2003). La « toile» comme force des points faibles? Vers de petites entreprises « internationales ». Réseaux, (121), 119-144.

Compiegne, I. « Chapitre I. La société numérique. Quelles réalités ? », dans La société numérique en question(s), Auxerre, Éditions Sciences Humaines, « Petite bibliothèque », 2010, p. 15.

Engwall, L. Minerva and the Media. Universities Protecting and Promoting Themselves. Dans C. Mazza, P. Quattrone, & A. Riccaboni (Éd.), Universities in Transition: Issues, Models, and Cases (2008) pp. 31-48. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Floris, B. Communication et gestion symbolique dans le marketing. Dans Les Enjeux de l'information et de la communication 2001/1 (Volume 2001), pp. 49-61

Kotler, P. Wong, V., Saunders, J., & Armstrong, G. (2004). Principles of Marketing: European Edition. Prentice Hall Europe.

La légion royale canadienne, « Guide des relations publiques », Legion, 2018, p.4.

Lebaron, F. Gérard MAUGER, Lectures de Bourdieu », Paris, Ellipses, 2012, p.72.

Libaert, T. « Chapitre 2. Les principes fondamentaux de la communication des organisations », dans, Introduction à la communication. Sous la direction de LIBAERT Thierry. Paris, Dunod, « Les Topos », 2014, p. 28-29.

Libaert, T., & Johannes, K. (2010). La communication corporate. Paris : Dunod. Luckmann, T. (2014 [1985]). Communicative Genres. Dans J. Angermuller, D. Maingueneau, & R. Wodak (Éd.), The Discourse Studies Reader. Main Currents in Theory and Analysis (pp. 350-356). Amsterdam : John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Lowrie, A. Branding Higher Education: Equivalence and Difference in Developing Identity (2007), pp. 990-999**.**

Olszak, E. Le marketing stratégique des universités : Universités catholiques, universités privées et universités publiques (2020)

Ragouet, P. « Notoriété professionnelle et organisation scientifique », in Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie, Nouvelle série, Vol. 109, Les sciences institutions, pratiques, discours, Juillet-Décembre 2000), p. 329,

Serraf, G. Dictionnaire méthodologique du marketing, éd. d'Organisation, coll. Adetem Marketing demain, Paris, 1985.