

Assessing key reputation drivers among staff members of the North-West University

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Dissertation accepted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree *Master of Arts in Communication* at the North-West
University

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Graduation: May/June 2023

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is a product of immense support from several special people. To these individuals, I express my gratitude:

- First and foremost, I thank God for putting this opportunity on my path, for enabling me to carry out this study and for always providing a way when I struggled.
- My study leader, mentor and role model, Prof Lida Holtzhausen: Thank you for taking on this study and sticking with me over the extension period. Thank you for your advice, help, and encouragement. You have been my inspiration for undertaking post-graduate studies. I have the world of respect for you.
- My parents, Steven, and Sharon Pieterse, for always believing in me, encouraging me, and supporting me throughout my education, emotionally and financially.
- My partner, Ivan Koortzen, and my dear friends Drs Charles and Jani van der Vyver, for your advice, support and encouragement.
- My manager and friend, Mrs Karen Tredoux and my director Mr Louis Jacobs, for investing in me and always being so understanding and helpful when I needed assistance, advice, or time off work to complete the study.
- Everyone in the NWU CRM department who assisted with the study. Specifically, I would like to, as the CRM team would say, give a shout out to Mr Clement Manoko, Mr Louis Jacobs, Mr Warren Mokgawe, Mr Jean-Marc Stidworthy, Mrs Jennekin De Beer and Mrs Marelize Santana.
- Prof Suria Ellis from the NWU Statistical Consultation Services for your advice regarding, and the processing of, the quantitative research.
- Mrs Cecile Van Zyl for proofreading the dissertation.
- Ms Anneke Coetzee (NWU Ferdinand Postma Library) for reviewing the bibliography.

ABSTRACT

The higher education sector (HES) in South Africa has been faced with two-plus decades of transformation in an attempt to redress the social injustices of the country's past (Webbstock & Fisher, 2016:18; Teferra & Altbach, 2004:29). South Africa attempted to use education to correct these inequalities (Mzangwa, 2019:2). In addition, corporate reputations worldwide have been affected by new trends such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the 4th industrial revolution, which have created a new type of stakeholder (Xu *et al.*, 2018:2941). Collectively, developments such as these have created a need for universities to ensure effective corporate communication strategies, especially corporate reputation management. The study conducted a literature review regarding corporate reputation. Here, the concept of corporate communication was first investigated. Thereafter, the literature review analysed corporate reputation in terms of its definition, stakeholder relations, the trends that affect it, its elements, its management, its measurement, and the advantages that a strong corporate reputation can yield.

A contextual study on the North-West University (NWU) was also conducted. This showed that the NWU, in particular, had undergone a substantial transformation over the past two decades. This included the iconic merger in 2004 of a historically white university, the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PU CHE), with two historically black universities, namely the University of the North West and the Sebokeng Campus of the Vista University (NWU, 2015a:3; Pretorius, 2017:18). The NWU was a university comprising of three campuses situated in Potchefstroom, Mahikeng and Vanderbijlpark. Each campus retained its own culture, identity, language, and academic niche areas. Each campus was also run by its own management structures, although governed at an institutional level by the NWU Institutional Office, which was separate from and higher than each campus (NWU, 2015a:4). However, the NWU was faced with transformation again in 2014 when the Council on Higher Education (CHE) called for further transformation within the South African HES and the NWU responded with a new strategy characterised by the shift from a federal to a unitary model, a lengthy restructuring process and an alignment process of academic programmes (Pretorius, 2017:130). These processes were to result in a more unitary university (NWU, 2017:1). The latter brought with it various challenges for the NWU, including negative reactions from key NWU stakeholders (Pretorius, 2017:142). One key stakeholder group identified by this study as being sensitive to, and impacted by these changes, are staff members. Staff are key stakeholders who have a direct effect on the organisation at hand's corporate reputation (Matuleviciene & Stravinskiene, 2015:78). That being said, the perceptions that staff have of the NWU are therefore important. To study these perceptions, this study makes use of (1) a literature review regarding the concept of corporate reputation and the management and measurement thereof, (2) semi-structured interviews with

the four members of the NWU Corporate Relations and Marketing (CRM) department's management, and (3) an online survey developed using RepTrak™ that was distributed to NWU staff.

The interviews' findings suggested that while NWU CRM management had a sufficient understanding of corporate reputation management, there was room to improve their understanding. These findings also questioned whether the NWU had a formal corporate reputation management strategy in place. The survey found that the NWU had an average corporate reputation in the eyes of its employees, and it was recommended that the university should strive to improve this perception.

The study furthermore provided insight into why the university's corporate reputation was perceived as being average and provided recommendations to the university to aid in improving its corporate reputation specifically in terms of its staff members.

KEYWORDS: competition; higher education; Institutional Office; Mahikeng Campus (MC); North-West University; positioning; Potchefstroom Campus (PC); reputation; reputation management; reputation measurement, restructuring process; RepTrak™; semi-structured interviews; systems theory; Vanderbijlpark Campus (VC)*

OPSOMMING

Suid-Afrika se hoër onderwyssektor (HOS) het vele transformasies ondergaan in die afgelope twee dekades as gevolg van die land se poging om die sosiale ongeregthede van die verlede reg te stel (Webbstock & Fisher, 2016:18; Teferra & Altbach, 2004:29). Suid-Afrika het probeer om tersiêre onderig te gebruik om hierdie ongelykhede reg te stel (Mzangwa, 2019:2). Korporatiewe reputasies wêreldwyd word ook beïnvloed deur nuwe tendense soos die *Covid-19*-pandemie en die 4de industriële revolusie (Xu *et al.*, 2018:2941). Gesamentlik het ontwikkelings soos hierdie 'n behoefte by universiteite geskep om effektiewe korporatiewe kommunikasiestrategieë te verseker, veral in terme van korporatiewe reputasiebestuur. Hierdie studie het 'n literatuurstudie oor korporatiewe reputasie behels. Korporatiewe kommunikasie is eerstens bespreek waarna korporatiewe reputasie ontleed is in terme van definisies, belangegroepverhoudings, die tendense wat dit beïnvloed, elemente, bestuursdimensies, meting en die voordele wat 'n sterk korporatiewe reputasie vir 'n organisasie kan inhou.

'n Kontekstuele studie oor die Noordwes-Universiteit (NWU) is ook onderneem. Hierdie studie het getoon dat die NWU in die afgelope twee dekades beduidende transformasieprosesse ondergaan het. Dit sluit in die ikoniese samesmelting in 2004 van 'n historiese wit universiteit, die Potchefstroom Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys (PU CHE), en twee historiese swart universiteite, naamlik die Universiteit van Noordwes en die Sebokengkampus van die Vista Universiteit (NWU, 2015a:3; Pretorius, 2017:18). Die NWU is tans 'n universiteit wat uit drie kampusse, te Potchefstroom, Mahikeng en Vanderbijlpark, bestaan. Elke kampus word gekenmerk deur eiesoortige kultuur, identiteit, taal en akademiese nisareas. Gedurende die ontstaansjare van die NWU is elke kampus deur hul eie strukture bestuur, alhoewel hulle op 'n institusionele vlak deur die NWU Institusionele Kantoor bedryf is. Hierdie Kantoor was apart van, en, en in terme van bestuur, hoër as elke kampus (NWU, 2015:4). In 2014 het die NWU weereens 'n transformasieproses in die gesig gestaar toe die Raad vir Hoër Onderwys (CHE) verdere transformasie binne die Suid-Afrikaanse HOS vereis het. Die NWU het daarop reageer met 'n nuwe strategie wat gekenmerk was deur die verskuiwing van 'n federale na 'n unitêre bestuursmodel. Hierdie model het 'n uitgerekte herstruktureringproses en 'n belyningsproses van akademiese programme geverg (Pretorius, 2017:130). Gesamentlik was hierdie prosesse daarop gemik om 'n meer unitêre universiteit daar te stel (NWU, 2017:1). Die herstruktureringproses het egter verskeie uitdagings vir die NWU meegebring, insluitend 'n sekere mate van onsekerheid en voorbehoud tussen sleutel belangegroepes van die NWU (Pretorius, 2017:142). NWU-personeellede vanuit al drie kampusse is geïdentifiseer as 'n sleutelbelangegroep wat deur hierdie veranderinge beïnvloed is, en wat sensitief daarteenoor opgetree het. Personeel word gereken as 'n kern belangegroep van enige organisasie wat 'n direkte uitwerking op die organisasie se

korporatiewe reputasie het (Matuleviciene & Stravinskiene, 2015:78). Om hierdie rede is die persepsies wat NWU personeel van die universiteit het, belangrik. Om hierdie persepsies te bestudeer, maak hierdie studie gebruik van (1) 'n literatuurstudie rakende die konsep van korporatiewe reputasie sowel as die bestuur en meting daarvan, (2) semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met die vier direkteure van die NWU se departement vir Korporatiewe Verhoudings en Bemarking (KVB), en (3) 'n aanlyn opname gekenmerk deur RepTrak™, wat aan NWU-personeel gestuur is.

Die onderhoude het bevind dat alhoewel NWU KVB-bestuur 'n voldoende begrip van korporatiewe reputasiebestuur gehad het, daar ruimte was om die toepassing daarvan te verbeter. Hierdie bevindinge het ook bevraagteken of die NWU 'n formele korporatiewe reputasiebestuurstrategie in plek gehad het. Die opname het bevind dat die NWU 'n gemiddelde korporatiewe reputasie in die oë van werknemers het, en daar is dus aanbeveel dat die universiteit daarna streef om hierdie persepsies te verbeter.

Die studie het beide teoretiese en praktiese insig toegevoeg oor hoekom die universiteit se korporatiewe reputasie as gemiddeld beskou kan word. Aanbevelings aan die universiteit is ook verskaf om die persepsies van werknemers rakende die universiteit se korporatiewe reputasie te verbeter.

SLEUTELWOORDE: kompetisie; kubernetika; hoëronderrys; Institusionele Kantoor; Mafikengkampus (MK); Noordwes-Universiteit; posisionering; Potchefstroomkampus (PK); reputasie; reputasiebestuur; reputasiemeting, herstruktureringproses; RepTrak™; semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude; stelselsteorie; Vanderbijlparkkampus (VK)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and background

The following sections provides an introduction and background to the study through outlining the theoretical circumstantial context of the study as well as the study's problem statement.

1.1.1 Theoretical context

Over the past decade, the business environment has grown, causing the nature thereof to transform into a more challenging, competitive, and borderless environment. This transformation is accredited to changes such as (1) globalisation (especially with regard to the products and/or services that organisations produce and provide); (2) the increase in expectations that stakeholders have of an organisation; (3) the innovation and development of technology; (4) the increasing reliance of stakeholders on these technological developments; (5) the virtual and widespread geographic workforces that these developments are gradually creating; and (6) the increase in emerging competitors that have positioned themselves within these modern prerequisites from conception (Panwar *et al.*, 2016:154; Vitale, 2020). Further research indicates that the most significant of these changes is the shift from organisations focusing solely on making as much profit as possible, to focusing on what stakeholders want and need in order have had an overall satisfactory experience with the organisation (Shina, 2020:4).

It is essential for organisations to understand that collectively these changes have not only produced the necessity for organisations to effectively communicate with key stakeholders, but also supplementary complexity for business transactions between organisations and these key stakeholders. A business decision made by any organisation will influence the organisation's long-term competitive position. These decisions on how to handle the changing business environment, and how to communicate with the developing stakeholders that this environment produces, must therefore align with the long-term growth of the organisation (Panwar *et al.*, 2016:155; Jones *et al.*, 2018:372). The changes within the political, social, environmental, and economic realms across the globe have forced organisations to rethink what they stand for and how they want to be viewed by their stakeholders. These new environments are challenging the ways in which organisations can adapt and how they communicate (Bektus, 2018:230; Schaltegger *et al.*, 2019:192). For organisations to survive, it is therefore necessary that they focus on managing and adapting to such inevitable changes (Vitale, 2020).

To adapt in a manner that will improve stakeholder experiences and perceptions, and therefore aid in the survival of an organisation, organisations should place more focus on enhancing

corporate communication functions (Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010:136; Abratt & Kleyn, 2012:1059). Corporate communication is an essential tool that all organisations should utilise (Lerbinger, 2018:11; Mohammed & Barkar, 2018:242).

Corporate communication is defined collectively as all communication with stakeholders that improves the organisation's position and corporate reputation (Lah *et al.*, 2016; Lerbinger, 2018:5). Moreover, corporate communication is seen as the collective tool that organisations use to communicate with stakeholders and to manage the perceptions that stakeholders have of an organisation (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012:1054; Mohammed & Barkar, 2018:242). It is important for organisations to effectively implement corporate communication functions, as the future of an organisation strongly depends on how it is viewed by its stakeholders (Bundy *et al.*, 2018:477; Cornelissen, 2020:2). To understand the latter, Cornelissen (2020:4) defines corporate communication as “a management function that offers a framework for the effective coordination of all internal and external communication with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favourable corporate reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organisation is dependent.” Furthermore, it is a function that symbolically projects a specific image of an organisation to its various stakeholders (Aula & Mantere, 2008:91; Ansoglenang *et al.*, 2018:11; Cornelissen, 2020:63).

While the concept of corporate communication comprises various functions that can aid organisations, this study intends to identify and emphasise the importance of one of these corporate communication functions, namely corporate reputation (Lah *et al.*, 2016:121). Corporate communication then links to corporate reputation in the sense that corporate reputation lies at the heart of corporate communication (Cornelissen, 2020:63).

Corporate reputation can be defined as one of the most important corporate assets (Lah *et al.*, 2016:137; Pires & Trez, 2018:48; Maduro *et al.*, 2019:79). Corporate reputation has measurable value and is furthermore a symbolic and strategic objective. It makes the organisation distinct and gives it a competitive advantage through two-way symmetrical and interactive communication (Helm & Tolsdorf, 2013:146; Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3).

Corporate reputation is the combined perceptions of stakeholders regarding their experiences with the organisation that have been formed over an extended period, or through various past interactions that stakeholders have had with the organisation (Aula & Mantere, 2008:15-29; Lah *et al.*, 2016:122).

The perceptions that stakeholders have of an organisation are critical as they influence the organisation's capability to sell products/services, draw in potential investors, employ paramount

staff and secure competitive advantages (Griffin, 2009:1-7; Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3). It is an intangible organisational asset that contributes to the inherent success and growth of any organisation (Gangi *et al.*, 2020:1975).

Corporate reputation is, furthermore, a principle that must (1) continuously be implemented through all organisational activities, (2) always be taken into consideration, (3) regularly be evaluated, measured, and mended where possible, and (4) be aligned to the objectives of the organisation (Aula & Mantere, 2008:15-29; Franklin *et al.*, 2009:196). Moreover, corporate reputation places emphasis on organisational activities that focus on the triple-bottom-line: i.e., people, planet, profit (Goldman *et al.*, 2012:33). Efficient corporate reputation management also contributes to the long-term success of an organisation, as it builds strong leadership for organisations to integrate the various levels within organisations and society, creating additional integrated management processes that protect the organisation (Caywood, 2012:4; Alshammari, 2016:19).

Corporate reputation management is a process that consists of building relationships with key stakeholders to maintain and improve its corporate reputation. Moreover, it involves on-going organisational activities that ensure that the organisation, its corporate reputation, and products/services are positively viewed by stakeholders, to favourably position the organisation within its specific sector (Caywood, 2012:4; Larson & Wirth, 2012:243).

When aiming to improve an organisation's corporate reputation, the role of an organisation's management is to ensure that the links in the corporate reputation chain are in place, are appropriate for the specific organisation, and are consistent and present in all levels of the organisation (O'Loughlin *et al.*, 2015:406; Pérez, 2015:14). Moreover, corporate reputation can be managed by managing the elements of which it is comprised, namely corporate identity, corporate image, corporate branding, corporate personality and corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture (Van der Walddt, 2017:79). It can also be argued that it is crucial for the implementation and measurement of functions, such as corporate reputation, to be aligned with the specific corporate nature and strategy of the organisation in question.

Corporate reputation management should furthermore not just be implemented by simply attempting to "transmit, transplant or project" a good corporate reputation – in a way that just makes the organisation look good. Rather, it should be earned through the company's "reliable and responsible activities, services and/or products", which prove that the organisation is indeed good (Aula & Mantere, 2008:15; Aula & Heinonen, 2016:165). A strong corporate reputation is a result of efficiently communicating and being transparent with stakeholders over an extended period (Lah *et al.*, 2016:139; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016:1794; Van der Walddt, 2017:77).

If this is not achieved, an organisation's corporate reputation may become damaged as they are likely to be negatively perceived by their stakeholders (Aula & Heinonen, 2016:165; Gangi *et al.*, 2020:1977).

Various instruments have been developed in theory and practice to measure an organisation's corporate reputation. However, each organisation is unique, and some instruments may therefore not produce useable results for certain organisations (Alves *et al.*, 2014:58; Eckert, 2017:146). Moreover, these instruments differ in terms of what their focus is, such as the finances of an organisation, or the perceptions of the organisation's stakeholders (Van der Waladt, 2015:116; Kaur & Singh, 2018:53).

Literature studies over the past two decades, by authors such as Davies *et al.* (2003:139-140), Chun (2005:99-105), the Reputation Institute (2016b) and Elam (2018) show that there are many instruments available to measure corporate reputations. These instruments include *Fortune's Most Admirable Companies Survey* (Elam, 2018), *Unidimensional Measurement Techniques*, including ranking measures, image and identity measures, brand equity scales, employee satisfaction and retention, customer satisfaction, loyalty and probability, the link between corporate reputation and performance, and multiple stakeholder reputation methods (Chun, 2005:99-105), the Reputation Quotient or *RQ* (Davies *et al.*, 2003:139), the *Rotterdam Organisational Test or RIOT* (Davies *et al.*, 2003:140), and the RepTrak™ *Pulse* (Reputation Institute, 2016b). Although each of these measurements is noted in literature, this study discusses the most well-known measures in the following chapter (refer to section 2.7). However, it is important to note that RepTrak™ is the measurement instrument of choice for this study.

Reasoning behind the latter is due to two major findings, namely (1) there is evidence that RepTrak™ is the most effective and most used measurement instrument of corporate reputation, and (2) studies regarding the measurement of corporate reputation within a university context have used RepTrak™ successfully. Regarding the former, RepTrak™ is considered one of the most viable corporate reputation measurement instruments available (Chapleo *et al.*, 2011:30; Van der Waladt, 2017:86). It is an effective and reliable instrument that has provided over three million companies globally with corporate reputation ratings (Reputation Institute, 2016b). RepTrak™ measures corporate reputation by applying its four themes (trust, admire, esteem and feeling) and seven dimensions (products and services, innovation, workplace, governance, citizenship, leadership, and performance) to the organisation at hand, and assessing how each is perceived by the organisation's stakeholders (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:5; Reputation Institute, 2016b). Regarding the latter, it is evident that in terms of a university context, former research has shown that RepTrak™ can be used successfully to measure the corporate reputation of a university, validating the use thereof in this study. Vidaver-Cohen (2007) used RepTrak™ to

measure the corporate reputation in terms of various stakeholder groups' perceptions of a business school. The study's conclusions state that the use of RepTrak™ within its context provided adequate and usable results. A UK PhD study undertaken in 2017 (*An evaluation of the impact of event attendance on perceptions of the host organisation's reputation: a university case study* by Angliss) regarding corporate reputation measurement within a university context concluded that the traditional method of measurement used by universities, namely performance rankings, has become invalid as a university's corporate reputation comprises of more than just that (Angliss, 2017:122). This research further indicated that RepTrak™ would be an adequate corporate reputation measurement instrument for universities. In 2019, a Malaysian-based study by Jie and Haum, within the context of a private university, used RepTrak™ to determine what the predictors of the university's corporate reputation in terms of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices were. The study's conclusions provided a link between the CSR practices and the university's corporate reputation, but indicated that if used within a larger framework, RepTrak™ would be a viable instrument to measure the university's corporate reputation on a broader scale. Taking these two findings into consideration, it was decided that because RepTrak™ has provided successful results within a university context, and because it is the newest and most used instrument to measure corporate reputation in organisations, it should be used to determine what the key drivers of the NWU's corporate reputation in terms of stakeholder perceptions are.

In summary, corporate reputation is therefore a key asset that every organisation should prioritise to understand, measure, and manage. Doing so could bring advantages for an organisation. In addition, RepTrak™ has shown to yield successful results when applied to a university setting.

The proceeding section explores the context of the study within the higher education sector (HES) in South Africa.

1.1.2 Context of Higher Education Sector in South Africa

The unique characteristics of a higher education institution (HEI) influence the development and implementation of the strategies/functions that they undertake (Mazais *et al.*, 2012:1; Ansoglenang *et al.*, 2018:2). This higher education sector (HES) is pre-eminently experiencing a gain in competitiveness as more individuals enrol in tertiary institutions compared to the past, resulting in an increased interest in the corporate reputation performance of universities (Mazais *et al.*, 2012:2; Degenaar, 2014:71).

The HES in South Africa is described as “vibrant” with many of its constituent institutions regarded as world-class academic institutions (SouthAfrica.Info, 2013). According to the Department of

Higher Education and Training (DHET) in South Africa, their objective is to ensure that the higher education landscape of South Africa becomes a “transformed” sector characterised by “high quality” education that is “demographically representative” and that “provides students and staff with opportunities” (DHET, 2020).

South Africa’s HES comprises of various bodies and institutions that fall into six categories. These are identified as (1) Universities of Technology, otherwise known as Technikons (e.g. Cape Peninsula University of Technology); (2) Traditional Universities (e.g. North-West University), (3) Comprehensive Universities (e.g. the University of South Africa – UNISA); (4) Private Universities and Colleges (e.g. Varsity Collage); (5) TVET colleges, formally known as FET Colleges (e.g. Boland TVET College); and (6) SETAs and other role players and authorities reporting to the DHET (e.g. AgriSETA, NSFAS) (Tjønneland, 2017:2; DHET, 2020).

The difference between these various institutions that offer higher education and training is found primarily in the type of qualifications that they offer. Universities of technology provide vocation education in terms of diplomas and/or degrees. Vocation education is described as training that moulds students to work effectively and productively in a specific occupation as soon as they have completed their training (Stumpf & Niebuhr, 2012:4; Markowitsch, 2017:10). Traditional universities are described as being institutions that offer degrees, comprise theoretical study as well as practical elements. Comprehensive universities are described as providing qualifications that are a combination of those provided by traditional universities and universities of technology (Southafricaeducation.info, 2020), while TVET colleges focus on producing graduates who have ample “intermediate skills” and “practical training” regarding professions in the labour market. Specifically, TVET colleges offer “vocational, occupational and artisan training” (DHET, 2020).

Another difference between these institutions is the level of education they offer (DHET, 2020). With this, post-school institutions, other than traditional and comprehensive universities, broaden the choice that individuals have when considering tertiary education. Although the quality of education and qualifications obtained from traditional and/or comprehensive universities such as the North-West University (NWU) makes them the leading competitors, smaller institutions do contribute to the competitiveness within the sector. This is especially true regarding those that offer students an education with lower financial implications and prerequisites. TVET colleges, for example, offer students who do not have university exemption to attend a traditional and/or comprehensive university, the opportunity to still acquire a post-school qualification. Where traditional and/or comprehensive universities place higher prerequisites on subjects such as Mathematics and Physical Science and require higher AP-scores, institutions such as TVET colleges only require students to have completed grade 9 and be 16 years of age or older (DHET, 2020).

Finally, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) represent specific fields (National Government of South Africa, 2020), while other role players within the sector provide services either to institutions or their students or play a role in how institutions are managed (DHET, 2020). These role players are identified as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), Council on Higher Education (CHE), Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), National Skills authority (NSA) and National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) (DHET, 2020).

Keeping the context of the HES in mind, the assumption can be made that traditional and/or comprehensive universities do not only have to compete with one other, but also other institutions that offer post-school qualifications. In addition, all these institutions must also ensure that they follow the guidelines as set out and required by the aforementioned role players within the sector (Degenaar, 2018:2; DHET, 2020).

HEIs furthermore have the objective of a successful bottom-line to an extent, as well as yielding successful tangible and intangible outputs, and should therefore also ensure that effective communication-based activities are in place (O'Loughlin *et al.*, 2015:406; Ansoglenang *et al.*, 2018:2). However, due to the unique nature thereof, applying effective communication strategies is more complicated in the HES compared to other sectors. The traditional approach, which mainly focuses on finance and is commonly applied in other sectors, has proven to yield less satisfactory results when applied to the HES. By using a traditional approach with universities, their integrity is challenged (Dholakia & Acciardo, 2014:144; O'Loughlin *et al.*, 2015:406). As a result, a need to define theoretical guidelines for corporate reputation specific to the HES has surfaced (Dholakia, & Acciardo, 2014:147; Rashid & Mustafa, 2020:297).

As previously revealed, it is evident that the new business environment influences corporate reputation and the management thereof (refer to section 1.1.1). This can be attributed to certain trends that have evolved within this new environment. The 4th industrial revolution, as one such trend, emerged over the past two decades, and in this time, has had a significant impact on how this new environment has been shaped. Otherwise known as Industry 4.0, the 4th industrial revolution is described as the “current trend of atomisation technologies” (Xu *et al.*, 2018:2941). Industry 4.0 is the development of industries to becoming “smart” or “intelligent” industries driven by technological advances (Manda & Dhaou, 2019:245).

Industry 4.0 is furthermore characterised by cyber-physical systems (CPS), the internet of things (IoT) and cloud computing. Together, these allow for the physical and virtual worlds to assimilate (Xu *et al.*, 2018:2941; Manda & Dhaou, 2019:245). Moreover, Industry 4.0 has caused such an immense shift in how organisations world-wide function, that it has become essential for

organisations to increase their “industrialisation, informatisation and manufacturing digitisation” so as to gain “efficiency, competency and competitiveness” (Xu *et al.*, 2018:2942). Taking into consideration that the main target audiences of universities and future of academia world-wide, are Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z’ers), generations driven by technology and the fast-paced advancements in the field, it is possible to assume that Industry 4.0 will have an effect on the HES. Industry 4.0 has therefore created an environment where organisations have a strong online presence and, with this, it is inevitable that stakeholders will see more of the organisation in the virtual world.

HEIs are often tasked with satisfying various stakeholder groups, which can be challenging. Universities must then find a way to position themselves to satisfy the needs of these stakeholders, which continue to evolve as markets evolve, better than their competitors (O’Loughlin *et al.*, 2015:406; Degenaar, 2018:2). It therefore seems that with the establishment of the new environment in which universities find themselves because of the transformation of the 4th industrial revolution, corporate reputation has begun to play a key role in attracting and maintaining loyal stakeholders that contribute to the inherent success of HEIs (O’Loughlin *et al.*, 2015:406).

In addition to the trend of Industry 4.0, in 2020, the world was hit with a global pandemic: The Corona Virus. This unforeseen and abrupt pandemic also influenced, and continues to influence, the business environment, including the higher education sector. Businesses, schools, and universities were shut down and had to find alternative ways to reach their objectives. Many universities opted to continue their teaching and learning plans via e-learning platforms, relying heavily on the virtual world. The readiness of universities to do so, the speed at which they came up with alternative plans, and the way in which they implemented these plans have also had an immense effect on their corporate reputations as their key stakeholders, namely staff and students, were and continue to be directly influenced by every step of this virtual existence that universities have had to convert to. The way in which an organisation, or in the case of this study a university specifically, is perceived online may influence its corporate reputation. This new environment therefore continues to add pressure on institutions within the HES to ensure that their corporate reputation is managed effectively.

Moreover, in the past decade, problems have arisen within the HES as a result of student protests and the NWU particularly has, in addition, found itself in deep water with various media bashings regarding issues such as first-year initiation, various student deaths, the removal of historical statues, growing financial implications for stakeholders, study fees, political issues surrounding the payment of NSFAS-funded students’ fees resulting in registration issues, plagiarism

allegations, language policies, the re-structuring process, alignment and *Potchefication*¹ to name but a few. Considering the sum of the issues that have the potential to affect the university's corporate reputation, a re-evaluation of corporate reputation management approach may just give the institution an upper hand.

The proceeding section discusses the multiple identities of the NWU.

1.1.3 The multiple identities of the North-West University

In the past, the NWU could be seen as a *mother-brand* structured by three individual and demographically separate campuses in Potchefstroom, Mahikeng (previously known as Mafikeng) and Vanderbijlpark (previously known as the Vaal Triangle Campus) (Degenaar, 2018:5; Van der Vyver, 2020). Each campus was characterised by its own unique personality, image, structure, identity, culture, demographics, and socio-economic backgrounds (NWU, 2015a:2; NWU, 2016a:5). Each campus was also run individually through the individual campus' management, while the *mother-brand* was managed by the Institutional Office. This ensured that although each campus had the freedom to be unique, all policies, procedures, strategies, and functions of each campus were aligned to the holistic image that the university desired to depict (NWU, 2015a:4; Kgwadi, 2016:2). This, however, changed when the university implemented the restructuring process in 2017. The process was headed by the university's vice-chancellor at the time, Professor Dan Kgwadi, and intended to transform the university into a more aligned institution – in other words to do away with the individual campus identities and rather implement a new holistic identity at an institutional level that would be diverse enough to accommodate each individual campus' current identity (Kgwadi, 2016:2). The vice-chancellor's office communicated with the university's various internal and external stakeholder groups regularly by means of email, press releases and social media updates and/or videos. They also attempted to gather opinions regarding the process from stakeholders by means of surveys communicated through these channels. It stands to reason that such a process would have had implications on the university's corporate reputation, as not all stakeholders may have agreed with it. Further issues, such as the shift to a unitary model and the alignment process that went hand in hand with the restructuring process, also had and continue to have an influence on the NWU's corporate reputation.

¹ A term referring to how the NWU Mahikeng and Vaal Campuses felt that (1) the Potchefstroom Campus benefited from services housed in the then Institutional Office; (2) how all systems, policies and processes on all campuses were managed according to how the Potchefstroom Campus preferred to do so; and (3) anything new implemented by the Institutional Office on the three campuses as the Mahikeng and Vaal Campuses felt that the Potchefstroom Campus and the Institutional Office were one and the same.

Theoretically, in the case of partnering organisations, one organisation can influence the other organisation's corporate reputation and partnering organisations are therefore at high risk of reputational damage (Dholakia & Acciardo, 2014:159; Petersen & Lemke, 2015:496). This had the potential to be the case when considering the NWU's former structure. One may argue that the new structure may prove to be problematic as the conduct of one campus not only affects the specific campus' corporate reputation, but also that of the remaining interconnected campuses and the *mother-brand*.

Dholakia and Acciardo (2014:159) state that stakeholder interests and perspectives have distinguished differences between institutions in the HES. Consequently "multiple identities" within HEIs have evolved to appeal to the sector's diverse stakeholders. The existence of these "multiple identities" may, however, possibly cause "confusion and prevent consistency in implementation" (Dholakia & Acciardo, 2014:159). Recommending the establishment of a "single identity" for a university instead, identifies its "central characteristics" and it is consequently more likely to become (1) aware of its core values, (2) central and distinct, and (3) effectively functional both internally and externally. However, this approach has its implications too, as it may prove challenging for an institution to establish a "single identity" when it consists of so many diverse factors (Dholakia & Acciardo, 2014:159).

In summary, increases in students entering the HES, combined with a developing sector, previous media bashings, various forms of finance issues, the shift to a unitary model, the implementation of processes such as the re-structuring and alignment, *Potchefication*, influential political campaigns such as 2015-2017's #FeesMustFall, and the rise of racial and/or cultural hostilities since 2017, have influenced some stakeholders' perceptions of the NWU despite the university's sustained efforts to avoid this very situation. Although processes such as the restructuring process, the alignment process and the shift to a unitary model have been concluded for the NWU, other issues such as the advanced technological inclination of Millennials and Gen Z'ers, the Covid-19 pandemic and political issues such as NSFAS payments and student protests remain. Issues such as these, in conjunction with the possibility and high probability of new issues surfacing, continue to create challenges for the NWU. Moreover, because the objectives set by the NWU before the restructuring of the university have been completed, the university has set new strategic goals that must be met. It also stands to reason that if all the aforementioned have had an effect on the NWU's corporate reputation, that new strategic goals set by the university, and the rise of new issues for the university, too will have an effect on its corporate reputation. The need to re-evaluate the university's corporate reputation is therefore crucial. The following section continues this need in the problem statement.

1.1.4 Problem statement

Over the past decade, the NWU has undergone changes within its (1) identity, (2) image, (3) brand, (4) personality, and (5) behaviour, culture, and ethics. The NWU has also had to deal with political and socio-economic issues that have plagued the HES. These issues also included the call for transformation of the HES, which started in the 1980s, negative media attention aimed at the NWU regarding first-year initiation practices and student deaths at the university such as in 2014, issues surrounding study fees in 2015/2016 and student protests regarding this as recently as 2017, plagiarism allegations in 2017, and issues surrounding the pay-out of NSFAS funds in 2020. The change that Industry 4.0 has brought about has also fuelled the need for change in how universities function on various levels. Industry 4.0 has furthermore shaped a new generation of students and staff who have entered the HES. Millennials, and Gen Z'ers especially, are generations to whom the fast pace and advances of technology are second nature. As these generations contribute greatly to the makeup of universities' core stakeholder groups, it is possible to suggest that universities must therefore adapt their strategies to obtain their objectives in a manner that positively coincides with the advanced technological characteristics of these generations. The past decade has not only seen the changes in the political and socio-economic realms, but also the changes that Industry 4.0 and the younger generations have brought about for the HES. The year 2020 also took the HES by surprise when it brought with it the Covid-19 pandemic, causing the sector and its constituent parties, including the NWU, to have to rapidly and abruptly reconsider the way that they reached their objectives.

These issues that have taken place in the period ranging between 2014 and 2021 have highlighted the NWU in the media and on social media on numerous occasions. This has both benefited and damaged its corporate reputation. However, one blow to a reputation can have such an immense effect that several "boosts" cannot correct. Corporate reputation management within the NWU should therefore be investigated and reviewed to best attain and sustain the desired corporate reputation of the university.

With the implementation of the unitary model, the restructuring process, and the alignment process, the NWU began to do so. Together, these processes have succeeded in combining the individual sub-identities, or campuses, to create one holistic NWU brand at an institutional level. Many hypothesised that this may become problematic as the result on the corporate reputation of an institution undergoing such processes is not always as effective as it was intended to be. The fear that the implementation of these processes could have a negative effect on stakeholders was a concern for the NWU. Many alumni, students, and staff from the three campuses at the time seemed to have opposing opinions regarding the need for and effectivity of these processes. Staff were faced with challenges such as new structures and task agreements and being

confronted with having to work across new cultural boundaries. In addition, some staff were further confronted with the inevitability of regular travel to sister campuses, some of which require the staff to be away from home for a few days – something that they may not have anticipated when entering the service of the NWU. These attitudes were present from the onset of the transformation processes, but the NWU felt that transformation was necessary regardless thereof to ensure the survival of the institution within the transforming sector in which it functions (Kgwadi, 2018:2). These processes have resulted and continue to result in challenges for NWU staff, which may affect their productivity and the way in which they perceive and project the NWU to others. While these processes have been completed, some NWU staff still do not agree with the need for or manner of implementation thereof. In addition, the new work-from-home agreement that was brought in because of the Covid-19 pandemic has also brought about many challenges for the NWU and its staff.

For many staff members, working from home required spending money on getting at-home work stations set up in terms of area, furniture, electricity, telephone costs, and internet costs. While the NWU did and continues to supply staff members in need of internet with funding to do, this was the only funding considered for staff members during this time. In addition to costs, staff members also had to take into consideration their family dynamic as many households saw more than one person working from home. Many staff members also had children at home fulltime and had to juggle their work and family dynamic with playing a more active role in their children's schoolwork.

Staff members who were unable to work from home were requested to complete other tasks that were not part of their task agreements to keep busy while still contributing to the NWU's objectives. Moreover, this came at a time when staff members were still settling into their new structures and task agreements brought about by the restructuring process. This added fuel to the fire in the sense that staff who already felt overworked and unhappy, now had these feelings magnified.

As the national Covid-19 levels (regulatory guidelines for the resuming of business and social activities) in South Africa descended, the NWU implemented stages in bringing staff back to their physical workplaces. As this process has progressed, NWU staff are now expected to back at work fulltime. However, it seems that staff members still work from home at times.

As staff were called back in groups, this too proved to be problematic as many staff members who were called back to the office first felt that they could continue to work from home or that it was unfair that their colleagues could continue to work from home. In addition, staff who worked

from home for extended periods reported feeling disconnected from the NWU and their colleagues as well as having trouble switching off from work after hours.

Although there are also staff that have reported being satisfied with their work circumstances and with the NWU through all these challenges, the fact that there are staff reporting negative experiences is reason for the NWU to investigate and act accordingly to keep up staff members' morale and maintain good stakeholder relationships. Gaps in communication could very well be the reason as to why stakeholders feel that the NWU has not always handled these challenges efficiently. This study suggests that it is important that the action taken by the NWU should focus specifically on corporate communication functions and how these functions can aid in rectifying and/or managing issues such as these. Specifically, the study intends to identify one function of corporate communication, namely corporate reputation, and the management thereof as an aid to these issues.

Taking into consideration all the challenges that the NWU has faced from 2014 to 2021, the university has yet to recognise the need for corporate reputation management to play an integral part in resolving and managing challenges and crises. There is no evidence that the NWU has undertaken a corporate reputation study or assessment during this period. Reflecting upon the issues that the NWU has gone through since 2014, and the issues and crises that the university is currently facing, a corporate reputation assessment of the university would be beneficial for the NWU.

By assessing their corporate reputation, the NWU would be able to identify what the key drivers of their corporate reputation are and therefore be able to strategically plan how to manage their corporate reputation. This would lead to aiding the NWU in effective communication and management of challenges and crises facing the NWU. This study therefore aims to undertake an assessment of the NWU's corporate reputation with a focus on the university's staff members' perspectives to provide recommendations on the university's corporate reputation management strategy.

1.2 Research questions

1.2.1 General research question

What should the key drivers of the North-West University's corporate reputation management strategy be, according to staff members?

1.2.2 Specific research questions

- (1) What are the theoretical points of departure regarding corporate reputation management?
- (2) What is the North-West University's approach to the university's current corporate reputation management?
- (3) What are the perceptions of NWU staff regarding the university's current corporate reputation management according to the RepTrak™ measurement instrument?

1.3 Research objectives

1.3.1 General research objective

To determine what the key drivers of the North-West University's corporate reputation management strategy should be, according to NWU staff members, through conducting both qualitative and quantitative research in terms of a literature review, semi-structured interviews and the RepTrak™ measurement instrument.

1.3.2 Specific research objectives

- (1) To determine the theoretical points of departure regarding corporate reputation management available in recent literature sources.
- (2) To determine the North-West University's current corporate reputation management approach by means of semi-structured interviews.
- (3) To determine the North-West University's staff members' perceptions surrounding the university's current corporate reputation management, by conducting a RepTrak™ measurement.

1.4 Guiding theoretical arguments

- Corporate reputation is an intangible corporate asset characterised by the perceptions of an organisation's stakeholders from their past and future interactions that they have had and will have with the organisation (Lah *et al.*, 2016:137; Pires & Trez, 2018:48; Maduro *et al.*, 2019:79; Cornelissen, 2020:2). When managed correctly, a good corporate reputation allows an organisation to be unique, adds competitive advantage and contributes to the long-term success of the organisation (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3; Jeffery *et al.*, 2018:2). Corporate reputation comprises six elements, namely corporate identity, corporate image, corporate brand, corporate personality and corporate behaviour, ethics,

and culture (Van der Waladt, 2017:79). How each of these elements is defined, managed, and measured by an organisation contributes to the overall success of the organisation's corporate reputation.

- To manage corporate reputation, an organisation should ensure that they understand the concept of corporate reputation and are able to define it within the borders of their organisation (Aula & Mantere, 2008:15-29; Franklin *et al.*, 2009:196). Corporate reputation, by definition, links closely to stakeholder relations as a corporate reputation is the sum of perceptions that stakeholders have of the organisation (Caywood, 2012:4; Larson & Wirth, 2012:243). These perceptions have, in addition, been created over a long period of time and organisations should therefore acknowledge that corporate reputation management is a corporate function that must be implemented for the entire lifespan of the organisation (Cornelissen, 2020:2). Moreover, effective management of corporate reputation is also made possible when the elements that comprise it are understood and managed effectively (Van der Waladt, 2017:79). This study suggests that the NWU should focus on its corporate reputation management to aid the university when faced with challenges and/or crises.
- Measuring corporate reputation will allow an organisation to better understand their corporate reputation and how it needs to be managed to produce a positive perception from stakeholders. There are many measurement instruments available for corporate reputation. These include *Fortune's Most Admirable Companies Survey* (Elam, 2018), *Unidimensional Measurement Techniques*, (Chun, 2005:99-105), the Reputation Quotient or RQ (Davies *et al.*, 2003:139), the *Rotterdam Organisational Test or RIOT* (Davies, *et al.*, 2003:140), and the *RepTrak™ Pulse* (Reputation Institute, 2016b). Taking into consideration that every organisation is unique, organisations should choose an instrument that best fits their needs and nature (Alves *et al.*, 2014:58; Eckert, 2017:146). However, as RepTrak™ has shown to be a globally viable instrument, as well as being the newest instrument of measurement, it seems to be the status quo used by many organisations world-wide (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:5; Reputation Institute, 2016b). Moreover, RepTrak™ has been used successfully to measure corporate reputation specifically in the setting of tertiary education institutions in studies by Vidaver-Cohen (2007), Angliss (2017), and Jie and Haum (2019). By measuring their corporate reputation, the NWU will be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses in their corporate reputation. By acquiring this information, the NWU will be able to strategically plan how to better manage its corporate reputation in the future.

1.5 Research method: A mixed-method approach

This study makes use of a mixed-method research approach. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches are used to answer the study's general and specific research questions (Creswell, 2013:4; Zohrabi, 2013:254). In addition, the design type of mixed-method utilized by the study was characterized in terms of its type as a concurrent mixed-method. A concurrent mixed-method occurs when both the qualitative and quantitative approaches are undertaken by the researcher at the same time, or parallel to one another (Choi *et al.*, 2021:2; McGrudden *et al.*, 2021:7).

Using a mixed-method approach is popular within the fields of social sciences or humanities as the approach provides results derived from the strengths of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. Using a mixed-method approach within these fields furthermore allows modern-day studies to provide innovative recommendations (Creswell, 2013:4; Fetters *et al.*, 2013:2135).

Qualitative research is a research paradigm used to study "human interaction from an insider's perspective" with the objective to describe and understand, rather than explain and predict (Babbie & Mouton, 2012:53). It is described as explanatory, and probes into the "what" and/or "how" of the topic at hand (Elkatawneh, 2016:3). Qualitative research is done when a researcher is physically in the field and makes use of observational methods such as unstructured interviews, close observations of interviewees involved in the study at hand and analysing documents (Babbie & Mouton, 2012:53; Elkatawneh, 2016:3; Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017:14).

A quantitative research approach is a research paradigm which functions on a variable and controlled level and focuses on "the quantification of constructs" (Babbie & Mouton, 2012:49). In this approach, the researcher aims to make use of quantitative measurements or statistics, for example, assigning numerical properties to the measured factors, such as the perceptions that NWU staff have of the corporate reputation management of the NWU (Elkatawneh, 2016:4).

The research design that follows in the section hereunder discusses how the researcher proposes to implement the mixed-method approach.

1.6 Research design

This section outlines the research design of the study. The qualitative and quantitative methods of the concurrent mixed-method utilised by the study are presented hereunder.

1.6.1 Qualitative research methods

The qualitative methods utilised by the study include a literature study and four semi-structured interviews with NWU Corporate Relations and Marketing (CRM) management.

1.6.1.1 Literature study

The study uses a variety of sources obtained from books, web-based references, accredited articles, academic journals, abstracts, completed master's and doctorate dissertations/thesis from various universities, official NWU documents pertinent to the university's corporate reputation and specific situation, and a selection of theoretically based models/graphs/illustrations/steps. These sources were obtained from (1) the Ferdinand Postma Library on the NWU's Potchefstroom Campus, (2) databases such as EBSCOhost, SA ePublications, ISAP, Sabinet and Google Scholar, and (3) platforms such as Research Gate.

Regarding the academic literature pertaining to the definition, elements, management, measurement, trends and advantages of corporate reputation, extensive detail regarding the theory thereof is captured in Chapter 2 (refer to sections 2.1 to 2.9). However, the works of Davies *et al.* (2003), Chun (2005), Aula and Mantere (2008), Walker (2010), Doorley and Garcia (2015), Van der Waldt (2015; 2017), Henisz (2017), Pérez-Corenjo *et al.* (2019), and Cornelissen (2020) can be identified as the most contributing authors of these sections.

From these author's works, corporate reputation has been found to be an important corporate asset that has been investigated since as early as the 1990s. Fombrun (1996), Fombrun and Van Riel (1997; 2004), Walker (2010), Doorley and Garcia (2015), Van der Waldt (2015; 2017) and Cornelissen (2020) have all defined corporate reputation. While the original definition thereof was produced by Fombrun and Van Riel (1997), the remaining authors contributed greatly in terms of adding to this definition and grounding it within academic literature. The early definition of corporate reputation by Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) states that it (corporate reputation) is an intangible corporate asset that is the representation that stakeholders have of an organisation based on past and future interactions that they have had and will have with the organisation. Soon after this definition's establishment, its original authors (Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997) expanded thereon to include how trustworthy these stakeholders find the organisation at hand to be. Fombrun and Van Riel (2004) then further added to the definition stating that it is an asset that provides a competitive advantage for organisations. Walker (2010) added to the definition by emphasising that these stakeholders could be either internal and/or external stakeholders. While Van der Waldt (2017) agrees with the latter, he touches on the importance of an organisation's employees and directors' participation and perspectives regarding corporate reputation. Although Doorley and Garcia (2015) use the basis of the early definition, they do, however, disagree slightly, stating that corporate reputation is not an intangible concept. Rather, they find it to be a tangible asset as it can be assessed through various organisational activities.

Following the definition of corporate reputation, the work by these authors provides a good overview of what corporate reputation comprises. While Chun (2005) described three elements of corporate reputation, namely image, identity, and desired identity, Argenti (2008) added two types of image to the list. Doorley and Garcia (2015) also contributed to the list with performance, behaviour, and communication (while still including identity). Cornelissen (2020) placed emphasis on financial performance, quality, staff perception and community engagement. However, Van der Waldt (2015) touches on all these aspects, while formally categorising the elements of corporate reputation as being corporate identity, image, brand, personality, behaviour, ethics, and culture. These elements, as identified by Van der Waldt (2015), were used as the framework to discuss the elements of corporate reputation in this study (refer to section 2.3). However, the study made use of not only Van der Waldt's research, but also that of the studies other main contributing authors, as well as additional sources to define and discuss each of these elements (refer to section 2.3).

In terms of managing corporate reputation, Doorley and Garcia (2015), Van der Waldt (2015), and Pérez-Corenjo *et al.* (2019) agree that it is of the utmost importance that organisations can effectively manage their corporate reputation. The Reputation Institute (2016b) and Doorley and Garcia (2017) state that although there are many ways to manage corporate reputation in theory, a specific framework for corporate reputation management is something that is still required.

Davies *et al.* (2003) propose the use of the corporate personality chain (see section 2.4.2) to manage corporate reputation. Doorley and Garcia (2017) state that to manage corporate reputation, an organisation must manage each of the elements thereof and/or implement their theories of the ten precepts and best practices of reputation management. Aula (2011), Van der Waldt (2015), Heinz (2017), and Smith (2017) maintain that effective stakeholder relation management plays a role in effective corporate reputation management. While McShane (2018) and Wyma (2019) suggest the use of enterprise risk management (ERM) systems (see section 2.4.3.). Finally, by focusing on an organisation's performance, communication, and behaviour, Doorley and Garcia (2015) propose the use of comprehensive reputation management for effective corporate reputation management.

Moreover, Gardberg and Fombrun (2002) and Eckert (2017) agree that to manage a corporate reputation, organisations must be able to measure it. Alves *et al.* (2014) suggest that each organisation is unique and should therefore have a unique approach to measuring their corporate reputation. Eckert (2017) holds that there are many measurement instruments available, and organisations are sometimes unsure of which instrument to use for their specific organisation.

Authors such as Gardberg and Fombrun (2002), Davies *et al.* (2003), Chun (2005), Sah and Abdullah (2014), Fombrun *et al.* (2015), Van der Waladt (2015), and the Reputation Institute (2019) have all contributed to identifying corporate reputation measurement instruments. Davies *et al.* (2003) mention the Rotterdam Organisational Test (RIOT) as a possible instrument, while Chun (2005) identifies eight unidimensional measurement techniques for corporate reputation (refer to section 2.7.1). Davies *et al.* (2003), Gardberg and Fombrun (2002) and Van der Waladt (2015) also discuss the use of the Reputation Quotient (RQ) (refer to section 2.7.2). However, Sah and Abdullah (2014), Fombrun *et al.* (2015) and the Reputation Institute (2016b; 2018; 2019) all agree that the RepTrak™ Pulse is currently the most common and suitable instrument to measure corporate reputation (refer to section 2.7.3). Van der Waladt (2015) and Dowling (2016) state that the measurement of corporate reputation needs to be re-evaluated in literature.

Van der Waladt (2017) expands his discussion on corporate reputation management by discussing the trends that affect it. Although none of the other main contributing authors specifically list any such trends, authors such as Papastefanou, (2008), Proseripo and Zervas (2016), Eckert (2017), Xu *et al.* (2018), Pelletier *et al.* (2019) and Thomas (2019) contribute to defining each of the six trends listed by Van de Waladt (refer to section 2.6). In addition, the study also identifies one additional trend, namely the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, the study states that corporate reputation is affected by seven current trends.

Finally, most of the contributing authors cited in the literature study agree that a strong corporate reputation brings many advantages for an organisation. What the study identifies these advantages as are a combination of these authors' works. While the authors' lists of identified advantages are similar to one another, there are instances where certain authors suggest an advantage that another author does not. While Cravens and Oliver (2004) suggest that the main advance of a strong corporate reputation is a good financial performance, Ang and Wight (2009) and Glandfield *et al.* (2017) place focus on a strong competitive advantage. Ang and Wight (2009) and Van der Waladt (2015) suggest that a strong corporate reputation will result in the organisation's products or services being perceived as better quality by their stakeholders. Van der Waladt (2015) and Glandfield *et al.* (2017) both add to this stating that when perceived as providing a better-quality product or service, the internal and external stakeholder relations of the organisation are also positively affected. Ang and Wight (2009) and Van der Waladt (2015) also touch on the advantage of a reduced risk of crisis hitting the organisation.

Considering the discussions here above and that of sections 2.1 through to 2.9, the study notes that extensive literature regarding the theory of corporate reputation management is available. In terms of this study's context, some studies such as those undertaken by Vidaver-Cohen (2007), Angliss (2017), and Jie and Haum (2019) have investigated corporate reputation within the

context of a university setting and have produced successful results. However, these studies were undertaken in other countries such as the UK, Sweden, and Australia. This study's focus is differentiated as it is within a South African context. A study by Cupido (2017) focuses on some of the elements of corporate reputation within this context, but not corporate reputation in essence or the management thereof. Research surrounding corporate reputation within the HES is also under great demand as specific guiding theory surrounding the subject is limited (Chapleo, 2011:412; Dholakia & Acciardo, 2014:159). Within South Africa, a Nexus search at the start of this study recorded seven related higher degree dissertations, five of which are accredited to an MA qualification, and two studies were accredited to a PhD qualification. All these studies are related to the field of corporate reputation management, but none within the specific context of this study, namely a South African university setting.

Bearing the above in mind, it is possible to conclude that (1) there is enough theoretical literature available to undertake the study, (2) the concept of corporate reputation is relevant within a South African context, (3) the concept of corporate reputation is relevant within the context of a university setting and (4) the proposed study – while having adequate and supportive theoretical material – is unique enough to embark upon. The latter is highlighted by the fact that the NWU currently finds itself in a unique situation. The past decade has seen the university go through a merger, a restructuring process, and an alignment process, while also having to face challenges and crises such as student protests, NSFAS funding issues, study fee reductions, student deaths, the changes brought about by the 4th Industrial Revolution and, most recently, having to continue business despite the abrupt hit of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Together, the challenges and crises that the NWU has gone through since 2014 to date provide a need for the NWU to assess its corporate reputation to ensure that these challenges and crises have not damaged its corporate reputation, and if they have, provide the NWU with recommendations to repair its corporate reputation and manage it effectively in challenges and crises to come.

In addition to a literature study, the assessment of the NWU's corporate reputation requires additional research methods. The proceeding section continues to discuss these methods, by specifically discussing the semi-structured interviews used for this study.

1.6.1.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The study facilitated four individual interviews with senior NWU communication specialist staff members who work with the NWU's corporate reputation. These interviews were either in-person or virtual meetings via Microsoft Teams. The option for virtual interviews had to be considered in

adherence with the NWU's Occupational Health and Safety Regulations considering the Covid-19 pandemic (refer to section 4.4.1.4.1). These specialists are furthermore identified as being the management of the NWU Corporate Relations and Marketing (CRM) department and its three sub-departments, namely Corporate Communications, Stakeholder Relations and Student Recruitment and Marketing.

Table 1-1 hereunder provides the interviewees of the semi-structured interviews:

Table 1-1: The four NWU CRM participants of semi-structured interviews

Department	Participant
Corporate Relations and Marketing	Executive Director
Corporate Communications	Director
Stakeholder Relations	Director
Marketing and Student Recruitment	Director

These interviews were semi-structured, comprising a set of pre-determined questions derived from the literature review outlined in Chapter 2. These questions may be deviated from during interviews allowing interviewees, as well as the researcher, to elaborate on, or bring attention to, relevant topics within the broader study (Struwig & Stead, 2001:98). All interviews were recorded (with the permission of the interviewees) and analysed by means of a qualitative content analysis.

The proceeding section reflects the method of the qualitative content analysis.

1.6.1.2.1 Method of qualitative content analysis

The qualitative content analysis started with a review of available literature regarding corporate reputation. From this, factors that influence corporate reputation were identified. These factors are specifically listed as constructs and concepts of corporate reputation in the research design described by Table 4-3 (see section 4.3). Taking the situation of the NWU into account, these theoretical concepts and constructs were used to create a list of questions (the interview schedule) (refer to section 4.4.1.3). These questions where the pre-determined questions as mentioned in the preceding section. Once satisfied with the design of these questions, the researcher contacted the personal assistant of the CRM executive director's office, who then assisted in inviting the interviewees to take part in the study as well as scheduling each interview. OHS regulations related to Covid-19 at the NWU resulted in interviewees having a choice

between in-person and virtual interviews. The physical interviews were recorded by means of an iPhone, while the virtual interviews were recorded with the function on Microsoft Teams with the permission of the interviewees.

Hereafter, the researcher proceeded with the qualitative content analysis through three steps, namely (1) transcription, (2) repeated analysis and reflection, and (3) presentation of findings.

In step 1, the researcher transcribed each of these interviews. This process of transcription was done according to the verbatim method, by which the researcher transcribed the verbal data contained in an audio-recording from each interview as a word-for-word text document (Greenwood *et al.*, 2017:90). In step 2, the researcher repeatedly analysed and reflected upon the content of the transcriptions to make viable deductions. In step 3, the researcher presented these findings in a way that allowed for comparisons and discussions thereof to take place in a separate chapter of the study (refer to Chapter 5). This process is described in more detail in section 4.4.1.5.

The study also made use of a quantitative method.

1.6.2 Quantitative research method

The quantitative research method was an online survey characterised by RepTrak™.

1.6.2.1 RepTrak™: A quantitative survey

A quantitative survey is characterised as being shorter than and less in depth when compared to research methods such as semi-structured interviews. The quantitative survey is a list of questions or statements that are designed to help researchers conclude what the sample or population in question thinks and knows, what they have done and are planning to do, and what their attitudes or beliefs are (Roopa & Rani, 2012:273-274).

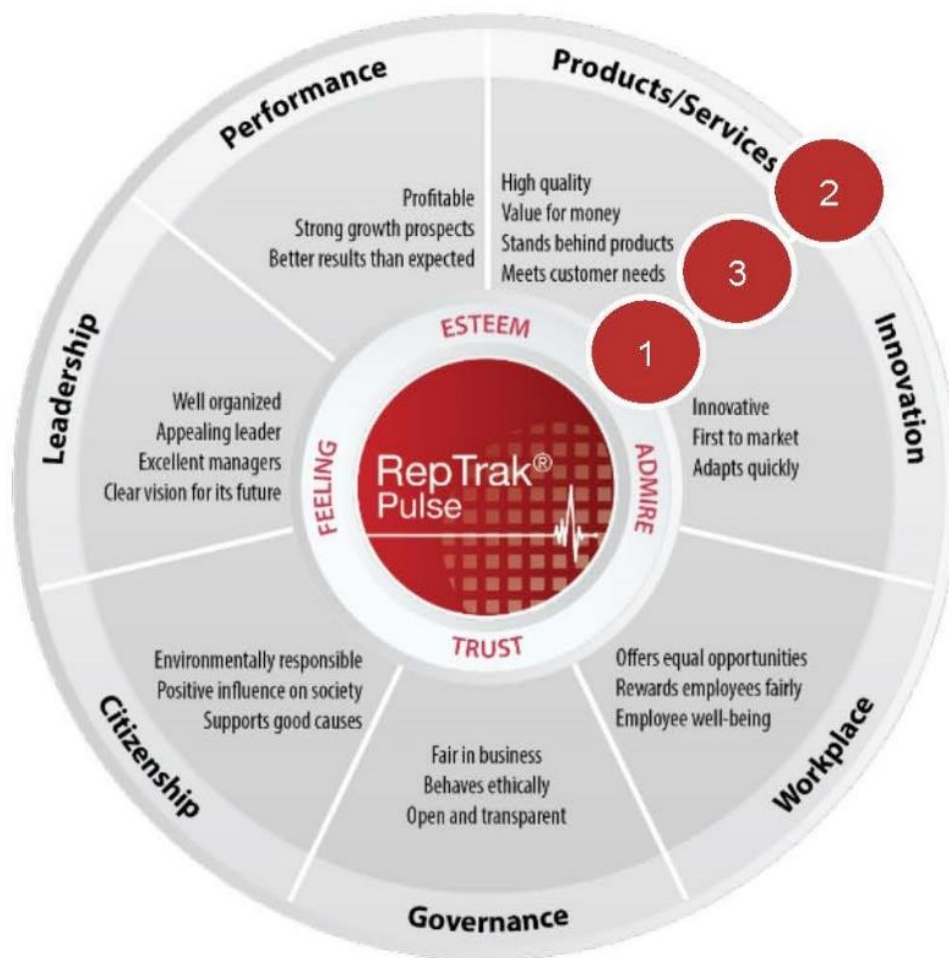
RepTrak™ Pulse was used to determine how staff of the NWU perceived the university's corporate reputation. In theory, the aspects for measuring corporate reputation are (1) an emotional appeal, which creates a feeling of good, respect, and trust about an organisation; (2) high quality, innovative and appealing cost of products/services; (3) excellent leadership and a clear future vision; (4) a good work environment for internal stakeholders; (5) better financial performance than that of the organisation's competitors, as well as being known for high profitability and low liability to risks; and (6) having a strong corporate social responsibility presence within the organisation's community (Aula & Mantere, 2008:37; RepTrak™, 2019). Within the structure of the RepTrak™, all these aspects occur as dimensions and attributes.

RepTrak™ is a measurement instrument “designed to track and analyse corporate reputations” (Aula & Mantere, 2008:37). RepTrak™ can be seen as the “pulse” of an organisation that, simply put, “tracks perceptions about [a] company's ability to deliver in seven key dimensions”, namely *products and services, workplace, innovation, governance, citizenship, leadership, and performance* of the organisation (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:5; Reputation Institute, 2016b). These dimensions are further expanded into 23 attributes. These attributes are grouped under each dimension as follows:

- **Products and services:** high quality, value for money, stands behind products and meets customer needs (4 attributes).
- **Workplace:** offers equal opportunities, rewards employees fairly and employee well-being (3 attributes).
- **Innovation:** innovative, first to market, adapts quickly (3 attributes).
- **Governance:** fair in business, behaves ethically, and open and transparent (3 attributes).
- **Citizenship:** environmentally responsible, positive influence on society, and supports good causes (3 attributes).
- **Leadership:** well organised, appealing leader, excellent managers, and clear vision for its future (4 attributes).
- **Performance:** profitable, strong growth prospects, and better results than expected (3 attributes).

The attributes per dimension of RepTrak™ “show the emotional bond that people have with a company and connects that bond with their rational behaviours” (Reputation Institute, 2016b). RepTrak™ is, in addition, the newest reputation measurement instrument as it was launched by the Reputation Institute in 2005 as an updated version of the Reputation Quotient or RQ (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:5; Reputation Institute, 2016a:3). The RQ originally only measured an organisation’s corporate reputation according to 20 factors grouped into five categories as opposed to the seven dimensions and 23 attributes measured by RepTrak™ (Aula & Mantere, 2008:37). Therefore, RepTrak™ was used as the measurement instrument for corporate reputation in terms of staff member prospective at the NWU.

Figure 1-1 hereunder visually depicts the structure of RepTrak™.



Source: Reputation Institute (2016b)

Figure 1-1: RepTrak™

RepTrak™ was used to create a quantitative online survey sent to all the staff members of the NWU. The survey comprised a set of standardised statements derived from RepTrak™'s attributes, which allowed the researcher to measure the perceptions of respondents. Furthermore, the statements that comprised the survey were rated by interviewees according to a five-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree). The collective results of each statement's rating provided descriptive statistics. These statistics were analysed and discussed to determine how NWU staff perceived each attribute and dimension of RepTrak™.

Once the questionnaire was finalised, the NWU Department for Corporate Communications assisted in sending out the survey to all NWU staff by placing an invitation link in the NWU *Daily Comms* – an email newsletter sent out to all NWU staff every second day, if not every day. The survey link was placed in the *Daily Comms* for two months (start of April 2022 to end of May

2022). If staff clicked on the link, they were taken to the survey on Google Forms – an online survey tool. Once they landed on the website, a short message identifying the researcher, explaining the background, need, permission and ethical considerations of the study, written by the researcher, was presented. This message also indicated that participation was optional, that responses would remain anonymous and would only be used for statistical purposes for this study. An informed consent followed this message and staff had to tick a box that indicated they agreed to take part in the study. Thereafter, respondents were presented with section A of the survey, which aimed to obtain their demographic information. Thereafter, section B presented the statements derived from RepTrak™ that were to be rated from one to five. Section C then provided an open and optional platform for respondents to provide general comments.

Once submissions for the survey closed, the NWU's Statistical Consultation Services (SCS) processed the data. The proceeding section discusses how the statistical data obtained from the survey was processed.

1.6.2.2 Data processing of quantitative methods

After submissions closed, the researcher provided SCS with the raw data. SCS then processed the data using SPSS and Amos software and provided the researcher with descriptive statistics. In addition to the descriptive statistics obtained from SCS, the researcher also analysed the statistics provided by Google Forms. Google Forms provided graphs and percentages for each statement in the *responses* section of the form. Here, the researcher analysed the presented data by discussing the levels at which the concepts and constructs measured, i.e. what opinions were most popular among the respondents and which concepts and constructs measured high, and which measured low. This data is presented in table format (sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2). The data processing by SCS also provided comparative statistics to determine the effect that the demographic profile of NWU staff had on RepTrak™ (see section 6.2). The process of how this analysis was done is discussed in further detail in the methodology chapter (refer to section 4.2.3.1).

The RepTrak™ survey had already been used in previous studies and it was therefore regarded as reliable and viable by the SCS. SCS, however, confirmed reliability by applying Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha is a statistical formula that can be applied to measure the reliability of a group of "test or scale items" by measuring how "consistent" of a measure these items are of a specific concept (University of Virginia, 2015).

SCS also confirmed validity with a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in AMOS Version 27. CFA is defined as being an analytical process used to test the validity of "multiple hypotheses" of a

“measurement model”, consisting of at least three themes/elements, at the same time (Hoyle, 2004:169). CFA furthermore allows the researcher to be able to determine whether the relationship between the measurable items and their concepts, and the distinction between these concepts, manifest in the collected data (Crede & Harms, 2018:18). With regard to the use of AMOS version 27, the study defines this as computer software that makes use of, among others, CFA to assist with research analysis through providing supportive data (IBM, 2020a).

SPSS Version 27 was also used by SCS. SPSS Version 27 is computer software utilised in the field of social sciences statistics. The software is used in research studies to allow researchers to understand their data, analyse the trends that their data has produced and in doing so, allows researchers to make conclusions pertaining to their study (IBM, 2020b). SCS used SPSS Version 27, which was therefore used to (1) provide descriptive statistics on factors to describe the average opinion of NWU staff regarding the university’s current reputation, and (2) made use of nonparametric correlations, independent t-tests, and one-way ANOVAs to determine the effect of biographical variables on RepTrak™.

The data was provided by SCS to the researcher in a format of descriptive statistics that were able to be analysed and discussed in a separate chapter of this study (refer to Chapter 5).

1.7 Ethical considerations

The researcher adhered to the ethical principles as determined by the NWU. The study was assessed and received ethics clearance by the NWU Faculty of Humanities’ Ethics Committee and BASSREC (ethics no. NWU-00620-18-A7). Permission for the study was granted by the NWU Director of Corporate Communication and the NWU Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (NWU RDGC, reference no: NWU-GK-22-009). Moreover, the researcher and the study leader of this study have both completed four certificates in ethics training to ensure that the manner in which the study was undertaken was ethical (refer to Annexure C).

Furthermore, the researcher considered the ethical factors of the study through the *Research and Innovation* (2015b:1) and the *Research Infrastructure* (2016b:1) policies of the NWU. These state that all research executed under the NWU’s name must “promote innovative research and innovation for the economic development of the country, the continent and the world.” In response to this consideration, a formal discussion with the NWU director of Corporate Communication proposed that a study of this nature could be beneficial to the University for future reference.

In addition to reviewing the NWU’s *Research and Innovation* and *Research Infrastructure* policies, further research regarding the guidelines of ethical considerations that should be noted by a researcher when executing research under the name of, as well as reporting research done about

the NWU, was undertaken. This supplied formal NWU policies, manuals and reports listed in the NWU's online *Research Support* catalogue. This catalogue furthermore allowed for the analysis of related NWU policies such as the *Ethical Checklist*, the *Manual for Post-Graduate Studies*, and the *Nuremberg Code*. With this, it is felt that the study will not overstep any ethical boundaries suggested and/or listed in the policies. When undertaking a study aimed at NWU students or staff, the university also requires researchers to apply for permission through the NWU Gatekeeper. This application was submitted to the committee by the researcher with the help of her study leader. The Gatekeeper approved the application with one specific restriction: the researcher was not permitted to have access to any NWU staff members' personal information, and the survey therefore had to be distributed by the NWU department for Corporate Communications. Therefore, the invitation link in the NWU *Daily Comms* was used. Refer to section 4.4.2.2 for more information on this process.

When considering the study's feasibility, the NWU Department for Corporate Communication showed supportive interest in the proposed study and stated that they would be keen to review the study's outcomes on completion. In addition, the department indicated that they would, where possible, assist in the coordination of interviews to ensure the formality and appropriateness of the interview proceedings. This eradicates any ethical and other problematic issues that may come into play during the study's duration.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The study was undertaken within a single tertiary institution, and with only one stakeholder group of the university. This allowed the researcher to provide a discussion of how NWU staff members perceived the corporate reputation of the university. These perceptions are therefore not attributed to other tertiary institutions within the South African HES or globally. The study is therefore beneficial to the NWU, but will not be suitable to be used for consideration or implementation within a different university either locally or globally. The study can, however, contribute to the development and undertaking of a new, and broader, study that focuses on the corporate reputation management of South African universities, or simply through applying the framework of the study to measure the perceptions of other stakeholder groups or to measure the corporate reputations of other universities.

1.9 Chapter layout

- Chapter 1: Introduction and orientation of the study

The first chapter served to provide an overview of the study. This included an introduction and background of the study that focused on the theoretical context of corporate communication,

corporate reputation and the management and measurement thereof, the context of the HES, and that of the NWU. Thereafter, the chapter proceeded to provide a problem statement for the study as well as a general research question, three specific research questions, a general research objective, followed by three specific research objectives, three guiding theoretical arguments, and discussions pertaining to the research approach, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

- Chapter 2: Defining, managing, and measuring corporate reputations

Chapter 2 focused on the broader theoretical context of the study. Through a literature review, Chapter 2 discussed the theoretical foundation of corporate communication, corporate reputation, new trends surrounding corporate reputation, how stakeholder relations link to corporate reputation, the elements of corporate reputation, corporate reputation management, corporate reputation measurement with a strong focus on RepTrak™, and the advantages of a strong corporate reputation. In addition, a contextual discussion in terms of the NWU was also provided in conclusion of each of these sections.

- Chapter 3: The past and present context of the North-West University

Chapter 3 provided the study with context. This chapter did so by providing an overview of the international HES, as well as that of the South African HES. The chapter furthermore discussed the NWU in terms of its history, and past and present challenges that have had, and continue to have, an influence on the university's corporate reputation.

- Chapter 4: Research methodology

Chapter 4 sees a detailed explanation of the empirical approach and methods used to gather data for the study. The chapter furthermore explained how this data was analysed and interpreted.

- Chapter 5: Corporate reputation management and measurement: Empirical findings

Chapter 5 served to present a discussion and representation of the findings collected from the data derived from the qualitative method applied by the study. These findings were specifically derived from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the management of NWU CRM.

- Chapter 6: Stakeholder perceptions of the NWU's corporate reputation: Empirical findings

Chapter 6 served to present a discussion and interpretation of the data collected from the quantitative method applied by the study. These findings were derived using RepTrak™ to determine how staff members at the NWU perceived the university's corporate reputation.

- Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations

In this final chapter, a summary of the research process followed by the study was provided. Furthermore, the study's general research question was answered and recommendations for managing and measuring corporate reputation at the NWU were offered. The chapter concluded with discussions pertaining to the study's limitations and the possibilities of future research within the study's context.

CHAPTER 2: DEFINING, MANAGING AND MEASURING CORPORATE REPUTATIONS

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter, *introduction, problem statement and orientation of the study*, provided an overview of the study. It became evident that the business environment has changed over the past decade due to trends such globalisation, changes in stakeholder group composition (as organisations are now dealing with Millennials and Gen Z'ers), Industry 4.0 and constant technological advances, the Covid-19 pandemic, and an increase in organisations that have favourably positioned themselves within their sectors (Panwar *et al.*, 2016:154; Manda & Dhaou, 2019:245; Vitale, 2020). As in other sectors, these trends are also noted in the higher education sector (HES) of South Africa (Mazais *et al.*, 2012:2).

These trends, as well as challenges such as political and socio-economic issues, call for transformation within HES, as issues surrounding NSFAS funding, study fees, student protests and student deaths have highlighted the NWU specifically in the media on various occasions since the onset of these events in 2014 (refer to section 1.1.3). Together, these publicly scrutinised challenges have influenced the university's corporate reputation. This, together with the fact that the sector continues to face new challenges, prompted this study to suggest that the NWU should focus on its corporate communication functions, specifically its corporate reputation management to be more positively perceived by its stakeholders (refer to section 1.1.4).

In addition, the theory surrounding corporate reputation and the management and measurement thereof was highlighted. Corporate reputation was found to be a function of corporate communications. It was noted that corporate reputation is an organisational asset that yields both tangible and intangible results. Furthermore, it was found that it is crucial for corporate reputation be managed effectively (Caywood, 2012:4; Alshammari, 2016:19). One theoretical point of departure for corporate reputation management was noted as understanding what it is and what it comprises (Van der Waladt, 2017:79). It is also essential for organisations to measure their corporate reputations. Measurement allows organisations to better understand and manage their corporate reputations. Moreover, it was found that various measurement instruments are available in literature (see section 1.1.1). Organisations should therefore familiarise themselves with the available measurement instruments and choose an instrument in consideration with their organisation's nature (Alves *et al.*, 2014:58; Eckert, 2017:146).

The study then posed three specific research questions to assess the key drivers of reputation management in terms of staff members at the NWU (refer to section 1.2). Chapter 2 investigates the first specific research question posed by the study:

What are the theoretical points of departure regarding corporate reputation management?

This chapter attempts to answer this specific research question through a literature review regarding the definition and composition corporate reputation, the elements that comprises it, and the management and measurement thereof. More specifically, the chapter aims to discuss corporate reputation in terms of six sections, namely: (1) providing a theoretical framework of corporate communication in terms of its definition, composition and how it relates to corporate reputation; (2) discussing corporate reputation in terms of its definition, the new trends surrounding the construct and how stakeholder relations link to corporate reputation; (3) determining what the elements of corporate reputation are; (4) determining how corporate reputation should be managed; (5) determining how corporate reputation can be measured; and (6) discussing what advantages organisations can enjoy from acquiring a strong corporate reputation. In addition, each of the categories pertaining to corporate reputation will be concluded with a contextual discussion thereof in terms of the NWU.

2.2 Corporate communication

Corporate communication has been documented in literature over the past two decades (Illia & Balmer, 2012:417; Podnar, 2014:1). In this, the need for corporate communications as an organisational function, as well as corporate communication practitioners and/or managers to be considered organisational assets, has been expressed on numerous occasions (Lerbinger, 2018:11; Mohammed & Barkar, 2018:242). Furthermore, corporate communication practitioners should play a role in the management of an organisation (Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010:136; Abratt & Kleyn, 2012:1059; Cornelissen, 2020:35). This is attributed to the important role that corporate communication plays in all levels of an organisation. The main reasoning behind the former is that corporate communications are extensively focused on stakeholders, as well as the relationships and communication that organisations have with these stakeholders. Effective stakeholder relations are especially important as the future and success of an organisation strongly depends on how it is viewed by its stakeholders (Bundy *et al.*, 2018:477; Cornelissen, 2020:2).

As corporate communication has received much traction in literature, it is possible to broaden the discussion thereof. It should be noted, however, that because this study's focus is on one function of corporate communication, namely corporate reputation management, the proceeding discussion regarding corporate communication will only focus on defining the concept of

corporate communication and determining what it comprises. This will allow the study to provide an overview of how corporate reputation fits into corporate communication. Moreover, it will allow the study to move to a discussion regarding corporate reputation and the management and measurement thereof – the theoretical essence of this study.

2.2.1 Conceptualising corporate communication

Corporate communication can be regarded as all communication with stakeholders that improves the organisation's position and corporate reputation (Lah *et al.*, 2016:120; Lerbinger, 2018:5). Corporate communication is a broad topic that consists of various functions or activities. These activities link to one another in the sense that they all, in some way, shape or form, aim to create favourable relationships and effective internal and external communication with all relevant stakeholder groups of an organisation (Illia & Balmer, 2012:417; Siano *et al.*, 2013:153; Podnar, 2014:5). This is important as an organisation's survival depends on the positive buy-in from these various stakeholder groups (Bundy *et al.*, 2018:477; Cornelissen, 2020:2).

Corporate communication is furthermore divided into two forms of communication that have an influence on the organisation, namely internal and external communication (Siano *et al.*, 2013:153; Van der Vyver, 2020:91). Internal communication is communication focused on the internal stakeholders of an organisation, namely its employees, while external communication is communication focused on the external stakeholder groups of the organisation, such as its customers (Verčič *et al.*, 2012:224; Wonneberger & Jacobs, 2016:368; Van der Vyver, 2020:91).

To serve as operational definition of this study, corporate communication is defined as follows:

Corporate communication is an organisational asset that focuses specifically on all relevant stakeholders of an organisation, both internally and externally. It is an organisational function that consists of various activities that aim to positively influence the relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders, to favourably position the organisation within its market and enhance its reputation (Illia & Balmer, 2012:417; Siano *et al.*, 2013:153; Podnar, 2014:5; Lerbinger, 2018:5; Cornelissen, 2020:2; Van der Vyver, 2020:91).

As this section already noted, corporate communication comprises various functions or activities (Illia & Balmer, 2012:417). These activities are highlighted in the following section.

2.2.2 The composition of corporate communication

Corporate communication comprises three types of communication, namely (1) management communication, (2) marketing communication, and (3) organisational communication (Troise & Camilleri, 2021:165).

Management communication is defined as the communication that occurs between the management of the organisation and the employees working under these management structures. Management communication is not solely found at the top level of an organisation, but also in every level of an organisation (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:15; Troise & Camilleri, 2021:165). Therefore, management communication is the communication expressed via all management structures in the organisation. Management communication furthermore has an effect on the organisation as it affects the relationship between management and employees, and therefore it has an effect on the organisation's internal stakeholders, a defining attribute of corporate communication (Reissner & Pagan, 2013:2743; Alpenberga & Scarbrough, 2016:4960).

Effective management communication within an organisation is crucial as it aids the organisation in (1) having its internal stakeholders share the same (and desired) vision of the organisation, (2) establishing and maintaining a sense of trust toward management and leadership from an employee perspective, (3) initiating and effectively managing changes that occur within the organisation, and (4) strengthening employees' association with the organisation (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:16).

Marketing communication can be defined as communication focused on the external stakeholder groups of an organisation, namely its customers. It is all forms of communication that an organisation sends out in order to support the sale of its products, services and brand, or to receive feedback on the quality of these products, services and brands from their customers (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:17; Finne & Grönroos, 2009:180; Kayode, 2014:12). There are five ways in which marketing communication takes place. These are (1) advertising, (2) personal selling, (3) sales promotion, (4) public relations, and (5) direct marketing (Todorova, 2015:369).

Organisational communication is commonly regarded as a strategic type of communication that is aimed at a variety of stakeholders, including internal and external stakeholders such as shareholders, investors and media and/or parties that investigate and regulate financial and legal activities (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:20; Conrad & Poole, 2012:4; Harris & Nelson, 2018:12).

Thus far, Chapter 2 has briefly discussed corporate communication in terms of its definition and composition. This was necessary for the purpose of this study, as the theoretical aspect that the study investigated, namely corporate reputation management, forms part of corporate

communication (refer to section 1.1.1). The proceeding section explores how corporate reputation fits into corporate communications. Thereafter, the literature study regarding corporate reputation commences.

2.2.3 From corporate communication to corporate reputation

The common denominator found in all types of corporate communication is that it is focused on communication with stakeholders and the relationship that organisations have with each of their stakeholder groups (refer to sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2).

Corporate communication was previously defined as all communication with stakeholders that improves the organisation's position and corporate reputation as it is an organisational function that consists of various activities that aim to favourably position the organisation within its market and enhance its reputation (Lah *et al.*, 2016:121; Lerbinger, 2018:5) (refer to section 2.2.1). The importance in creating and improving a strong corporate reputation lies in its definition: corporate reputation is the sum of perceptions that stakeholders have of an organisation (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:43; Aula & Mantere, 2008:15-29; Cornelissen, 2020:4). This study has already determined how stakeholders view the organisation will have a direct influence on the organisation's long-term success (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3; Jeffery *et al.*, 2018:2; Gangi *et al.*, 2020:1975) (refer to section 1.1.1). It then stands to reason that because stakeholder perception is important for the survival of an organisation, and because corporate reputation is concerned with stakeholder perception, that corporate reputation will have an effect on the survival of the organisation. Corporate communication then links to corporate reputation in the sense that corporate reputation lies at the heart of corporate communication (Cornelissen, 2020:63).

Through an interpretation of works by Van der Walldt (2017:79) and Cornelissen (2020:63), Figure 2-1 hereunder visually depicts the three major types of communication within the framework of communication.



Source: Author's adaption from Van der Waldt (2017:79) and Cornelissen (2020:63)

Figure 2-1: The three types of corporate communication

In conclusion to the discussion of corporate communication and how corporate reputation fits into the larger framework of corporate communication, the literature study can proceed to an exploration of corporate reputation, beginning with the definition thereof.

2.3 Corporate reputation

Corporate reputation is a concept that has been defined by many scholars and practitioners alike. The definition thereof is far from simple and cannot be compacted into a single sentence. Accordingly, various sources that date from as early as 1990 to as recently as 2020 have been utilised to provide a definition for corporate reputation for this study.

The proceeding sections define corporate reputation.

2.3.1 Conceptualising corporate reputation

“If we lost all of our production facilities, we could rebuild the business. But if we lost our brand name and reputation, the business would collapse” (Sherman, 1999:9).

Although dated, the above quote made by Michael Sherman (1999:1) (then Chief Operating Officer of AIG Europe Limited) in *Reputation Management: Strategies for Protecting Companies, Their Brands and Their Directors (Director's Guides)*, points out that the concept of corporate reputation has not only been around for quite some time, but that it has also been, and continues to be, an essential tool for the success of an organisation.

Starting with scholars such as Elmer (1990:181), who researched the concept at the start of its influence in the early 1990s, we note that corporate reputation began as having two distinguishing qualities: (1) corporate reputation is not an individual judgement, rather it is a collective social judgement, and (2) corporate reputation is a result of multiple interactions between an organisation and its stakeholders. These interactions are not necessarily compliant of one another, and are subject to differentially (Aula & Mantere, 2008:15-29; Lah *et al.*, 2016:122).

Various works by scholars such as Fombrun and Van Riel can also be used as a starting point to define corporate reputation. Their various individual and collaborative works have shaped the literature pertaining to corporate reputation over the past three decades. Fombrun's (1996:3) early definition of corporate reputation suggests that it is the holistic representation that key stakeholders have of an organisation due to past and future interactions that they have experienced with it. Fombrun and Van Riel (1997:10) continue to define corporate reputation together as a holistic perception of how trustworthy and reliable an organisation is. These definitions have remained throughout the years and have been built upon not only by its original writers, but also by many other scholars, as this literature review proceeds to show.

Fombrun and Van Riel (2004:390) later characterised corporate reputation as a concept with two distinct properties: (1) corporate reputation is what creates and projects the views that stakeholders have of an organisation, and (2) corporate reputation is important as these views are what set the organisation apart from its leading competitors. The former is later substantiated in literature by scholars such as Aula and Mantere (2008:15-29) and the latter by scholars such as Garcia (2015:3) and Doorley and Garcia (2017:2). Later, literature proceeded to add to Fombrun and Van Riel's (2004) two properties of corporate reputation by defining corporate reputation as consisting of five properties, namely (1) reputation is based on perceptions; (2) these perceptions are those of both the organisation's internal and external stakeholders; (3) it is a comparative concept (in terms of competitors); (4) it can be described as being either positive

or negative; and (5) it is sustainable, but susceptible to change (Dickinson-Delaporte *et al.*, 2010:1857; Walker, 2010:370; Helm & Tolsdorf, 2013:146; Raithel & Schwaiger, 2015:946).

Corporate reputation can be regarded as a collective phenomenon, or overall perception, that stakeholders have of an organisation because of social practices and experiences (Helm, 2011:4; Dijkmans *et al.*, 2015:59; Burke *et al.*, 2018:1229). Stakeholders place various pieces of information regarding an organisation, acquired over time and through third party input, together to create the image that they have of an organisation (Elmer, 1990:178; Feldman *et al.*, 2014:54).

The perceptions that stakeholders have of an organisation are therefore determined by the sum of images of the organisation. These images include the organisation's finances, leadership, citizenship, culture, innovation, products and services, workplace, behaviour, performance, and communication (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3-4; Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:5; Kaul & Desai, 2016:1). These perceptions are formed over an extended period through the past and future interactions that stakeholders have had, or will have, with the organisation (Caywood, 2012:3; Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3; Cornelissen, 2020:63). These perceptions are furthermore socially constructed and can be developed independent of reality. This means that these objective perceptions are not always based on fact, are complicated to control, and are nearly impossible to manipulate (Walker, 2010:369; Aula & Heinonen, 2016:165). This view is grounded in literature as, on various occasions, it is stated that a corporate reputation is made up of different dimensions, is issue specific and the various stakeholder groups of an organisation may possibly have different perceptions of the organisation (Walker, 2010:357-364; Szöcs *et al.*, 2015:371; Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:5; Dijkmans *et al.*, 2015:59; Eckert, 2017:147; Vig *et al.*, 2017:41).

Corporate reputation is furthermore identified as a fragile, strategic, and key asset of an organisation that contributes to the organisation's distinct identity, personality, and image, which has great competitive value (Caywood, 2012:3; Van der Walddt, 2015:106; Pool *et al.*, 2016:1425; Ansoglenang *et al.*, 2018:2). Therefore, corporate reputation should be regarded as an essential strategic corporate asset (De Leaniz & Del Bosque Rodríguez, 2016:174; Enke & Borchers, 2021:9; Pérez-Cornejo *et al.*, 2021:1).

Moreover, corporate reputation is a concept that is more than often considered to be intangible (Helm, 2011:3; Reddiar *et al.*, 2012:29; Fernández-Gámez *et al.*, 2015:1). However, some scholars disagree that corporate reputation is just an intangible concept. These scholars opine that stating that regarding corporate reputation as being just an intangible concept is not helpful to the organisation when attempting to manage corporate reputation, as it limits management's understanding of the worth of their organisation's corporate reputation and the management thereof. Corporate reputation can be assessed through various organisational activities and facts

and is therefore also a tangible asset (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3; Pires & Trez, 2018:51; Gangi *et al.*, 2020:1975).

The importance of a strong corporate reputation lies in the fact that it is easier to build than to fix, suggesting that an organisation should always avoid establishing a negative corporate reputation among key stakeholders (Fortunato, 2008:117; Gatzert, 2015:458; Nirino *et al.*, 2021:2). A strong corporate reputation leads to reduced costs, increased profits, and a stable survival for the organisation. In addition, it influences the organisation's capability to sell products and/or services, draw in potential investors, employ paramount staff and influence their environment (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3; Fernández-Gámez *et al.*, 2016:2; Pool *et al.*, 2016:1426).

A strong corporate reputation, however, is not quick or easy to attain. Organisations must earn good corporate reputations by conducting responsible activities and providing reliable and unique products and/or services, and by facilitating trust, respect, and social capital through all communication with stakeholders (Aula & Mantere, 2008:14-15; Dowling, 2016:209; Cornelissen, 2020:63).

Corporate reputation must furthermore (1) be continuously implemented through all organisational activities, (2) always be taken into consideration, (3) regularly assessed, measured, and improved where possible, and (4) aligned with the objectives of the organisation (Griffin, 2009:1-7; Rossouw & van Vuuren, 2010:111). More recent research supports this, stating that corporate reputation must be measured, monitored, and managed, and organisations that fail to do so will miss opportunities, set themselves back in comparison with their competitors and create problems that could have been prevented (Aula & Mantere, 2008:15-29; Doorley & Garcia, 2015:5; Pollák *et al.*, 2021:93). All dimensions of corporate reputation are measurable, and organisations should therefore also place emphasis on the necessity of measuring corporate reputation (Reputation Institute, 2016b; Van der Walddt, 2017:78).

To define the term *corporate reputation* thus far, this section has determined that corporate reputation has a great deal to do with stakeholder perception. This is deduced from the various definitions discussed in this section that consider corporate reputation to be the perceptions that stakeholders have of an organisation, which are derived from the level of credibility that stakeholders award to the organisation. This is based on the trustworthiness and quality of the organisation that stakeholders have experienced from various interactions with the organisation over time (Van der Walddt, 2015:104; Dowling, 2016:209). Corporate reputation is a constant, collective, and measurable perception of an organisation that has been, and continues to be, developed through a stakeholder's past, current and future interactions with an organisation (Aula & Mantere, 2008:15; Walker, 2010:370; Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:5; Cornelissen, 2020:63). It then

stands to reason that if stakeholders play such an important role in corporate reputation, that the importance of stakeholder relations should be taken into consideration when investigating corporate reputation. The proceeding section therefore evaluates the importance of stakeholder relations within corporate reputation.

2.3.1.1 Corporate reputation and the importance of stakeholder relations

Stakeholders are defined as any person or group of persons who affect, or are affected by, the actions of an organisation (Smudde & Courtright, 2011:137; Reddiar *et al.*, 2012:32). The indirect effect that these stakeholders have on an organisation affects the organisation's corporate reputation (Matuleviciene & Stravinskiene, 2015:78; O'Loughlin *et al.*, 2015:406; Pérez-Cornejo *et al.*, 2021:2). With this, it is possible to state that corporate reputation depends greatly on stakeholder relations. Organisations should therefore proactively focus on managing stakeholder relations and consider the importance thereof from the very start of their corporate reputation management strategies (Aula & Mantere, 2008:30; Aula, 2011:30; Van der Waladt, 2015:110).

Each organisation has a unique blend of stakeholders. How important each stakeholder group is, is also unique to an organisation (Brandão *et al.*, 2017:162; Riahi, 2017:37). In general, stakeholder groups can be categorised as being (1) internal or external stakeholders, (2) primary or secondary stakeholder groups, (3) normative, functional, diffused or customer related groups, (4) regulatory, organisational, community or media groups, or (4) shadow groups (Matuleviciene & Stravinskiene, 2015:78-80; Slabá, 2016:308).

Most literature leans toward the theory that the employees and/or customers are the most important stakeholder groups for any organisation as these are the two largest stakeholder groups that will affect the organisation the most (Davies *et al.*, 2003:140; Matuleviciene & Stravinskiene, 2015:78; Metzker & Zvarikova, 2021:83).

In terms of customers, good management of these external stakeholders is found to be essential, as this is where an organisation's products and services are of the most importance (Ferrel, 2004:128; Guilbault, 2018:295). Customers must feel that they are treated well by the organisation at hand, and that they are receiving high quality for their contribution (Walsh & Beatty, 2007:130; Schrock & Lefevre, 2020:6). A good relationship between consumers and the organisation will result in building trust, loyalty, and satisfaction, which will, in turn, positively affect the organisation's corporate reputation (Smith, 2011:73; Hutama & Ekawati, 2020:210).

In terms of the employees of an organisation, these internal stakeholders are more than often noted to be the key stakeholders of the organisation as they generate a positive outcome in financial performance for an organisation, contribute to creating a competitive advantage, and will

not only stimulate a positive corporate identity among one another, but the front-line employees will also contribute to the perceptions that customers have of the organisation (Cravens & Oliver, 2006:294; Brandão *et al.*, 2017:162). Corporate reputation is highly associated with the employees and directors of the organisation in the sense that these individuals are seen as being part of the organisation's corporate reputation. Employees and directors are then vital assets to the success of the organisation's corporate reputation (O'Loughlin *et al.*, 2015:406; Van der Waladt, 2017:77).

However, although customers and employees are many a time noted to be the most important stakeholder groups of an organisation, some literature does state that no one stakeholder group can be generalised as being the most important stakeholder group. Rather, each organisation, being unique and functioning within a specific sector, should take the nature of their organisation into consideration and, according to this, determine who their key stakeholders are (Matuleviciene & Stravinskiene, 2015:80).

The corporate environment that exists within Industry 4.0 has called for stakeholder relations to be re-evaluated to minimise the aforementioned impact that these stakeholders have on an organisation (Van der Waladt, 2015:111). The traditional approach to managing stakeholder relations will, in other words, not be sufficient. This re-evaluation can be accredited to the recent new trends that corporate reputation has been experiencing, which will be discussed in a proceeding section of this chapter (refer to section 2.3.2). However, Industry 4.0 seems to be the dominating trend affecting stakeholder relations, as virtual stakeholders have emerged as a result thereof and have proven to be a challenge for organisations to manage. Stakeholders are now able to have an immediate global impact on organisation's corporate reputation through easy access to internet and social media platforms (Van der Waladt, 2015:111; Ghadge *et al.*, 2020:670). The internet and online communications have proven to be strategic tools when it comes to managing corporate reputations in terms of stakeholder relations. This is mainly because these tools play a role in influencing how stakeholders feel about an organisation (Aula, 2011:30).

From this, it is evident that corporate reputation is strongly influenced through stakeholder relations and perspectives. It then stands to reason that stakeholder relations and perspectives must be effectively monitored and managed. As corporate reputation and stakeholder relations are interlinked, monitoring and managing corporate reputation will assist in monitoring and managing stakeholder relations and perspectives, and *vice versa*.

From the conceptualisation of corporate reputation and the importance of stakeholder relations within corporate reputation, this study defines corporate reputation as follows:

Corporate reputation is a valuable, manageable, and measurable core asset of an organisation that yields both tangible and intangible benefits (Van der Waladt, 2015:104; Pool *et al.*, 2016:1425; Gangi *et al.*, 2020:1975). It is characterised as being either a negative or positive overall perception that an organisation's various stakeholder groups have of the organisation (Aula & Mantere, 2008:15; Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:5). These perceptions are developed over time from these stakeholders' past experiences and will continue to develop because of future interactions with the organisation (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3; Cornelissen, 2020:63).

As this study focuses on corporate reputation within the NWU, the section that follows is a discussion that contextualises corporate reputation in terms of the NWU.

2.3.1.2 Corporate reputation in the context of the NWU

Corporate reputation is an important concept within the HES due to the competitive and ever-changing nature of the sector (refer to section 1.1.2). The stakeholders of higher education institutions (HEIs) within in this sector, such as staff, students and alumni, show significant interest in their institution's corporate reputation (Verčič *et al.*, 2012:161; Rashid & Mustafa, 2020:297). This interest arises because the corporate reputation of a tertiary institution allows these stakeholders to get an idea of how the institution has performed in the past, indicates what the current product and service quality of the institution is, and therefore attracts paramount students and staff (Plewa *et al.*, 2016:3088; Burke *et al.*, 2018:1229).

Corporate reputation is a valuable, manageable, measurable and core asset of the NWU (Van der Waladt, 2015:106; Pool *et al.*, 2016:1425; Reputation Institute, 2016b; Ansoglenang *et al.*, 2018:2; Cornelissen, 2020:63). It has the potential to produce both tangible (for example third stream revenue acquired from research outputs) and intangible benefits (for example stakeholders that express a positive perception of the NWU) for the university (Fernández-Gámez *et al.*, 2015:1; Gangi *et al.*, 2020:1975).

Moreover, the NWU's corporate reputation is characterised as being the collective perceptions of the NWU held by both internal (staff and current students) and external (prospective students, alumni, the communities where the NWU is present, and role players within the HES) stakeholders. These perceptions can be either positive or negative, have developed over time from stakeholders' past experiences with the NWU, and will continue to develop because of future interactions that stakeholders will have with the NWU (Aula & Mantere, 2008:15; Walker, 2010:370; Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:5; Cornelissen, 2020:63). Although all these stakeholders' perceptions are important to understand the entirety of the NWU's corporate reputation, this study

focuses on the perceptions of only one internal stakeholder group of the NWU, namely the NWU's staff.

Corporate reputation is not just an organisational asset that should be taken into consideration by organisations within the business environment, but should also be regarded as a strategic asset for HEIs (Rashid & Mustafa, 2020:297). Corporate reputation is therefore a concept that should be investigated and assessed by the NWU to ensure that the university's stakeholders positively perceive it, and that these perceptions are aligned with the NWU's strategic goals (Griffin, 2009:1-7; Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010:111).

By investigating and assessing its corporate reputation, the NWU will be able to grasp a good understanding of how its corporate reputation can be effectively managed. A well-managed corporate reputation will lead to a strong corporate reputation, which, in turn, will provide the university with benefits such as a stable intake of new students and the ability to employ skilled staff (Griffin, 2009:1-7; Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3; Fernández-Gámez *et al.*, 2016:2). Corporate reputation is furthermore a measurable concept and should therefore be handled as such by the NWU (Alves *et al.*, 2014:58; Van der Waldt, 2015:116).

In summary, this section provided a discussion that produced definition of corporate reputation (refer to section 2.3.1.1). The concept of corporate reputation can be broadened to include new findings as research regarding corporate reputation grows, and as sectors in which the concept is used, change.

2.3.2 New trends surrounding corporate reputation

Van der Waldt (2015:117) holds that because corporate reputation is dynamic and susceptible to change, it stands to reason that new trends pertaining to the concept will arise. The ever-changing corporate environment in which organisations find themselves, as well as new developments made by academia regarding corporate reputation and the management thereof, are also contributing factors as to why new trends develop (Panwar *et al.*, 2016:154, Vitale, 2020).

Although the trends surrounding corporate reputation are not found in a listed format in most of the study's referenced sources (refer to section 1.6.1.1), Van der Waldt (2015:117-121) presents a list of five trends that affect to corporate reputation. This list includes virtual organisations, digital information, social technologies, social media parody accounts and online reputation management. The common denominator between trends then seems to be the development of technology that has influenced the corporate environment. With this, the study therefore identifies another trend, namely the 4th Industrial Revolution (refer to section 1.1.1). Another trend identified

in section 1.1.1 was that of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has also been added to the lists of trends that may have an influence on corporate reputation.

2.3.2.1 The Covid-19 pandemic

The end of 2019 marked the arrival of a global pandemic: The Corona Virus, or Covid-19. Covid-19 is a contagious virus that can cause patients to become critically ill. The virus saw high mortality rates world-wide and caused life as we knew to come to a halt (Daniel, 2020:93; Lone & Ahmad, 2020:1300; World Health Organisation, 2021). On an international level, many countries went into full lockdowns, including South Africa, when the Corona Virus arrived on South African shores in March of 2020 (Chowell & Mizumoto, 2020:1094; Haryanto, 2020:1; sacoronavirus, 2021).

During these lockdowns, little to no business activity took place. People were told to stay at home, and therefore work from home, and only leave for essentials such as buying groceries and seeking medical attention. As the infection rates dropped and raised, South Africa implemented different *Corona Virus Levels*. These levels were implemented along with the National State of Disaster declaration and were government guidelines that regulated business activity during the pandemic; in other words, which business sectors could operate, and which could not. However, even at the lowest level, although organisations were allowed to operate, people were still encouraged to adopt work-from-home policies as far as possible (South African Government, 2021). On 4 April 2022, at midnight, the National State of Disaster in South Africa was terminated, and all sectors were free to resume business at full capacity (Reuters, 2022).

This unforeseen pandemic prompted organisations to find alternative ways to reach their objectives during the pandemic's period. In response, if the organisation's nature allowed it, many organisations turned to technology and attempted to continue running as virtual organisations (refer to section 2.3.2.3). Although research surrounding the pandemic's effect on corporate reputation is limited, it can be noted that the readiness and ability of organisations to do so have had an impact on their corporate reputations in the sense that organisations that were able to effectively implement this shift received praise from their stakeholders. On the other hand, organisations that failed in this shift, lost in terms of performance and stakeholder perception (Hassan & Soliman, 2021:2).

Section 1.1.1 identified the 4th Industrial Revolution as one of, if not the most, sufficient trends affecting organisations and their corporate reputations. The proceeding section discusses this trend.

2.3.2.2 The 4th industrial revolution

The 4th industrial revolution, otherwise known as Industry 4.0, should be consulted in all organisational activities to positively influence the organisation (Lee *et al.*, 2018:9). Industry 4.0 is characterised by various automation technologies, namely cyber physical systems (CPS), the internet of things (IoT) and cloud computing. These technologies have intergraded the real world with the virtual world (Xu *et al.*, 2018:2941; Manda & Dhaou, 2019:245).

The 4th industrial revolution has brought with it a new culture of stakeholders, and organisations should therefore familiarise themselves with what Industry 4.0 is and how it can influence their stakeholder relationships, and therefore their corporate reputation (Lee *et al.*, 2018:8; Ghobakhloo, 2020:6).

Many of the current trends to be discussed in the proceeding sections are strongly related to Industry 4.0, as these trends are in some way, shape or form connected to technological advances. One such trend is identified as that of virtual organisations.

2.3.2.3 Virtual organisations

Thomas (2019) suggests that a virtual organisation consists of a “virtual office, virtual teams, and virtual leadership” and provides “innovative, high-quality products or services instantaneously in response to customer demands”. Van der Waladt (2015:117) defines a virtual organisation as a “network organisation” that has virtual properties, but states that the virtual organisation does not yet have a clear definition as it consists of different dimensions that display different virtual levels, namely “virtual teams, telecommunications, home based employees, hoteling and hot desking and adhocracy”.

Virtual organisations have recently come into the mix due to globalisation, the constant developments surrounding technology, an increase in global competition and changing consumer needs within the 21st century’s corporate environment (Nami, 2008:211; Papastefanou, 2008:7). An organisation that has become adaptable to this new corporate environment creates a competitive advantage for itself as it is able to place extended focus on being an interconnected organisation that can function flexibly. This flexibility allows such organisations to offer a wide variety of products and services to consumers at a lower cost and increased convenience (Van der Waladt, 2015:117; Vitale, 2020).

Virtual organisations are an uncertain business as they fail as often as they succeed. However, traditional organisations can no longer handle the pace at which their stakeholders require

information, services and/or products. A virtual presence is then at the least a necessity, but it needs to be managed effectively (Nami, 2008:213; Thomas, 2019).

Because the concept of a virtual organisation is a new trend, it is essential that academia and practitioners attempting to implement corporate reputation management within such organisations first understand its dynamic make up. Van der Waldt (2015:117) outlines five “principles of a virtual organisation”: (1) the most common principle between virtual organisations is that they all “break the constraints across space and time”, meaning that regardless of where the actual entity is situated, its virtual presence allows it to reach a wide demographic of stakeholders, both internally and externally; (2) virtual organisations rely greatly on “knowledge systems” as they are characterised as being “information intensive”; (3) as virtual organisations are able to communicate with such a wide demographic audience, these organisations are also able to connect the different individual groups, assets and ideas that make up this wide spread audience, even “across traditional boundaries”; (4) virtual organisations communicate with stakeholders through technological platforms, doing away with traditional face-to-face communications; and (5) virtual organisations are “dynamic and flexible”.

2.3.2.4 Digital information

Due to the corporate environment created by Industry 4.0, which is subject to constant technological change and advancement, organisations have begun to feel the pressure of changing the ways in which they communicate (Van der Waldt, 2015:118; Lee *et al.*, 2018:8). One of the greatest factors in this regard has become the use of digital information, as stakeholder presence in virtual networks and online platforms has intensified. This has changed the way in which corporate stakeholders relate to, and use communication media (Van der Waldt, 2015:118; Flyverbom *et al.*, 2016:100). Almost every individual has access to a smart phone equipped with internet access, several applications, and media accounts.

The statement that these corporate stakeholders are more connected than ever before can therefore without argument be agreed upon. This can then also create competitive advantage for organisations that have already adapted to the new virtual trend and at the same time, negatively influence organisations that have not yet seen the change.

In terms of corporate reputation, it can be argued that virtual and digital friendly organisations will fare better, especially to the younger more technologically based stakeholders, as they will feel that their needs are easily being met in addition to the convenience that they will enjoy.

Digital information can be communicated to stakeholders through social technologies, presented in the following section.

2.3.2.5 Social technologies

Social technology applications are easily downloaded to devices and are therefore used by the majority of stakeholders. This has, in turn, created the dominance of social technologies as the mainstream communication medium (Van der Waladt, 2015:119; Hogan & Strasburger, 2018:1). Organisations have had to adapt to using social media platforms as communication channels to effectively reach stakeholders (Veil *et al.*, 2011:115; Troise & Camilleri, 2021:2).

There are many social media platforms available, each differing in functionality, while the most used social media platforms are Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Pelletier *et al.*, 2019:270; Shawky *et al.*, 2019:213). Social media platforms such as these can have negative effects on an organisation and its corporate reputation as thousands of stakeholders can now easily communicate not only with the organisation through a medium that everyone can witness, but also with one another (Van der Waladt, 2015:119; Proseripo & Zervas, 2016:2). In addition, social media allows for information to be spread quickly and to be constantly available (Eckert, 2017:145).

Social media has grown at an exponential rate, seeing almost 70% of adults admitting to actively using at least one social media platform, and 50% of these users visiting these platforms daily (Pelletier *et al.*, 2019:270). In 2015, Van der Waladt presented statistics for social media platforms specifically within a South Africa framework. The study by World Wide Worx conducted in 2013 that Van der Waladt uses as a framework, stated that at the time that Facebook had 9.4 million users. Twitter was in second place with 5.5 million users. However, more recent research states that while Facebook is the number one used social media platform, YouTube now comes in second and Twitter in third (Shawky *et al.*, 2019:213).

Social media platforms and the use thereof have created challenges for organisations (Van der Waladt, 2015:119; Kane, 2017:38; Troise & Camilleri, 2021:2). These challenges include first and foremost the effective management of social media platforms related to the organisation. The question of who should be responsible for the effective implementation and management of such platforms is most probably the biggest challenge, while others include organisations having to place more focus on their corporate communication and public relations departments and creating new employment positions relating to the management and strategic creation of an organisational social media and online presence (Van der Waladt, 2015:119; Pelletier *et al.*, 2019:270). The problem most likely lies in the fact that organisations do not always understand that various social media platforms each has its own purpose and that a one-size-fits-all approach is not viable (Roshan *et al.*, 2016:352; Pelletier *et al.*, 2019:270).

In addition, organisations should focus on how to integrate their business objectives and organisational functions with their social media needs. To do so, many organisations have transformed themselves into social businesses, meaning that they are more flexible and responsive to the challenges of the digital age, while all stakeholders of the organisation take responsibility for the social technologies (Van der Waladt, 2015:120; Pelletier *et al.*, 2019:273).

Corporate reputation management pertaining to social technologies is also a subject of concern as traditional approaches are not equipped to manage corporate reputation functionally and effectively (Van der Waladt, 2015:120). Academia have recently been looking at ways to manage corporate reputation within the context of virtual and social platforms.

Social media platforms have the potential to cause harm to a corporate reputation as this study has already concluded. These platforms give way to another trend that can harm corporate reputations, namely social media parody accounts, which are discussed in the following section.

2.3.2.6 Social media parody accounts

A social media parody account is an account or handle on a social media platform that is created to intentionally mock something by means of humour, irony, or satire (Wan *et al.*, 2015:383; Highfield, 2016:2820; Maronikoulakis *et al.*, 2020:1). Most parody accounts on social media are fake accounts. A parody's reputation will outlast that of which it is a parody's reputation (Van der Waladt, 2015:120; Ferrari, 2020:1). Therefore, organisations may find accounts on social media platforms that use the organisation's name and logo, but these accounts are not actually associated with the organisation.

Parody accounts have become more common within a South African context at times when certain issues grip the nation's attention (Van der Waladt, 2015:120).

The trends discussed in sections 2.3.2.2 through to 2.3.2.6 have been noted to require the attention of corporate reputation management. Although corporate reputation management will be discussed in section 2.5 to follow, online reputation management is identified by this study as the final trend surrounding corporate reputation. The following section discusses this trend.

2.3.2.7 Online reputation management and the importance thereof

As online platforms gain traction and popularity, organisations must actively work to ensure an impeccable online presence to positively affect their corporate reputation (Portmann *et al.*, 2015:93; Proseripo & Zervas; 2016:2). Although little research is available regarding these new trends and the management thereof, Van der Waladt (2015:121) states that, as a starting point,

organisations should be aware of, and constantly monitor their online presence, which consists of, for example, blogs, emails, websites, and social media platforms.

A single post from an account directed at an organisation has the potential to reach thousands of individuals who form part of the organisation's stakeholders (Highfield, 2015:2023; Wan *et al.*, 2015:383). Any post that reaches these stakeholders has the potential to alter the perception that these stakeholders have of the organisation and therefore the organisation's corporate reputation. When these posts are negative, many organisations attempt to obstruct them by partaking in damaging activities such as fraud, solicitation of positive posts, taking legal action against those who made the post(s) at hand, and warning stakeholders of consequences should they post negative reviews (Van der Waladt, 2015:121; Proseripo & Zervas, 2016:2).

To manage these trends, organisations should therefore rather constantly monitor their online presence. Through this, organisations can position themselves to potentially detect any stakeholders or parody accounts that are aiming to damage their corporate reputation at an early stage (Van der Waladt, 2015:121).

In summary, the Covid-19 pandemic, the 4th industrial revolution, virtual organisations, digital information, social technologies, social media parody accounts and online reputation management are all trends that can affect corporate reputations. In the following section, these trends are discussed within the context of the NWU.

2.3.2.8 New trends surrounding corporate reputation in the context of the NWU

Within the context of the NWU, each of the identified new trends surrounding corporate reputation, as discussed in sections 2.3.2.1 to 2.3.2.7, is discussed as follows:

- **The Covid-19 pandemic**

Covid-19 has influenced all sectors of business, including the HES. Institutions such as the NWU were closed for physical classes and on-campus activities due to the risk of the virus spreading. In response, the NWU had to find alternative ways to reach their objectives, especially in terms of teaching and learning, producing graduates for their current year, and recruiting students for the following year. The NWU continued its teaching and learning plans via e-learning platforms such as eFundi², Zoom and Microsoft Teams. In addition, graduates were formally awarded their degrees via social media, specifically via a live streaming on the university's YouTube account. Student recruitment

² An e-learning platform used by the NWU. The platform is a gateway where students receive information about their modules such as presentations and other information used in classes. Students can also write tests and submit assignments on the platform.

at the NWU shifted from big, in-person and interactive events and campaigns such as Open Days, the Science Convention and Engineering Week, to virtual tours and interactive pdf brochures. The NWU therefore became reliant on the virtual world. Although the NWU implemented these alternatives, stakeholders were at times unhappy with what they were provided. Students complained that communication was not sent (although it was), and that classes were not interactive enough. Parents complained that they were paying for a contact service that their children were not receiving. Graduates complained that they deserved a more personal graduation. Staff morale and productivity had to be closely monitored while still attending to their and the stakeholder groups' grievances. The readiness of, speed, and manner in which the NWU implemented alternatives had an effect on its corporate reputation as key stakeholders, namely staff and students, were directly influenced by every step of this virtual existence that the NWU had to convert to.

- **The 4th industrial revolution**

The NWU has transformed in terms of the 4th industrial revolution by making use of the technologies that Industry 4.0 has brought with it. Students and staff both make use of online platforms (e.g. eFundi, Citrix³), and social technologies (e.g. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn) for both study and work purposes. The transformation of Industry 4.0 is also seen within the NWU in terms of its research and innovation projects such as the *Tjop*⁴ Coronavirus smartphone screening application and the NWU Solar Car.

- **Virtual organisation**

The NWU can be seen as a virtual organisation in terms of the Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes offered by the university. With this, the university provides one of its core business aspects, namely tertiary education, via online learning platforms. Other properties of virtual organisations also exist within the NWU. These include online application and communications provided through various online channels such as the website and social media. The Coronavirus pandemic also contributed to the NWU acting as a virtual organisation as students and staff were required to study and work from home.

³ A system that is downloaded to a computer that, when accessed, allows a student or staff member from the NWU to work on their personal device as if it were a device on campus. This gives students and staff access to applications available on on-campus devices.

⁴ A health-screening mobile app created by the NWU Faculty of Engineering that can be used by organisations of all sorts to record and store data pertaining to the pandemic.

- **Digital information**

Digital information is spread on a regular basis from the NWU to its stakeholders through online channels. Staff, for example, receive regular emails from the Vice-Chancellor and Department of Corporate Communication. In times of crises, such as the Coronavirus pandemic, staff received official updates via e-mail daily, which later became the *Daily Comms*. This newsletter remained even after the pandemic and is currently being used to distribute information about studies and events among others. Staff also receive other newsletters such as the NWU *Eish!*⁵, *@NWUResearch*⁶ and department-specific newsletters such as the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences' (FNAS) *Science Scoop*⁷. Students receive digital information from the NWU via email, SMS and various NWU social media accounts. Even NWU alumni receive digital information in terms of the *NWU Alumni* newsletter and email updates handled by Stakeholder Relations. Moreover, the university also introduced a bot on its social media that generates immediate interaction with stakeholders on social media.

- **Social technologies**

The NWU has many Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram accounts and Twitter handles as almost every campus, faculty, research group, student campus council (SCC), student representative council (SRC), student academic association (SAC) and student residence has either one or a combination of these accounts, all of which are handled by different individuals who have limited communication with one another. Every post by every one of these accounts or handles has the potential to affect the collective stakeholder perception of the university.

On 31/01/2023, the university's official Facebook page (North-West University) had 86 005 likes and 92 115 followers, the official NWU Twitter (@theNWU) handle had 28 700 followers; the NWU Instagram account (my_nwu) had 34 300 followers and its LinkedIn account (North-West University/Noordwes-Universiteit) had 107 880 followers. This means that one post by any of these handles or accounts can reach thousands of users, emphasising the risk that social technology and digital information has for the NWU.

⁵ The official NWU staff electronic magazine.

⁶ A quarterly electronic newsletter that showcases research and innovation activities at the NWU.

⁷ The official FNAS electronic newsletter.

- **Social media parody accounts**

In terms of social media parody accounts, a search on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn on 15/07/2020 found no accounts or handles claiming to be the NWU. However, apart from the various official affiliations such as faculty, library, campus, sport, hostel, student council and accommodation-based handles/accounts, a few unofficial affiliations were noticed. These included handles/accounts on Facebook (e.g. NWU confessions – a page where NWU students post cringeworthy personal confessions) and Instagram (e.g. nwu_vaal_cool_kids which seems to be an unofficial account for NWU Vanderbijlpark Campus students). The search also showed one old account for the NWU on Instagram with only two posts, which makes use of the university's old logo and corporate colours, as well as one glitch account on LinkedIn, with 8 236 followers, which makes use of the correct NWU logo and colours, but misspells its name as "North West University", failing to add the hyphen between North and West.

- **Online reputation management:**

Online reputation management is essential in terms of the NWU as the university makes use of new technologies that, accompanied by Industry 4.0, has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, engages in the trend of a virtual organisation, makes use of various forms of digital information and social media platforms and is at risk of social media parody accounts. The theoretical discussion of each of these trends, as seen in sections 2.3.2.1 to 2.3.2.7, combined with the context thereof, as discussed here above, provides motivation as to why managing these online presences is important for the NWU.

In summary, it can be stated that these new trends require the attention of academics and practitioners alike to establish how these trends, and any other new trends, should be managed by organisations. In terms of the NWU, this argument is justified when considering that these trends all have an influence on the NWU. Moreover, the NWU's corporate reputation is also prone to being influenced by any new trends that may arise. It is therefore suggested that the NWU should take note of these trends and the possibility of influence that they may have on its corporate reputation to act accordingly regarding the management thereof.

Considering the literature discussed in section 2.3, the first guiding theoretical argument for the study is presented hereunder:

Guiding theoretical argument 1:

Corporate reputation is a corporate asset characterised by the perceptions of an organisation's stakeholders from their past and future interactions that they have had and will have with the organisation. When managed correctly, a good **corporate reputation** allows an organisation to be unique, adds competitive advantage and contributes to the long-term success of the organisation. Corporate reputation is influenced by **trends**, identified by this study as **Covid-19, the 4th industrial revolution, virtual organisations, digital information, social technologies, social media parody accounts** and **online reputation management**. The NWU has been influenced by all these trends and has the potential to be influenced by any other **new trends** that arise. The NWU should therefore be constantly aware of such **trends** and the influence that they may have on its **corporate reputation**.

Apart from being influenced by trends, corporate reputation is also influenced by the elements of which it is comprised. The proceeding section identifies the elements of corporate reputation.

2.4 Corporate reputation elements

Corporate reputation comprises elements (Van der Waladt, 2015:106; Drugă, 2021:104). Early research stated that the elements of corporate reputation were simply the organisation's image, identity, and desired identity (Chun, 2005:190). Three years later, these elements were expanded to being defined as the sum of an organisation's corporate identity, consisting of its customer image, community image, investor image and employee image (Argenti, 2008:3). Two additional years onward, three elements of corporate reputation were identified, namely corporate identity, corporate image, and corporate brand (Walker, 2010:359). Doorley and Garcia (2015:3) also identify four elements of corporate reputation, namely performance, behaviour, communication and, intrinsic identity. More recently, Cornelissen (2020:138) argues that one should look at the how an organisation performs financially, the quality of its products or services, how staff feel they are treated, the organisation's involvement in the community and its environmental footprint.

Over the past two decades, organisations have found themselves functioning in an environment that is subject to change and new trends (refer to section 1.1.1). This, in turn, forces organisations to alter the way in which they function. Within a South African context, this can be contributed to (1) globalisation, (2) new communication technologies, (3) the 4th industrial revolution, which includes changes and advances in CPS, IoT and cloud computing (Goldman & Shapiro, 2012:3; Xu *et al.*, 2018:2941); (4) the integration of Millennials and Gen Z'ers into primary stakeholder groups of organisations, and (5) the Covid-19 pandemic. Considering this, new elements for corporate reputation, such as organisational behaviour and culture, social media platforms,

organisational management, organisational personality, organisational competence, and organisational sincerity have surfaced to keep the management and measurement thereof up to date (Van der Waldt, 2015:106). Although these new elements are noted by Van der Waldt (2015:106), he states that it is, however, not possible to make use of all these scholarly inputs and chooses to specifically classify five main elements of reputation, namely (1) corporate identity; (2) corporate image; (3) corporate brand; (4) corporate personality; and (5) corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture. From this, this study interprets the elements of corporate reputation in Figure 2-2 below.



Source: Author's own interpretation from Van der Waldt (2015:106)

Figure 2-2: The Elements of Corporate Reputation

Although taking the research by Chun (2005), Argenti (2008), Walker (2010), Goldman and Shapiro (2012), Doorley and Garcia (2015) and Cornelissen (2020) into consideration, this study makes use of Van der Waldt's (2015) identification of five corporate reputation elements as a framework as Van der Waldt includes most aspects of prior literature pertaining to elements of corporate reputation as well as more recent additions. The discussion of these elements begins with that of the first element of corporate reputation, namely corporate identity, in the proceeding section.

2.4.1 Corporate identity

Corporate identity is discussed according to four sections, namely (1) the definition thereof, (2) its components, (3) its structure and measurement, and (4) how it fits in to corporate reputation.

2.4.1.1 Defining corporate identity

Simply put, corporate identity is how an organisation sees itself – it is the answer to the question, “who do we, as an organisation, think we are?” (Signori & Flint, 2020:26).

Corporate identity is the most unique and an essential element of an organisation, which is, in essence, how the organisation portrays itself to its stakeholders. It comprises all the “distinctive, central and enduring” traits of the organisation (Glandfield *et al.*, 2017:138-139; Melewar *et al.*, 2018:337). There is a distinct trend for organisations to refer to a corporate identity as pertinent to internal stakeholders, and as the most fundamental element of an organisation as perceived by the organisation’s employees (Walker, 2010:365-366; Balmer, 2017:1475; Cachón-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2021:275).

Corporate identity is furthermore the combination of the organisation’s (1) visual and symbolic presentation (made up of the sum of the organisation’s vision, behaviour, culture, values, and visual presentation), and (2) its internal stakeholders’ behaviours and actions (Helm *et al.*, 2011:48; Devereux *et al.*, 2020:414; Signori & Flint, 2020:25).

When a corporate identity is assigned, the ideal is that it is done so consciously to serve a goal, namely, to communicate visually and intentionally, who the organisation is to its stakeholders. However, at times, organisations unintentionally send out messages or signals to stakeholders and although unintentional, these signals also contribute to defining the organisation’s corporate identity (Flint *et al.*, 2018:67; Signori & Flint, 2020:28). Moreover, corporate identity is also a concept that is made up of various components that can individually or collectively affect the emotions of stakeholders (Van der Waltdt, 2015:106; Flint *et al.*, 2018:67). These components are discussed in the proceeding section.

2.4.1.2 The components of corporate identity

Around two decades ago, the basis of corporate identity was considered the sum of visual organisational elements such as an organisation’s logo, tagline, colour palette, corporate communication, location and architecture, and other organisational activities and/or elements, such as the organisation’s corporate behaviour, corporate culture, and market position (Melewar & Jenkins, 2002:81; Alessandri *et al.*, 2006).

More recent research still considers the components of corporate identity as being various organisational activities and elements. Visual elements, behaviour, appearance, communication, design, culture, structure, industry, and strategy of the organisation are emphasised as being core

components of corporate identity (Helm *et al.*, 2011:48; Melewar *et al.*, 2018:337; Devereux *et al.*, 2020:241).

Taking the past decade's research surrounding corporate identity into consideration, this study defines the components of corporate identity as organisational elements and/or activities that have an emotional effect on stakeholders. Specifically, the study identifies these components as (1) the visual elements of the organisation such as its logo and corporate colours, (2) the behaviour and culture of the organisation and its employees, (3) the structure, strategy, industry, and design of the organisation, (4) the way in which the organisation communicates, and (5) the organisation's culture and values.

As previously discussed, corporate reputation is a perception that stakeholders have of an organisation (Caywood, 2012:3; Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3; Cornelissen, 2020:63). Corporate identity therefore influences corporate reputation as the emotions that stakeholders experience through interaction with the components of corporate identity, will influence the perceptions that they have of the organisation (Stephens *et al.*, 2019:2).

Aside from comprising various components, corporate identity can also be discussed according to its structure and measurement, as the proceeding section shows.

2.4.1.3 The structure and measurement of corporate identity

The concept of corporate identity can be divided into two contributing concepts, namely the desired identity and the actual identity. The desired identity refers to how the organisation wants its internal stakeholders to view the organisation. This is a positive perception (Tanković, 2015:240). The actual identity refers to what these internal stakeholders really perceive the organisation to be. This can be either a positive or a negative perception (Walker, 2010:366).

Employees are identified as the key stakeholder group when considering corporate identity, as they have an influence on the success thereof. This is because these employees have a direct effect on the organisation's performance (Balmer, 2017:1484; Brandão *et al.*, 2017:164). Employees are furthermore the link between the organisation and its consumers, as these are the people who directly communicate with, represent the organisation to, and deliver services to consumers (Fritz *et al.*, 2017:333; Glandfield *et al.*, 2017:137). This influences how satisfied customers are, and how loyal they will remain to the organisation. In addition, the level of customer satisfaction and loyalty will influence the profitability and growth of the organisation (Smith, 2011:73; Glandfield *et al.*, 2017:137; Hutama & Ekawati, 2020:210).

Corporate Identity can be measured according to the corporate identity model, or the AC² ID Test, developed in 2003 by Balmer and Greyser. In essence, this test gathers data from stakeholders regarding the corporate identity to determine whether it is perceived to be ideal or desired, actual, or somewhere in between (Murwani & Melati, 2017:258). Additional measures of corporate identity include credibility, consumer congruence measures and by measuring elements such as corporate structure, behaviour, industry, brand, expertise, values, social responsibility activities or a combination thereof (Panigyrakis *et al.*, 2019:675).

2.4.1.4 Placing corporate identity within corporate reputation

Corporate identity is often used as a synonym for corporate reputation (Eckert, 2017:148). However, the two differ in the sense that corporate identity focuses on how internal stakeholders of the organisation perceive the organisation, while corporate reputation is focused on the collective perceptions of all stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2020:63; Signori & Flint, 2020:26). If corporate identity focuses on only one stakeholder group, and corporate reputation on multiple stakeholder groups, then corporate identity can be said to fit into corporate reputation as forming part of it.

Corporate identity is closely linked to another element of corporate reputation, namely corporate image. These elements are linked in the sense that when aligned, they have a positive result on the organisation's corporate reputation (Helm *et al.*, 2011:24; Tarnovskaya, 2017:15). The proceeding section discusses corporate image as an element of corporate reputation.

2.4.2 Corporate image

The discussion regarding corporate image takes place in terms of (1) its definition, (2) its structure, (3) its measurement and, (4) how it fits into corporate reputation. The discussion begins with the definition thereof.

2.4.2.1 Defining corporate image

While corporate identity is linked to internal stakeholders of an organisation, corporate image is linked to the external stakeholders (Lu *et al.*, 2019:449; Signori & Flint, 2020:27). Furthermore, while corporate identity aids to answering the question, "who do we think we are?", corporate image answers the question "what/who do others think we are?" (Walker, 2010:366).

Corporate image can be defined as the sum of the various intentional and accidental communications based on social, financial, product and recruitment issues that an organisation has sent out over an extended period to external stakeholders (Van der Walldt, 2015:107; Bozkurt, 2018:61). These communications allow external stakeholders to form a mental picture comprising

the beliefs, ideas, and impressions of the organisation, and, in essence, we refer to this perception as the corporate image (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:43; Helm *et al.*, 2011:49).

Moreover, a corporate image will most likely be a positive perception as the corporate image is what the organisation attempts to project themselves to be from the inside-out, although it should be noted that negative experiences between external stakeholders and the organisation can still occur (Walker, 2010:367).

As corporate identity and corporate image are two elements that link closely to one another, they also share a similar structure as the following section proceeds to show.

2.4.2.2 The structure of corporate image

The definitions of corporate image vary slightly from one another in terms of being either desired (what the organisation wants external stakeholders to perceive them as) or actual (what the external stakeholders really perceive the organisation to be) (Frandsen, 2017:1797; Bozkurt, 2018:61). However, corporate image should ideally be defined as desired as it is what the organisation actively attempts to project to external stakeholders in the hope that this is what they (the external stakeholders) will believe (Walker, 2010:366).

2.4.2.3 Measuring corporate image

A corporate image can be measured through quantitative instruments such as surveys. More than often, these surveys comprise statements or questions derived from literature pertaining to corporate image such as what it is comprised of and what affects it, in conjunction with the nature of the organisation of which the image is being measured (Flavián *et al.*, 2004:368). Other methods for measuring corporate image have included attitude scales, the Kelly Repertory Grid (KRG), the natural grouping method and even in-depth interviews with stakeholders (Lamelas, 2011:63-68). However, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews may prove problematic when considering the sheer scale of interviews that would have to take place within certain contexts. More recently then, set questionnaires such as that of Fortune's Most Admired Companies, which is essentially a questionnaire posed to stakeholders that requires interviewees to rate the organisation on an 11-point Likert scale in terms of statements by the questionnaire, have also been used to measure corporate image (Verčič *et al.*, 2012:162; Thielsch & Wirth, 2017:288).

2.4.2.4 Placing corporate image in corporate reputation

As is the case with corporate identity, corporate reputation is often used synonymously with corporate image, which leads to confusion within the field of corporate reputation management

(refer to section 2.1.4.4). Therefore, it should be emphasised that corporate reputation and corporate image are most definitely not the same thing. Rather than being equivalent to corporate reputation, corporate image forms part of it, and therefore has a strong influence on it in the sense that a good corporate reputation partly results from a good corporate image being built up over time (Aula & Mantere, 2008:27; Helm *et al.*, 2011:5; Van der Walddt, 2015:108).

Just as corporate identity and corporate image are closely linked to one another and form part of corporate reputation, these elements are also closely linked to the third element of corporate reputation. The corporate brand relates to corporate image and corporate identity as the corporate brand creates the emotional attachment and attitudes that stakeholders have with an organisation and its products and/or services (Davies *et al.*, 2003:77; Van der Walddt, 2015:108). Although the corporate brand is strongly linked to corporate identity and corporate image, this study has listed the corporate brand as being a separate element of corporate reputation.

2.4.3 Corporate brand

The sections that follow discuss the element in terms of (1) its definition, (2) what the importance of a strong corporate brand is, (3) its measurement and, (4) how it fits into corporate reputation.

2.4.3.1 Defining corporate brand

Corporate brand refers to the name, term, symbol, or design of a product, either individually or as a combination (Van der Walddt, 2017:82).

A corporate brand is the sum of all the associations pertinent to a product and is a concept that focuses on the promises and commitment that organisations make to their stakeholders. In other words, it is how credible and reliable the organisation is according to its stakeholders (Van der Walddt, 2015:108-109). The corporate brand of an organisation can furthermore be defined as a bond between an organisation and its stakeholders, which is formed through the communication of “values, culture and ethos” and that subsequently provides the organisation with a competitive edge (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:39; Mohan *et al.*, 2017:2).

The focus of corporate branding is on marketing as it is considered an effective tool in the corporate strategy of the organisation, which allows the organisation to establish a creative look and feel, and brand orientation (Khan, 2009:21; Mohan *et al.*, 2017:2). It has the potential to be controlled by management and is furthermore built on symbolism and has an emotional appeal and effect on stakeholders as it allows for contact between stakeholders and the organisation (Van der Walddt, 2015:109; Cornelissen, 2020:123).

2.4.3.2 The importance of a strong corporate brand

A strong corporate brand is essential for an organisation as it influences various stakeholder groups, collectively known as “the organisation's corporate brand community”, such as stock markets, suppliers, investors, management staff and most importantly the employees involved in working with and influencing consumers/customers (Glandfield *et al.*, 2017:137; Iglesias *et al.*, 2020:32).

A strong corporate brand will ensure that an organisation communicates unique and important information to its stakeholders (Mohan *et al.*, 2017:30; Nyagadza *et al.*, 2020:184). Moreover, the stronger the affiliation that stakeholders have with a corporate brand, the stronger these stakeholders' affiliation with the organisation will be (Glandfield *et al.*, 2017:137; So *et al.*, 2017:641).

2.4.3.3 Measuring corporate brand

Although corporate brand is an essential organisational asset and measurement therefore should be seen as equally essential, literature does not specifically document measurements thereof. Considering this, Plumeyer *et al.* (2017:233) reviewed literature dating back to as early as the 1990s and identified that a corporate brand can be measured according to 11 methods, namely “brand concept maps, constant-sum method, dichotomous scaling, focus group, free-association technique, free-choice technique, in-depth interview, Likert scaling, projective techniques, ranking, repertory grid, and semantic differential scaling.”

As with corporate identity and image, corporate brand has also more recently been measured by means of quantitative methods such as surveys among stakeholders, while other more recent methods include tracking of social media and data pertaining to website traffic, and consumer searches or Google analytics (Järvinen & Karjaluo, 2015:117; McCann & Barlow, 2015:278).

2.4.3.4 Placing the corporate brand in corporate reputation

Corporate brand links to corporate reputation in the sense that it is a subsection of corporate reputation. While corporate reputation cannot be controlled, a corporate brand can be (Khan, 2009:21; Van der Waltdt, 2015:108). This indicates the importance that a good corporate brand has when considering corporate reputations and the management thereof. One can assume that if an organisation can manipulate the various elements of corporate reputation, then one is controlling a somewhat difficult-to-control activity as best as it can be.

Moreover, the relationship between corporate reputation and corporate brand is mutually beneficial as a strong corporate reputation will ensure that stakeholders trust a specific corporate

brand (Lu *et al.*, 2019:448), while favourable brands will, in turn, initiate a positive corporate reputation (Van der Waldt, 2015:109).

2.4.4 Corporate personality

In this section, corporate personality is discussed in terms of (1) its definition, (2) an explanation of how it can be measured, and (3) how the element fits into corporate reputation. The definition thereof follows first.

2.4.4.1 Defining corporate personality

Corporate personality is the collective set of characteristics of an organisation, namely its sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and innovation, which are developed due to visual and behavioural identities, and which distinguish an organisation from its competitors (Maurya *et al.*, 2015:161; Van der Waldt, 2015:109; Foroudi, 2020:2).

Just as the previously discussed, elements of corporate reputation link to one another, and corporate personality also links to these elements, especially corporate identity. Corporate personality and identity are strongly linked in the sense that corporate personality influences the corporate identity, as the majority of the components of corporate identity, namely the organisational structure, strategy, behaviour, culture, communication, and design, also form part of corporate personality (Helm *et al.*, 2011:48; Van der Waldt, 2015:109).

2.4.4.2 Measuring corporate personality

In 2003, a measurement for corporate personality referred to as the corporate reputation personality scale was developed by Davies *et al.* This scale comprises the seven pillars of corporate personality, identified as (1) agreeableness, (2) enterprise, (3) competence, (4) ruthlessness, (5) chic, (6) machismo, and (7) informality (Davies *et al.*, 2003:152).

The corporate personality scale can simultaneously measure internal and external stakeholders' perceptions on these pillars (Davies *et al.*, 2003:152). The scale furthermore works by asking respondents to envision the organisation at hand as being a person, or as having human qualities (Mařová *et al.*, 2015:165).

The original authors (Davies *et al.*, 2003:152-158) of the scale are used as a framework to provide an explanation for each of these pillars:

- **Agreeableness:** Agreeableness refers to the level of importance that an organisation should place on trust and being socially responsible (Davies *et al.*, 2003:152). The pillar

is also divided into three attributes, which are furthermore made up of several items, i.e. warmth (how friendly, pleasant, open, and straightforward an organisation is), empathy (how concerned, reassuring, supportive and agreeable an organisation is) and integrity (how honest, sincere, trustworthy, and socially responsible an organisation is) (Davies *et al.*, 2003:153; Mařová *et al.*, 2015:166). This pillar should measure high to positively affect the organisation's corporate reputation.

- **Enterprise:** The pillar of enterprise measures modernity (how cool, trendy, and young an organisation is), adventure (how imaginative, up to date, exciting and innovative an organisation is), and boldness (how extraverted and daring an organisation is) (Davies *et al.*, 2003:153; Mařová *et al.*, 2015:166). This pillar should measure high to positively affect the organisation's corporate reputation.
- **Competence:** Competence measures conscientiousness (how reliable, secure, and hardworking an organisation is), drive (how ambitious, achievement orientated and leading an organisation is) and technocracy (how technical and corporate an organisation is) (Davies *et al.*, 2003:154; Mařová *et al.*, 2015:166). This pillar should enjoy the highest measurement out of all seven pillars to positively affect the organisation's corporate reputation.
- **Ruthlessness:** This is a negatively identified pillar that measures only two attributes, namely egotism (how arrogant, aggressive, and selfish an organisation is) and dominance (how inward looking, authoritative and controlling an organisation is) (Davies *et al.*, 2003:154; Mařová *et al.*, 2015:166). These attributes should receive lower scores in measurement to positively affect the measurement of the organisation's corporate reputation, i.e. an organisation should measure as having a low level of arrogance and dominance.
- **Chic:** Chic measures three attributes, namely elegance (how charming, stylish, and elegant an organisation is), prestige (how prestigious, exclusive, and refined an organisation is) and snobbery (how snobby and elitist an organisation is) (Davies *et al.*, 2003:155; Mařová *et al.*, 2015:166). Elegance and prestige should measure high to affect the corporate reputation positively, while snobbery should measure low to affect the corporate reputation positively.

- **Machismo:** Machismo refers to how masculine, tough, and rugged an organisation is (Davies *et al.*, 2003; Maťová *et al.*, 2015:166). This pillar should measure low to positively affect the organisation's corporate reputation.
- **Informality:** Informality refers to how casual, simple, and easy going an organisation is (Davies *et al.*, 2003:156; Maťová *et al.*, 2015:166). This pillar should measure low to positively affect the organisation's corporate reputation.

The final section pertaining to the corporate personality hereunder discusses how the element fits into the greater topic at hand, namely corporate reputation.

2.4.4.3 Placing corporate personality in corporate reputation

Corporate personality links to corporate reputation in the sense that the corporate personality is what gives an organisation traits that stakeholders can perceive and therefore form an opinion of (Pires & Trez, 2017:47; Foroudi, 2020:2). Corporate personality forms an integral part of corporate reputation as the effective management of corporate personality is essential for a good relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders (Brandão *et al.*, 2017:163). All employees of the organisation, especially those who find themselves in the line of management, must show a high level of dedication toward the organisation and what it stands for, for these characterises to not only be attained, but also maintained (Van der Walddt, 2015:109).

The final elements of corporate reputation identified by this study are corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture. Within the framework of this study, these elements are grouped together as one element, as the proceeding section shows.

2.4.5 Corporate behaviour, ethics and culture

Corporate behaviour, ethics and culture have a considerable impact on the corporate reputation of an organisation (Van der Walddt, 2017:85; Dupont & Karpoff, 2019:218). These are the final elements of corporate reputation identified by this study. Each is defined in the following sections, starting with corporate behaviour.

2.4.5.1 Defining corporate behaviour

Corporate behaviour has a direct impact on the formation of the corporate reputation and should therefore always be ethical in nature (Le Roux, 2003:88; Doorley & Garcia, 2015:49). If behaviour is unethical, the management of an organisation will have to deal with various obstacles including having to spend extra time on evaluating and ensuring the correct implementation of aspects such

as consumer service, employee motivation and relationship building, and maintaining said relationships (Van der Waladt, 2015:110).

2.4.5.2 Defining corporate culture

Corporate culture is the “how we do things here” aspect of an organisation – a concept that asserts competitive advantage and is influenced by the distinctive characteristics of an organisation, such as its nationality, goals, philosophies, principles, organisational history, and organisational imagery (Melewar & Jenkins, 2002:81; Chun, 2005:96). The corporate culture of an organisation is unique to the organisation and should be embodied by the organisation, its management, and its employees (Rivera, 2019:21).

Corporate culture is one of the essential building blocks for corporate reputation (Van der Waladt, 2015:110; Rivera, 2019:22; Blynova *et al.*, 2020:482). Corporate culture is furthermore not an aspect that can easily be changed or altered, even by top management. However, if the organisation has defined and embodied its corporate culture correctly, it is possible (Rivera, 2019:22).

Another element that is unique to organisations is that of corporate ethics.

2.4.5.3 Defining corporate ethics

Corporate ethics is defined as simply doing what is right and the good deeds that an organisation does for its stakeholders that influence stakeholder trust and loyalty (Van der Waladt, 2017:85; Ferrel *et al.*, 2019:491-493).

It is important for organisations to place adequate focus on activities such as ethics programmes and corporate social responsibility, as good corporate ethics builds a strong corporate reputation (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:49; Mella & Gazzola, 2015:41). An organisation’s management should also focus on inserting its customer service, motivation of employees and strategic management and communications concepts into its communication strategy to build good corporate ethics (Van der Waladt, 2017:85).

2.4.5.4 Measuring corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture

Corporate behaviour, culture and ethics are more than often measured through the measurement of an organisation’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices, as these elements are strongly linked to CSR (De Roeck & Farooq, 2018:927; Kucharska & Kowalczyk, 2018:454). However, recently, corporate culture, specifically, has been reviewed considering the possibility to use machine learning for the measurement thereof (Lu *et al.*, 2021:3265).

The following section concludes the theoretical discussion regarding the elements of corporate reputation by placing these last elements within corporate reputation.

2.4.5.5 Placing corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture in corporate reputation

Taking the definitions of corporate behaviour, ethics and culture as stated in sections 2.4.4.1 to 2.4.4.3 into consideration, it is possible to suggest that these elements fit into the greater concept of corporate reputation in the sense that the activities thereof have an influence on the holistic corporate reputation of an organisation.

2.4.6 Corporate reputation elements within the context of the NWU

The five elements of corporate reputation are (1) corporate identity, (2) corporate image, (3) corporate brand, (4) corporate personality, and (5) corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture (refer to section 2.4). Discussing these elements within the context of the NWU begins with corporate identity.

2.4.6.1 Corporate identity in the context of the NWU

The literature review regarding corporate identity discussed the element in terms of its definition, components, and structure (refer to section 2.4.1). As such, the contextual discussion of the element will follow the same recipe.

2.4.6.1.1 Defining corporate identity in the context of the NWU

The theoretical discussion of corporate identity (refer to section 2.4.1.1) stated that it comprises the unique, symbolic, distinctive, central, and enduring traits of an organisation and is, in essence who the organisation thinks it is (Glandfield *et al.*, 2017:138-139; Melewar *et al.*, 2018:337). Furthermore, corporate identity is a perception pertinent the internal stakeholders of an organisation (Walker, 2010:365-366; Signori & Flint, 2020:26). The NWU defines itself as a university that focuses on making their stakeholders' dreams come true, digitally transforming the university, transforming the university into a unitary institution that is a leading university in Africa, providing excellent teaching and research, enabling equality, addressing the social injustices of its sector's past, is socially responsible and behaves according to an ethic of care. In addition, the university prides itself on the visual aspects of its corporate identity, stating that the interlocking links of their logo and corporate colours symbolise the unity of the university, while their tagline "It all starts here" symbolises their promise to achieving all the aforementioned (NWUa; 2020:2).

2.4.6.1.2 The components of corporate identity in the context of the NWU

Earlier in this chapter, various components of corporate identity were identified (refer to section 2.4.1.2). These components were, namely (1) the visual elements of an organisation such as its logo and corporate colours, (2) the behaviour and culture of an organisation and its employees, (3) the structure, strategy, industry and design of an organisation, (4) the way in which an organisation communicates, and (5) an organisation's culture and values (Melewar & Jenkins, 2002:81; Alessandri *et al.*, 2006; Helm *et al.*, 2011:48; Devereux *et al.*, 2020:241). In terms of the NWU, these components remain. Specifically, they are as follows:

- Visual elements: The logo of the NWU is a representation of three interlocking links, its corporate colours are purple, teal and grey, and its tagline is "It all starts here".
- Behaviour and culture: The NWU aims to act in a socially responsible manner and with an ethic of care.
- Structure, strategy, and industry: The NWU is a unitary institution that has three campuses in Mahikeng, Potchefstroom and Vanderbijlpark. Its strategy is to ensure the transformation of the NWU and to position the university as a unitary institution of superior academic excellence, with a commitment to social justice. The industry in which the NWU functions is the HES.
- Communication: The NWU communicates through social media, email, SMS, newsletters, its website, profiles, and various formal documentation such as reports. Different platforms are used for different stakeholder groups and communications are specifically formulated to these various stakeholder groups.
- Culture and values: The NWU strives to have an inclusive culture and values that satisfy all its stakeholders.

2.4.6.1.3 The structure and measurement of corporate identity within the context of the NWU

According to section 2.4.1.3 corporate identity could be desired or actual. In addition, section 2.4.3.1 indicated that employees are the key stakeholder group for the element as they affect the organisation's behaviour and are the link between an organisation and its customers. Furthermore, the section stated that the interaction between customers and employees affected customer satisfaction and loyalty (Smith, 2011:73; Balmer, 2017:1484; Brandão *et al.*, 2017:164; Hutama & Ekawati, 2020:210). Whether the NWU's corporate identity is desired or actual requires an investigation into the university's corporate identity. This is not an objective of this study, and the study therefore cannot answer this. However, because corporate identity is what the organisation actively attempts to be, the NWU's corporate identity should be desired. Moreover,

the NWU's employees affect its students (seen as the customers) as it is various departments of staff who recruit, register, assist and teach these students.

According to section 2.4.1.3 again, corporate identity can be measured according to the corporate identity model, credibility measures, consumer congruence measures and by measuring aspects such as corporate structure, behaviour, industry, brand, expertise, values, social responsibility activities or a combination of all the aforementioned (Murwani & Melati, 2017:258; Panigyrakis *et al.*, 2019:675). In terms of measuring its corporate identity, the NWU embarked on communication and survey strategies regarding the construct when it underwent a re-brand in 2017, changing its corporate colours from blue, green, and maroon to purple as well as altering its logo and tagline. Whether measures such as those mentioned in this literature review were used, is not known. However, the measurement activities were headed by the NWU's Department of Corporate Relations and Marketing, and the methods used would, therefore, more than likely, have been suitable measurements.

2.4.6.1.4 Placing corporate identity in corporate reputation within the context of the NWU

As stated in section 2.4.1.4, although corporate identity is often used as a synonym for corporate reputation, the two differ in the sense that corporate identity focuses on how internal stakeholders of the organisation perceive the organisation, while corporate reputation is focused on the holistic perceptions of all stakeholders (Eckert, 2017:148; Cornelissen, 2020:63; Signori & Flint, 2020:26).

At the NWU, its corporate identity therefore forms part of the university's corporate reputation as the internal stakeholders (or employees and students) of the university are an important stakeholder group for the university.

2.4.6.2 Corporate image within the context of the NWU

Corporate image has been discussed in terms of its definition, whether it was identified as being desired or actual, and by placing the element in corporate reputation (refer to section 2.4.2). The contextual discussion of corporate image within the context of the NWU will follow the same recipe, starting with defining corporate image at the NWU.

2.4.6.2.1 Defining corporate image in the context of the NWU

According to section 2.4.2.1, corporate image is defined as the mental picture that stakeholders have of an organisation resulting from the sum of all communications that are sent to external stakeholders (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:43; Van der Waltdt, 2015:107; Bozkurt, 2018:61;). It is, in essence, the "who do we think we are?" of an organisation (Walker, 2010:366).

Comparing the literature discussed in section 2.4.2.1 to the context of the NWU, corporate image can be defined as the various communications that the NWU sends outward to its external stakeholders, namely prospective and current students, alumni, the Potchefstroom, Vaal and Mafikeng communities, the public, and other role players such as Government, the Council for Higher Education (CHE) and other role players within the HES. These communications can include the state of the NWU, its financial performance, its statistics in terms of current staff, enrolled students and graduates, research outputs, and marketing aimed at recruiting students. These communications attempt to be positive.

Although this study will not focus on the perceptions of the NWU's external stakeholders, the corporate image of the university should still be regarded as significant by the NWU as it is significant to the study of corporate reputation.

2.4.6.2.2 The structure of corporate image within the context of the NWU

As stated in section 2.4.2.2, corporate image, as corporate identity, can be defined as being either desired or actual (Frandsen, 2017:1797; Bozkurt, 2018:61). However, the section also stated that corporate image is more than often seen as desired as it is what an organisation actively attempts to portray itself as to its external stakeholders (Walker, 2010:366). The latter then suggests that the NWU's corporate image is desired.

2.4.6.2.3 Measuring corporate image within the context of the NWU

According to section 2.4.2.3 corporate image can be measured through instruments such as surveys, attitude scales, KRG, the natural grouping method and interviews (Flavián *et al.*, 2004:368; Lamelas, 2011:63-68). The section did, however, also state that qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, may prove to problematic when considering the number of stakeholders of certain organisations, such as the NWU. Undertaking in-depth interviews with all the university's external stakeholders would amount to thousands of interviews that would have to take place, and this is certainly not a viable option. Section 2.4.2.3 proceeded to explain that set questionnaires such as that of Fortune's Most Admired Companies are a more viable measurement for corporate image (Thielsch & Wirth, 2017:288). In the case where the NWU were to measure its corporate image, such an approach would therefore be the more suitable option. The NWU furthermore did engage in surveys with external stakeholders, specifically students and alumni, when the university implemented their re-brand, as previously mentioned in section 2.4.6.1.3. As with the surveys posed to internal stakeholders, the surveys and communication with external stakeholders were also headed by the university's Department of Corporate

Relations and Marketing, and it can therefore be assumed that the measurement was on par and produced valid results.

2.4.6.2.4 Placing corporate image within corporate reputation within the context of the NWU

Corporate image, although many times confused with corporate reputation, is not equivalent to corporate reputation (refer to section 2.4.2.3). Rather, it forms part of corporate reputation in the sense that a corporate image assists in building a good corporate reputation (Aula & Mantere, 2008:27; Helm *et al.*, 2011:5; Van der Walddt, 2015:108). Within the context of the NWU, it is important that NWU management and the Department of Corporate Relations and Marketing take cognisance of this when planning their corporate strategies.

On the completion of discussing corporate image, the theoretical discussion regarding corporate reputation elements continued the discussion by identifying corporate brand as a corporate reputation element. The proceeding section discusses corporate brand within the context of the NWU.

2.4.6.3 Corporate brand in the context of the NWU

Corporate brand was previously discussed in terms of its definition, placing the element in corporate reputation, and the importance of having a strong corporate brand for an organisation (refer to section 2.2.3). The discussion pertaining to the corporate brand within the context of the NWU will follow the same recipe, starting with defining the corporate brand within the context of the NWU.

2.4.6.3.1 Defining corporate brand within the context of the NWU

According to section 2.4.3.2, corporate brand refers to the name, term, symbol, or design of a product, either individually or as a combination (Van der Walddt, 2017:82). It was concluded to be the symbolic sum of perceptions that stakeholders have regarding the products/services of an organisation achieved through various tangible and intangible activities, and which gives the organisation a competitive edge (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:39; Van der Walddt, 2015:109; Mohan *et al.*, 2017:2; Cornelissen, 2020:123). Its focus was said to be on marketing, and it was furthermore determined to be a tool used to establish a creative look and feel and brand orientation (Khan, 2009:21; Mohan *et al.*, 2017:2).

In terms of the NWU, the university's corporate brand can be defined as the bragging points used to create a perception of the NWU. This perception is desired to include excellence in teaching and learning, research and innovation and community engagement, while offering a unique student life in an environment where students and staff are diverse, but inclusive.

2.4.6.3.2 The importance of a strong corporate brand in the context of the NWU

According to section 2.4.3.2, a strong corporate brand is important as it influences the various stakeholder groups of the organisation (Glandfield *et al.*, 2017:137; Iglesias *et al.*, 2020:32). A strong brand was further said to be associated with stakeholder loyalty toward the organisation at hand (Glandfield *et al.*, 2017:137; So *et al.*, 2017:641).

Within the context of the NWU, sections 1.1.3 and 1.1.4 stated that when the NWU underwent its re-brand, many stakeholders did not agree with the process as they were loyal to the old brand. The old brand of the NWU was therefore a strong brand in terms of the university's stakeholders and the new brand had to be actively sold to attain buy-in from all stakeholders, something the NWU has managed to accomplish through implementing new and fresh brand campaigns annually that still manage to build on one another, such as 2019/2020's *Become More* campaign, 2020/2021's *Greater Than* campaign, and 2022/2023's *Discover* campaign. These campaigns have each been aimed at different stakeholders and have had different goals. For example, while *Become More* was specifically aimed at pushing the brand to prospective students, *Greater Than* was aimed at pushing the brand to current students, and *Discover* is to be aimed at current students and staff of the NWU.

2.4.3.3 Measuring corporate brand in the context of the NWU

While there is no evidence available to the public that shows that the NWU measures its brand through instruments identified in section 2.4.3.3, the university's Department of Marketing and Student Recruitment focuses heavily on the tangible aspects of their brand campaigns that can produce quantitative data. The NWU does so by making use of the more recent instruments as identified by section 2.4.3.3, such as surveys, social media, website traffic and consumer searches, tracking and Google analytics through quantifying how well NWU hashtags perform and through graph displays of positive versus negative perceptions of NWU stakeholders regarding the NWU.

2.4.6.3.3 Placing corporate brand in corporate reputation within the context of the NWU

As stated by section 2.4.3.4, corporate brand is a subsection of corporate reputation and that a good corporate brand will assist in creating a good corporate reputation, and, in turn, result in an organisation enjoying a high level of trustworthiness from its stakeholders (Van der Walddt, 2015:108; Lu *et al.*, 2019:448).

In terms of the NWU, the university seems to understand this concept as there is a sub-department for *branding* that falls within the Department of Student Recruitment and Marketing.

This sub-department employs two managers of branding who ensure that the desired NWU brand is effectively communicated through all NWU activities.

In conclusion of the discussion regarding corporate brand as a corporate reputational element, the discussion identified corporate personality as an element of corporate reputation (refer to section 2.4.4). Accordingly, the proceeding section discusses corporate personality within the context of the NWU.

2.4.6.4 Corporate personality within the context of the NWU

Corporate personality was previously discussed in terms of its definition and measurement in section 2.4.4. The discussion that places corporate personality within the context of the NWU follows the same recipe, starting with defining corporate personality within the context of the NWU.

2.4.6.4.1 Defining corporate personality within the context of the NWU

According to section 2.4.4.1, corporate personality is the sum of the of characteristics of an organisation, including its sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and innovation, which are developed because of visual and behavioural identities, and which distinguish an organisation from its competitors (Maurya *et al.*, 2015:161; Van der Walddt, 2015:109; Foroudi, 2020:2).

Corporate personality was furthermore found to be an element that organisations must regard as of high value and one which employees, especially management, must actively portray (Van der Walddt, 2015:109).

In terms of the NWU, its personality can be defined as its unique language policy, its three culturally diverse campuses and speciality programmes such as Animal Health, Pharmacy and Engineering.

2.4.6.4.2 Measuring corporate personality within the context of the NWU

Corporate personality can be measured in terms of the corporate personality scale (refer to section 2.4.4.2). No public documentation pertinent to the NWU provides evidence that the university has measured its corporate personality. It will, therefore, be beneficial to the NWU to ensure that the university is actively measuring this element to not only improve upon it, but to be able to use the results thereof to contribute to the effective measurement and management of its corporate reputation.

2.4.6.4.3 Placing corporate personality within corporate reputation in the context of the NWU

As stated in section 2.4.4.3, corporate personality links to corporate reputation in the sense that the corporate personality is what gives an organisation traits that stakeholders can perceive and therefore have an opinion of (Pires & Trez, 2017:47; Foroudi, 2020:2). Corporate personality at the NWU therefore forms part of the university's corporate reputation as the effective management thereof is essential for a good relationship between the university and its stakeholders.

Furthermore, it would be ideal if all employees of the NWU, especially management, showed a high level of dedication the NWU and what the university stands for. While corporate videos, news articles and press releases show that management actively shows such dedication, the goals of the *Discover* brand campaign note that other staff and students of the NWU do not actively embody this dedication. However, the campaign strives to change this.

2.4.6.5 Corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture within the context of the NWU

Corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture was previously in three sections, namely corporate behaviour, corporate culture, and corporate ethics (refer to section 2.4.5.3). Placing the literature within the context of the NWU follows the same recipe, starting with corporate behaviour.

2.4.6.5.1 Corporate behaviour within the context of the NWU

According to section 2.4.5.1, corporate behaviour directly impacts corporate reputation and should therefore always be ethical (Le Roux, 2003:88; Doorley & Garcia, 2015:49). Corporate behaviour was furthermore identified as an element that should be regularly evaluated through evaluating activities such consumer service and employee motivation (Van der Waladt, 2015:110).

Corporate behaviour is significant to the NWU as the university's management has had to deal with numerous challenges that have faced the university, such as the need for transformation, student protests and the review of its first-year orientation programme, to name a few. Considering such challenges, the NWU must ensure that the university takes active measures to ensure its corporate reputation remains intact and that its relationships with its various stakeholders are not damaged beyond repair.

2.4.6.5.2 Corporate culture within the context of the NWU

Corporate culture was identified as the distinctive characteristics of an organisation, such as its nationality, goals, philosophies, principles, organisational history, and organisational imagery in section 2.4.5.2 (Melewar & Jenkins, 2002:81; Chun, 2005:96). It was furthermore said to be an

element that is unique to each organisation and should be managed accordingly (Rivera, 2019:22).

In terms of corporate culture, the NWU outlines its values, goals and principles in its strategy, vision and mission and annual profile. In addition, the university openly discusses its history and why it has transformed over the years in these documents. Reflecting on these documents, it seems that NWU has a clear picture of what it wants its organisational culture to be and how to attain this.

2.4.6.5.3 Corporate ethics in the context of the NWU

Corporate ethics was defined as the good deeds that an organisation does for its stakeholders to build trust and loyalty by focusing on CSR and ethics programmes in section 2.4.5.3 (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:49; Van der Waladt, 2017:85; Ferrel *et al.*, 2019:491-493).

The NWU takes corporate ethics into consideration when, among others, implementing campaigns such as the annual *race, language and gender awareness weeks* and various CSR programmes run by the Department of Corporate Social Responsibility at the NWU.

2.4.6.5.4 Measuring corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture within the context of the NWU

As previously stated in section 2.4.5.4, corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture are often measured through the measurement of an organisation's CSR practices (De Roeck & Farooq, 2018:927; Kucharska & Kowalczyk, 2018:454). In the case of the NWU, the university not only has an office for CSR activities, but also deputy deans at each faculty who have CSR activities as a key performance indicator (KPI). These activities are therefore measured through these persons. Whether the NWU has yet to make use of machine learning to measure these elements is unclear, but unlikely, as this strategy only surfaced in academia in 2021 (refer to section 2.4.5.4).

2.4.6.5.5 Placing corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture within corporate reputation in the context of the NWU

Within the context of the NWU, corporate behaviour, ethics and culture fit into the university's corporate reputation as activities such as *Race Week* and other CSR programmes that arise from these elements have an influence on the holistic corporate reputation of the NWU. It stands to reason that the NWU acknowledges this when considering that the university ensures that such campaigns and programmes take place annually, and that as many causes and stakeholders as possible are included through these activities.

Based on the analyses hereabove, the second specific guiding argument is formulated:

Guiding Theoretical Argument 2:

Corporate reputation comprises five **elements**, namely **corporate identity, corporate image, corporate brand, corporate personality** and **corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture**. How each of these elements is defined, managed, and measured by an organisation contributes to the overall success of the organisation's corporate reputation. The NWU should therefore ensure that it is aware of the influences that these elements, their management, and measurement have on the university's corporate reputation, and manage and measure these elements accordingly.

In summary, it is evident that corporate reputation has become increasingly important to organisational managers and academics alike in recent years. With this, the management thereof has also gained traction (Pérez-Corenjo *et al.*, 2021:4). Having provided a definition for corporate reputation, the trends that affect it and the elements of which it consists, the following section discusses corporate reputation management.

2.5 Corporate reputation management

Corporate reputation was defined in section 2.3.1 as an organisational asset that yields both tangible and intangible benefits (Pool *et al.*, 2016:1425; Gangi *et al.*, 2020:1975). It is characterised as being either a negative or positive overall perception that an organisation's various stakeholder groups have of the organisation (Aula & Mantere, 2008:15; Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:5). These perceptions are developed over time from these stakeholders' past experiences and will continue to develop because of future interactions with the organisation (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3; Cornelissen, 2020:63). Sections 1.1.1 and 2.3.1 furthermore stated that, because corporate reputation is such an essential corporate asset that is crucial to the inherent success of an organisation, it should be effectively managed.

Although researchers have placed great emphasis on the study of corporate reputation, a framework for the management thereof is still lacking (Reputation Institute, 2014:1; Pérez-Corenjo *et al.*, 2021:4). However, despite this, it is possible for an organisation's corporate reputation to be managed, "not perfectly, but well" (Doorley & Garcia, 2015:3). The question as to how corporate reputation can be, or rather should be, managed then arises.

Therefore, as an important construct in the study of corporate reputation, this section discusses corporate reputation management in terms of the basic principles by which it should transpire, a strategy guideline for effective corporate reputation management, and the importance of

managing risks and crises in an organisation. As with the previous sections of this literature review, this section also concludes by providing an application to the context of the NWU.

The proceeding section starts this discussion by outlining the basic principles of corporate reputation management.

2.5.1 Basic principles of corporate reputation management

Corporate reputation is a key organisational asset that should be proactively managed by the top management and specialist communication staff of an organisation, as it is susceptible to damage and is difficult to repair (Van der Walddt, 2015:110; Henisz, 2017:120). In addition to employing specialist communication staff, and including top management in the strategy of corporate reputation management, these departments should ensure that corporate reputation is managed across all the dimensions of an organisation, namely finance, CSR, people, distribution, resource and production, as well as strategic relations with stakeholders such as investors, employees, consumers, the media and the general public (Reddiar *et al.*, 2012:31; Van der Walddt, 2015:112; Doorley & Garcia, 2017:40).

Moreover, in order to manage a corporate reputation, communication practitioners should ensure that they know how to (1) pay tribute to their organisation's core and desired identities, (2) are knowledgeable in risk management and crisis communication, (3) retain truthful, credible and transparent communications with stakeholders and are knowledgeable in the management of relationships with stakeholders, (4) ensure that the elements of their organisation's corporate reputation are effectively managed, and (5) that the corporate reputation as a whole is managed through strategy, audit and measurement processes (Aula, 2011:30; Smudde & Courtright, 2011:147; Doorley & Garcia, 2017:28-32;40; Henisz, 2017:121).

The management of stakeholder relations is key to corporate reputation management, as these relationships have an enormous effect on the perceptions that these stakeholders have of the organisation (Van der Walddt, 2015:111). Organisations should ensure that they know which stakeholder groups are most important to their organisation, as effective management of stakeholder relations assists in the effective management of corporate reputation (Aula, 2011:30; Doorley & Garcia, 2017:40-41). In most cases, the employees of an organisation who deal with the external stakeholders can be an asset to managing corporate reputation (Komodromos, 2017:548). Organisations should therefore employ paramount staff who are socially intelligent individuals.

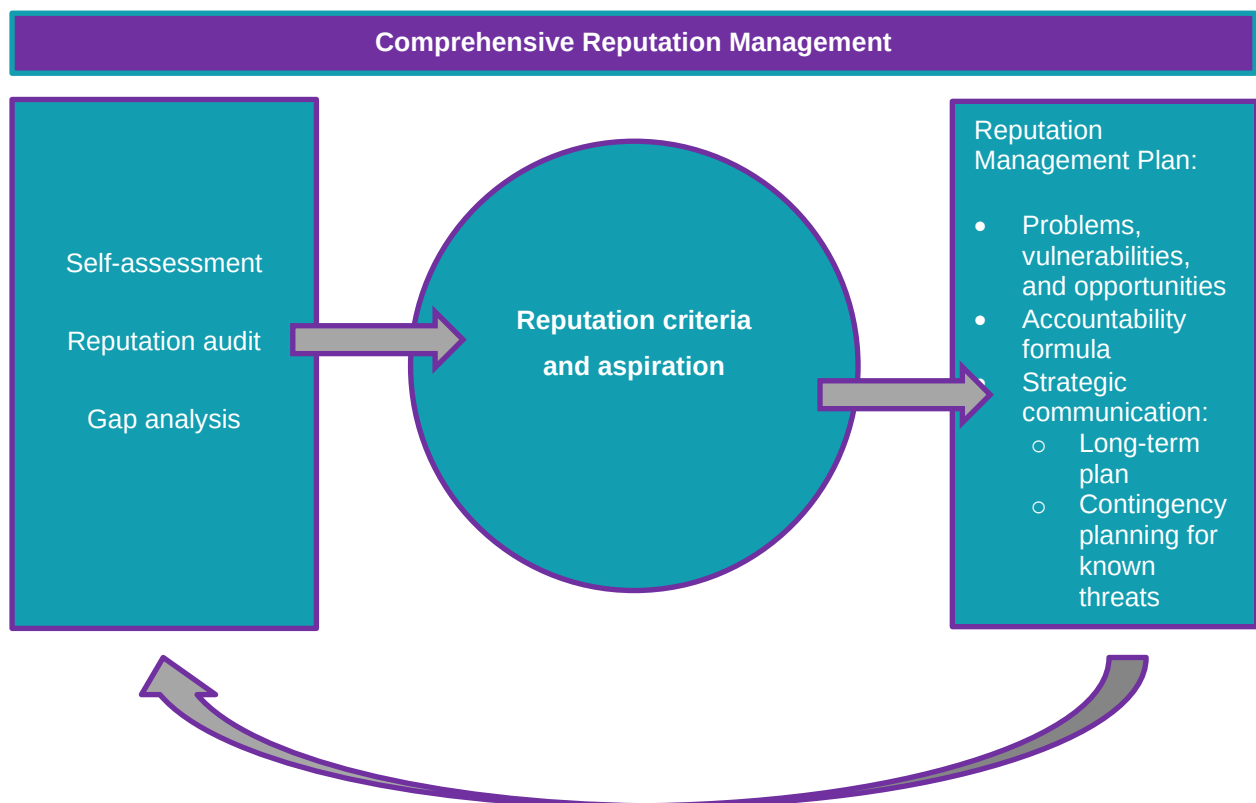
Every organisation is unique, and its nature therefore has a great deal to do with how its corporate reputation should be managed (Doorley & Garcia, 2017:40; Pérez-Corenjo *et al.*, 2019:9; Ajayi &

Mmutle, 2021:10). It then stands to reason that organisations should assess themselves, and accordingly create and implement a strategy that assists in managing the corporate reputation of the organisation.

2.5.2 Guidelines for corporate reputation management strategy

However, the main trends in corporate reputation management from the onset have been to effectively manage and understand stakeholder relations, and effectively manage and understand the elements that comprise corporate reputation. Doorley and Garcia (2017:5) state that corporate reputation management is more than just that. In response, the authors encourage organisations to plan and implement a corporate reputation management strategy that is specific to the organisation at hand. As a guideline on how to create such a strategy, the authors promote what they refer to as *Comprehensive Reputation Management*. This study uses the theory of comprehensive reputation management as a framework to identify guidelines to develop and implement an effective corporate reputation management strategy.

Figure 2.3 hereunder depicts Doorley and Garcia's (2017) comprehensive reputation management.



Source: Doorley & Garcia (2017:22)

Figure 2-3: Comprehensive reputation management

Comprehensive reputation management is defined as a strategy that views corporate reputation to be an organisational asset that aims to measure, audit, and manage it as such (Doorley & Garcia, 2017:20). It focuses on corporate reputation being the sum of an organisation's performance, communication, and behaviour. Moreover, this strategy is implemented within the main departments of an organisation (Kiraka, 2020:157).

The strategy makes use of seven key activities that each department in an organisation must assess, audit and analyse (Doorley & Garcia, 2017:20-22). These activities, and the flow thereof, are discussed as follows:

- **Activity 1:** Organisations should begin by creating a reputation template document that is customised to the organisation. This document should focus on what the organisation wants to measure, achieve or change (Doorley & Garcia, 2017:20-22).
- **Activity 2:** The organisation should undertake reputation audits of its internal and external stakeholders to identify any reputational gaps within the organisation's corporate reputation (Doorley & Garcia, 2017:20). To effectively manage a corporate reputation, it is important that organisations know what their various stakeholder groups think of the organisation, as well as determine what stakeholders' expectations of the organisation are (Esenyel, 2020:31). Reputational audits are conducted by measuring the corporate reputation. There are many measurement instruments of corporate reputation available. However, organisations should take note that not all instruments will effectively measure the corporate reputation of every organisation in terms of every stakeholder group. Organisations should therefore research the available instruments and implement the instrument that suits the organisation at hand the best (Alves *et al.*, 2014:58; Dowling 2016:206). These instruments were mentioned in Chapter 1 (refer to section 1.1.1) and will be further discussed later in this chapter (refer to section 2.6).
- **Activity 3:** Here, the organisation should compile a list of its reputational goals (Doorley & Garcia, 2017:20). By identifying these goals, organisations can effectively measure and manage them, allowing the organisation to attain these goals effectively (Rainey *et al.*, 2014:233).
- **Activity 4:** Using the criteria acquired from the previous activities, the organisation should create a corporate reputation management plan. This plan should be aligned with the basic principles of corporate reputation management as well as with the objectives of the organisation (Doorley & Garcia, 2017:20-22). Compiling and following such a plan are

essential as it assists with not only corporate reputation management, but also measurement. Organisations that have corporate reputation management plans in place have furthermore proven to have stronger corporate reputations (Goldstein *et al.*, 2011:35).

- **Activity 5:** The organisation must compile an accountability formula and identify its reputation components, as the management thereof is crucial to the effective management of corporate reputation (Doorley & Garcia, 2017:20-22; Van der Waladt, 2017:79; Esenyel, 2020:31). This activity should furthermore identify which specific departments within the organisation are responsible for these specific goals or reputational components (Doorley & Garcia, 2017:20-22).
- **Activity 6:** On completion and implementation of the previous activities, organisations should undertake annual follow-up audits and assessments (Doorley & Garcia, 2017:20-22). Undertaking annual audits allows the organisation to identify risks and areas of improvement, and gain perspective on the efficacy of organisational goals attained (Cohen & Sayag, 2010:296). In addition, audits help the organisation to understand the perceptions of the organisation and its objectives, and therefore aid in improving these perceptions and attaining these objectives (Worthington *et al.*, 2010:245).
- **Activity 7:** Finally, organisations should compile a summary pertaining to each of its stakeholder groups to provide an overview of the assessments of these stakeholder groups. This summary should identify who the various stakeholder groups of the organisation are and provide characteristics for each stakeholder group such as their expectations (Doorley & Garcia, 2017:20-22). This summary aids in the management of stakeholder relations, which is an important principle in managing corporate reputation (refer to section 2.3.1.1). Although most literature states that employees and customers are the most important stakeholder groups of an organisation, it is important to note that each organisation has a unique blend of stakeholders and the level of importance of each stakeholder group is also unique to the organisation (Davies *et al.*, 2003:140; Brandão *et al.*, 2017:162; Riahi, 2017:37). This assessment summary should therefore also be customised to the organisation and include all stakeholders of the organisation at hand.

Corporate reputation is furthermore affected by the risks and crises that organisations face (Eccles *et al.*, 2007:6; Anthonissen, 2008:78; Van der Vyver, 2020:3). It is therefore crucial that, in addition to following the basic principles surrounding corporate reputation management and implementing a comprehensive reputation management strategy, organisations should assess

reputational risks and crisis communication within the organisation (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:409). The proceeding section discusses risk management within the framework of corporate reputation management.

2.5.3 Risk management within corporate reputation management

Reputational risk is defined as anything that has the potential to damage an organisation's corporate reputation (Benn *et al.*, 2016:829; Van der Vyver, 2020:50). Organisational management should actively investigate how their organisation is viewed in the public eye and seek guidance from communication specialists when their reputation is at risk (Henisz, 2017:120). Although organisations should at times defend themselves, it can be detrimental to push a view that is clearly not positively reciprocated by their stakeholders. Organisations should "know when and how to respond" to critics as well as know what, how much and when to share information (Smith, 2017).

As corporate reputation is important to stakeholders, organisations must take responsibility for managing it through regular assessment and monitoring of reputational risks, as well as repairing the corporate reputation when damaged (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:409; Kiraka, 2020:157). Organisations should identify reputational risks in advance to avoid that they damage the corporate reputation, or at least to minimise the damage that they can have on the corporate reputation (Esenyel, 2020:31). Enterprise risk management (ERM) systems can be used to do so. ERM systems are defined as being processes that assist organisations to identify and manage possible risks that can have a negative effective on the organisation (Wu *et al.*, 2015:4; Wyma, 2019:5).

The use of ERM systems increases the success rate that organisations will achieve when having to make decisions regarding financial, operational, and strategic objectives that are at risk (Gazert, 2015:30; McShane, 2018:137). The rationale behind using ERM systems is that they help an organisation in crisis to handle the crisis, and sometimes even avoid it from happening. When in crisis, key stakeholders' needs may not be satisfied, damaging the organisation's reputation. Therefore, the fewer crises that an organisation experiences, the less risk there will be to its reputation (Pérez-Corenjo *et al.*, 2019:1). The use of ERM systems furthermore ensures organisational sustainability (Wyma, 2019:37). It should be noted that ERM systems are not a "one-size-fits-all" design. Rather, organisations should integrate ERM systems in a way that effectively cooperates with the specific nature of the organisation and its corporate reputation management plan (McShane, 2018:138).

This section discussed corporate reputation management in terms of the basic principles surrounding the construct, the guidelines to creating a strategy therefore, and in terms of how reputational risk is related to the construct. As with previous sections of this literature review, the proceeding section applies the discussions from section 2.5 within the context of the NWU.

2.5.4 Corporate reputation management within the context of the NWU

The application of literature, as presented in section 2.5, will follow the same recipe in this section. This application begins with the basic principles surrounding corporate reputation management within the context of the NWU.

2.5.4.1 Basic principles of corporate reputation management within the context of the NWU

The NWU should, first and foremost, ensure that its corporate reputation is taken into high consideration. The university should ensure that management is continually aware of the state of its corporate reputation and that they are involved in the management thereof. However, the main management of corporate reputation should lie within a department that employs communication specialist staff. This is the case at the NWU, as the university has a Department of Corporate Relations and Marketing (CRM). Specifically, this department is divided into three sub-departments, namely Corporate Communications, Stakeholder Relations and Student Recruitment and Marketing. CRM is headed by an executive director who reports to university management. Reporting to this executive director are the directors of each of CRM's sub-departments. Corporate reputation management lies within the sub-department for Corporate Communication. Corporate Communication's director heads corporate reputation management with the assistance of the managers and other communication specialists and staff within the department. The director of Corporate Communication provides feedback regarding this construct and its management to the executive director of CRM, who then ensures that university management is informed and present in the decision-making processes regarding corporate reputation management.

Moreover, the three sub-departments of CRM work closely with one another. The NWU department for corporate communication is therefore able to ensure that their corporate reputation management strategy includes and reaches all dimensions of CRM, including marketing, branding and stakeholder relations.

The following sections uncover potential guidelines for corporate reputation management at the NWU.

2.5.4.2 Guidelines for corporate reputation management strategy within the context of the NWU

It is essential that the NWU has a strategy for corporate reputation management in place. Whether the NWU has such a strategy in place is not documented in any publicly accessible items. One can only assume that because the university has a department dedicated solely to corporate communications, that such a strategy is in place. The corporate reputation management strategy of the university is assessed through the semi-structured interviews with CRM management (refer to Chapter 5).

However, comprehensive reputation management was identified in section 2.5.2 as an effective guideline to creating and implementing a corporate reputation management strategy. The use of the comprehensive reputation management strategy would also be a viable reputation management option for the NWU. As section 2.4.5 revealed, this strategy views corporate reputation as an essential asset and implements it within the main departments of the organisation through seven key activities. The use of the corporate reputation management strategy would be headed by the NWU's department for CRM if used.

The following section explores risk management at the NWU.

2.5.4.3 Risk management within corporate reputation management within the context of the NWU

The NWU is an institution that has various stakeholder groups. It is a large institution that is diverse, geographically widespread and falls within a sector that has been faced with various challenges over the past two decades. Moreover, the NWU has also experienced its own challenges and crises in this time. As a result, the NWU is an institution that is susceptible to crises and reputational risk. Therefore, the implementation of an ERM system would be beneficial to the NWU. By identifying reputational risks in advance, the university will be able to manage the crises that develop and, in doing so, protect their corporate reputation.

The third guiding theoretical argument is presented hereunder:

Guiding theoretical argument 3:

Corporate reputation management is essential as corporate reputation is a key asset that aids in the success of an organisation. Corporate reputation should be managed by determining what the **goals and objectives** of the organisation are, and then aligning these goals and objectives with stakeholder perception. **Stakeholder perceptions** should furthermore also be managed, monitored, and measured when managing corporate reputation. When managing corporate reputation, organisations should ensure that they **understand the concept of corporate reputation**, its elements and that it requires a **strategic plan**. Corporate reputation management must be proactively and continually managed throughout the lifespan of the organisation by top management and specialist communication staff. The NWU should follow a **comprehensive reputation management strategy** to build and maintain a strong corporate reputation to reach its objectives, gain competitive advantage within the HES, and aid in facing **challenges, risks and/or crises**.

Throughout this section regarding corporate reputation management, it has become evident that for an organisation to effectively manage its corporate reputation, it must measure it. The proceeding section therefore outlines how corporate reputation can, and should, be measured.

2.6 Measuring corporate reputation

“Reputation matters, and can be measured” (RepTrak™, 2021).

Measuring corporate reputation is important because organisations need to know how their stakeholders perceive them (Gardberg & Fombrun, 2002:303; Eckert, 2017:146). As a result, both academia and practice have shown a strong inclination toward the study and implementation thereof (Helm & Klode, 2010:87; Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:3-4; Anglis, 2017:45).

Corporate reputation should be measured according to the perceptions of an organisation’s various stakeholder groups (Walker, 2010:372; Kaur & Singh, 2018:53). Organisations should also take into consideration their definition of corporate reputation when measuring it, as this will influence how the organisation decides to measure it (Dowling, 2016:211). Moreover, the instrument of choice must not only be adapted to the organisation’s nature, but also to the specific stakeholder group whose perceptions are being measured. In addition, the measurement must focus on one stakeholder group at a time (Helm & Klode, 2010:95; Walker 2010:372).

The measurement of corporate reputation is problematic as no one organisation is the same. Therefore, no one instrument can be used to accurately measure the corporate reputations of all organisations (Alves *et al.*, 2014:58; Eckert, 2017:146). Measuring corporate reputation can be

done according to a single or multi-faced approach. However, a multi-faced approach is more effective as it incorporates specific elements of corporate reputation and therefore stakeholder perception (Kanto *et al.*, 2016:410).

Another problem that arises in the measurement of corporate reputation is that many of the available measurement instruments do not cover all the elements of which corporate reputation is comprised (Feldman *et al.*, 2014:58). Many instruments tend to focus on an element of corporate reputation such as brand, image or identity. However, as corporate reputation comprises various elements, an effective measurement instrument should measure all elements thereof (Caruana & Chircop, 2000:45; Helm & Klode, 2010:91). Furthermore, many of the available measurement instruments have been criticised as they focus on measuring tangible aspects such as financial issues, measuring corporate reputation in terms of capital, which does not “capture the role of communication building, maintaining and defending reputation” (Dowling, 2016:206). There is therefore a need for corporate reputation and the measurement thereof to be redefined and re-evaluated in literature (Van der Walddt, 2015:116). Therefore, when choosing a corporate reputation measurement instrument, organisations should ensure that they assess each possible instrument thoroughly and choose to implement the one that best suits the nature of the organisation and their stakeholders, and which would yield the most accurate results.

Over the past two decades, literature regularly mentions the use of corporate reputation measurement instruments such as the Rotterdam Organisational Identification Test (ROIT), The Corporate Personality Scale, Fortune’s Most Admired Companies in America, the Reputation Quotient (RQ) and most recently, RepTrak™. Although this study identifies RepTrak™ as the most viable instrument available and discusses it in more detail (refer to section 2.6.1), the ROIT, the Corporate Personality Scale, the Most Admired Companies and RQ are briefly discussed hereunder to determine why the study does not make use of them.

The ROIT, as developed by Van Riel and Balmer in 1997, is a questionnaire designed with intentional measurement aimed at employees, which consists of 11 elements that are divided into six groups, namely (1) culture; (2) goals and values; (3) job satisfaction; (4) perceived prestige; which together influence (5) organisational identification; which directly influences (6) employee communication, which, in turn, again influences organisational identification (Davies *et al.*, 2003:140). However, ROIT is designed to only measure employee perception and in addition, does not include all elements of corporate reputation. Rather it was originally designed to measure employee satisfaction within an organisation and is therefore not a viable measurement of corporate reputation (Van Riel & Balmer, 1997:384; Davies *et al.*, 2003:140).

The Corporate Personality Scale, as developed by Davies *et al.* in 2003, was discussed in section 2.4.4.2. To recap, the scale measures corporate personality through seven pillars, namely agreeableness, enterprise, competence, ruthlessness, chic, machismo, and informality (Davies *et al.*, 2003:152; Maťová *et al.*, 2015:165). Although this measurement instrument can simultaneously measure internal and external stakeholders' perceptions (Davies *et al.*, 2003:152), it must be noted that, according to the framework of this study, it only measures one element of corporate reputation, namely corporate personality, and therefore cannot be used as viable measurement of an organisation's corporate reputation.

Fortune's Most Admired Companies is a questionnaire that requests management of an organisation to rate the organisation on an 11-point scale ranging from 0, being poor, to 10, being excellent. This aids to provide an evaluation of the organisation's management, financial performance, product/service quality, its ability to attract and keep staff, its innovation, CSR, and long-term investments (Verčič *et al.*, 2012:162). Although a viable measure for corporate reputation, the main outcome is to rank various organisations that partake in the survey. The instrument is not something that the organisation itself can undertake individually when attempting to measure its corporate reputation with the objective of improving it, or the way in which they manage it.

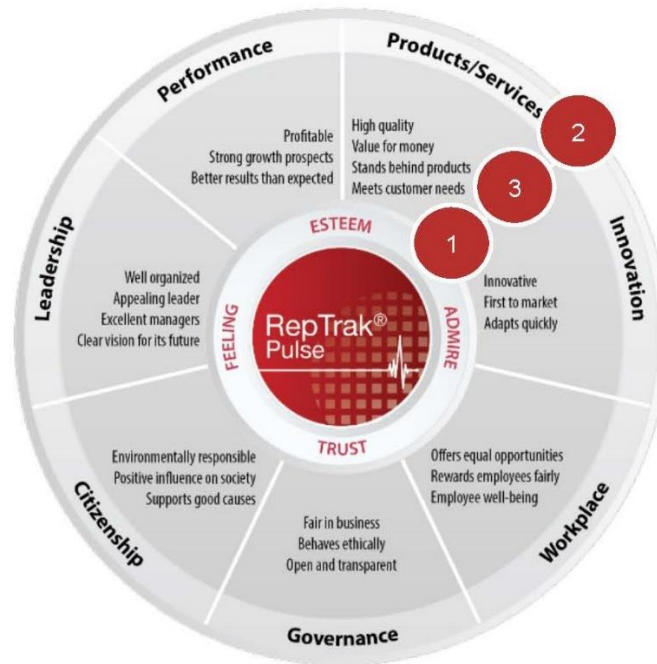
The Reputation Quotient (RQ) has been given a thumbs up for being an effective measurement instrument that was designed to attempt to cross global boundaries, having been used in 26 countries (Gardberg & Fombrun, 2002:303; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:248). The RQ is a broader measurement instrument for corporate reputation compared to other measurement alternatives. The measurement works by calculating the value of a list of 20 attributes that represent six dimensions, which were derived from "employees, investors and customers" and not only from top management (Davies *et al.*, 2003:139; Van der Walldt, 2015:116). These six dimensions can furthermore be identified as (1) products and services; (2) the workplace environment; (3) financial performance; (4) vision and leadership; and (5) social responsibility, which contribute to (6) emotional appeal (Davies *et al.*, 2003:139). Although internal stakeholders such as employees will be able to respond more accurately to certain dimensions evaluated by the RQ, it was designed with the intention to be functionally useable over multiple stakeholder groups, which is possibly the most essential aspect of a good corporate reputation measurement instrument (Davies *et al.*, 2003:139-140). Van der Walldt (2015:119) feels that the RQ is an ideal measurement of corporate reputation as it focuses on linking "salient aspects of reputation through emotional appeal, which can be enhanced through branding." From this, we can conclude that a measurement instrument that is able to simultaneously measure various dimensions of corporate reputation and which can be tweaked to use in terms of different organisations and

different stakeholder groups, is necessary for effective corporate reputation measurement to take place. In addition to the RQ, this study identifies RepTrak™ as such a measurement. RepTrak™ is therefore discussed in the following section.

2.6.1 RepTrak™

Given the need for a re-evaluation of corporate reputation measurement and taking into consideration the instruments that were already in use, the Reputation Institute decided to conduct studies around 2000 to develop a new measurement instrument for corporate reputation that would allow organisations to track and analyse their stakeholder perceptions, and therefore manage their corporate reputations. This initiative gave rise to the previously discussed RQ, a reputation measurement instrument that focused on measuring six dimensions of an organisation that were further divided into 20 attributes (refer to section 2.6.). Continuing this study, in 2005, the Reputation Institute refined the RQ, and the RepTrak™ Pulse was developed (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:4).

RepTrak™ is a reputation measurement instrument that is based on emotion (Wepener, 2014:43). It works by detangling “the drivers of corporate reputation from the dimensions of the construct itself” (Sah & Abdullah, 2014:3). Figure 2-4 hereunder depicts the RepTrak™ Pulse.



Source: Reputation Institute (2016b)

Figure 2-4: RepTrak™

To explain and measure corporate reputations, RepTrak™ makes use of four major themes, namely trust, admiration, esteem and feeling (Sah & Abdullah, 2011:36; Chan *et al.*, 2018:204). The Reputation Institute (2018) describes the four main themes of RepTrak™ as being “emotional dimensions”. Emotional dimensions are the feelings that stakeholders have toward an organisation (Wepener, 2014:7). By understanding these feelings, it is possible to understand exactly what an organisation should focus on improving, to improve the perception that stakeholders have of the organisation (Reputation Institute, 2018).

These themes are furthermore divided into seven dimensions, and the seven dimensions are divided into 23 attributes. Moreover, these themes are identified as being any or all the model’s seven dimensions. The Reputation Institute (2018) refers to these dimensions as the “rational dimensions”. The seven dimensions are (1) products and services, (2) innovation, (3) workplace, (4) governance, (5) citizenship, (6) leadership, and (7) performance. Moreover, these dimensions each comprises of either three or four attributes (Reputation Institute, 2018). Derived from the Reputation Institute’s (2018) RepTrak™ Pulse, the attributes accredited to each dimension are depicted in Table 2-1 hereunder.

Table 2-1: RepTrak™ dimensions and attributes

Dimension	Attributes
Products and services	• High quality • Value for money • Stands behind products • Meets customer needs
Innovation	• Innovative • First to market • Adapts quickly
Workplace	• Offers equal opportunities • Rewards employees fairly • Employee well-being
Governance	• Fair in business • Behaves ethically • Open and transparent
Citizenship	• Environmentally responsible • Supports good causes • Positive influence on society
Leadership	• Well organised • Appealing leader • Excellent managers • Clear vision for its future
Performance	• Profitable • Strong growth prospects • Better results than expected

Using Fombrun *et al.* (2015:6-9) and the Reputation Institute (2018) as a framework, each of these dimensions and their attributes can furthermore be discussed as follows:

- **Products and services**

The products and/or services that an organisation sells are the key value creators of the organisation (Töytäri *et al.*, 2011:494; Cunningham *et al.*, 2018:141). These products and services are, in other words, the dimension of the organisation that produces income for the organisation. In addition, this dimension establishes the brand image of the organisation – how customers feel about the products and/or services offered by the organisation and whether these products/services are of value to them (Sah & Abdullah, 2011:36; Osterwalder *et al.*, 2015:82). Purchasing products and services is often the first experience that stakeholders, mostly customers in this sense, have with an organisation.

This first impression therefore has a big influence on the organisation's corporate reputation (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:6). When measuring products and/or services of an organisation through RepTrak™, the measurement should be set up in such a way that it specifically measures the four attributes of the dimension products/services in terms of stakeholder perspective, namely (1) are the products/services of high quality? (2) are the products/services value for money? (3) does the organisation stand behind its products/services? In other words, does the organisation believe in what they are selling? and (4) do the products/services offered by the organisation meet the needs of the organisation's consumers? (Reputation Institute, 2018). Having all these attributes positively perceived will lead the organisation being admired, liked, trusted, and well regarded by its stakeholders (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:6).

- **Innovation**

This dimension refers to the extent to which an organisation can elicit emotional reactions from stakeholders such as excitement, admiration, and respect through its offerings. Moreover, the rate at which an organisation can come up with and produce new, original, and innovative products/services will influence how stakeholders perceive the organisation (Lin, 2011:258; Sah & Abdullah, 2011:33-34; Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:6). An organisation that can easily adapt to change and produce innovative products, services or ideas will enjoy the benefit of stakeholders positively perceiving these products/services, which will, in turn, lead to stakeholders wanting to buy the product/service as well as being more willing to overlook high price tags (Gassmann *et al.*, 2013:5; Van der Walddt, 2015:110). In addition, the organisation will gain admiration and respect from its stakeholders (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:6). When measuring this dimension through RepTrak™, its three attributes should therefore feature in the assessment. In other words, when measuring the innovativeness of an organisation, an organisation must pose the following questions: (1) is the organisation perceived as being innovative? (2) does the organisation launch new and exciting products within its market first, or do they use existing ideas to establish their products, services and/or ideas? and (3) does the organisation adapt quickly when faced with change, or does the organisation struggle to do so? (Reputation Institute, 2018).

- **Workplace**

By establishing a good workplace, an organisation will ensure that their internal stakeholders are happy and productive (Lewis & Malecha, 2011:42). Staff are more likely to stay at an organisation long term, and positively project the organisation to other stakeholders when they perceive their workplace to be pleasant and/or enjoyable

(Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:6-7). In the same breath, when staff feel unsatisfied with their workplace environment, they will project a negative perception of the organisation onto external stakeholders through poor production, bad customer service and complaints (Sah & Abdullah, 2011:34; Anjum *et al.*, 2018:1036). To keep employees happy, an organisation should ensure that it offers all employees equal opportunities, rewards all employees fairly and takes a keen interest in its employees' wellbeing. When measuring this dimension, the organisations should therefore ask: (1) do the employees of the organisations feel that they are offered equal opportunities compared to their colleagues? (2) do employees feel that they are rewarded fairly for the work that they do in terms of remuneration and benefits? and (3) do employees feel that the organisation cares about their wellbeing and that the organisation, in addition, actively works to improve employee wellbeing? (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:7; Reputation Institute, 2018).

- **Governance**

Governance refers to the structures and processes that provide and allocate power within an organisation, as well as actions by these structures in times of crises and/or challenges (Sah & Abdullah, 2011:34). These actions are perceived by stakeholders through the communication that an organisation has with stakeholders, and how effective this communication is. Communication with stakeholders, in this regard, should address what the crises or challenge was, why it happened, what the organisation did about it and what measures the organisation will take to ensure that the crises or challenge do not occur again. This communication should furthermore be transparent and not misleading, while portraying to stakeholders that the organisation knows that it is accountable and will take responsibility (Coombs, 2010:27; Heide & Simonsson, 2014:5). When stakeholders perceive an organisation as being ethical and transparent, especially in times of crises, they will award a higher level of trust and admiration to the organisation, which will, in turn, positively influence the organisation's corporate reputation (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:7). In measuring the governance of an organisation, RepTrak™ therefore poses the following questions to stakeholders to gain insight into these stakeholders' perceptions: (1) is the organisation at hand fair in the way in which it conducts its business? (2) does the organisation behave ethically? and (3) is the organisation open and transparent in communication with stakeholders? (Reputation Institute, 2018).

- **Citizenship**

This dimension refers to what extent stakeholders view an organisation as being a good fellow citizen. It comprises how good an organisation is in terms of whether the organisation performs good deeds, positively influences society, supports good causes

and cares for the environment (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:7; Reputation Institute, 2018). Measuring positively in this dimension aids an organisation in gaining respect, admiration, and support from stakeholders, and can therefore be a marketing and crisis management asset (Sah & Abdullah, 2011:35; Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:7). When measuring this dimension, RepTrak™ assesses stakeholder perception by posing three questions: (1) is the organisation environmentally friendly? (2) does the organisation support good causes? and (3) does the organisation have a positive influence on society? (Reputation Institute, 2018).

- **Leadership**

Leadership refers to the management structures of an organisation and the individuals who fulfil these positions. Good leadership within an organisation is important as it improves the organisation's financial performance, and results in favourable media coverage and higher investor rates (Sung & Choi, 2012:6; Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:8). Good leadership also attracts trust and confidence in an organisation (Caldwell *et al.*, 2012:180). When measuring leadership, RepTrak™ therefore assesses how stakeholders feel about an organisation's leadership by posing four questions: (1) has the leadership of the organisation ensured that the organisation is well organised? (2) does the organisation have an appealing leader? (3) does the organisation employ and keep excellent managers in service? and (4) does the leadership of the organisation have a clear vision for the organisation's future? (Reputation Institute, 2018).

- **Performance**

Good financial performance is a strong indicator of a strong corporate reputation (Cravens & Oliver, 2005:294; Ang & Wight, 2009:23; Ramos & Casado-Molina, 2021:122). Stakeholders will probably believe more in an organisation that can prove a strong and stable financial performance, and, in turn, this will lead to the likelihood that the organisation will continue to grow. The perception that the organisation enjoys steady growth also strengthens its corporate reputation (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:8). Moreover, an organisation that enjoys a strong and growing financial performance will also enjoy benefits within other dimensions of the organisation such as the ability to create and launch new products/services and a more efficient workforce that contributes to enhancing sales and aiding the organisation in times of crises (Sah & Abdullah, 2011:33). When measuring the performance of an organisation, RepTrak™ therefore asks the following: (1) is the organisation profitable? (2) does the organisation have strong growth prospects? and (3) does the organisation produce better results than expected? (Reputation Institute, 2018).

In the practical use of RepTrak™, each attribute is to be presented statement, and the respondent/respondents answer by using a Likert scale. Collectively, these attributes measure the dimension under which they fall (Fombrun *et al.*, 2015:9; Reputation Institute, 2018). From this, this study provides an example, with the focus on the measurement of the first dimension only, namely products and services. This example is presented in Table 2-2 hereunder.

Table 2-2: Example: How RepTrak™ attributes can be used in active research (five-point Likert scale)

			Respondents choose one option per attribute statement				
Dimension	Attribute and attribute number	Attributes and measurable statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Products and services	A1: High quality	Organisation X offers high quality products and services.					
	A2: Value for money	Organisation X offers products and services that are value for money.					
	A3: Stands behind	Organisation X stands behind its products and services.					
	A4: Meets customer needs	Organisation X meets customer needs.					

RepTrak™ is therefore a three-stage model. These stages are (1) identifying the themes of corporate reputation, (2) identifying the dimensions that influence corporate reputation; and (3) using the attributes that fall under each of these dimensions to measure each dimension and determine which dimensions should be improved upon to improve the overall corporate reputation of an organisation (Reputation Institute, 2016a:3).

After implementation, RepTrak™ awards a corporate reputation score to an organisation. The score is between 0 and 100. A score of 0 to 39 indicates a poor corporate reputation, 40 to 59 indicates a weak corporate reputation, 60 to 69 an average corporate reputation, 70 to 79 a strong

corporate reputation and above 80 indicates an excellent corporate reputation (RepTrak™, 2022:3). Table 2-3 hereunder presents these scores.

Table 2-3: RepTrak™ scores.

Score	Ranking
0-39	Poor
40-59	Weak
60-69	Average
70-79	Strong
80+	Excellent

Source: Author's own interpretation of RepTrak™ (2022:3)

RepTrak™ has furthermore become a popular measurement instrument in the corporate world and has been used by large organisations such as Apple and Google (Reputation Institute, 2018). Moreover, previous studies have also shown that RepTrak™ has been used within a university setting (refer to sections 1.1.1 and 1.6.2.1). Considering this, in conjunction with the findings documented in the literature review regarding the RepTrak™ Pule, this study has opted to use RepTrak™ as the measurement instrument to measure the NWU's corporate reputation in terms of its staff members' perceptions.

The proceeding section discusses the literature regarding corporate reputation measurement presented hereabove within the context of the NWU, while following the same recipe as the theoretical discussion, namely measuring corporate reputation and RepTrak™, starting with measuring corporate reputation at the NWU.

2.6.2 Measuring corporate reputation within the context of the NWU

Corporate reputation measurement has enjoyed a great deal of attention in both academia and practice. In addition, studies by Angliss (2017) and Jie and Haum (2019), among others, have also shown that universities have also focused their attention on the importance of corporate reputation, as well as the management and measurement thereof (refer to section 1.1.1). Reputation measurement was furthermore determined to consist of the organisation defining corporate reputation, its elements, and identifying stakeholders before choosing a measurement instrument (refer to section 2.6). Furthermore, all stakeholder groups' assessments must be taken into consideration to capture the entirety of an organisation's corporate reputation measurement (refer to section 2.6).

The NWU should follow suit and undertake a comprehensive assessment of its corporate reputation in terms of all its stakeholders, as the issues identified in the problem statement of this study also affect these other stakeholders (refer to section 1.1.4). This study aims to assess the

prospective of one stakeholder group, namely staff, and room for further assessment is therefore available. The NWU should furthermore ensure that the measurement instrument they choose to use can be used applied to multiple stakeholder groups and that it covers all the elements of corporate reputation.

Moreover, when choosing an instrument to measure its corporate reputation, the NWU should place a focus on investigating more recent and reliable instruments of measurement such as RepTrak™. The proceeding section places this instrument within the context of the NWU.

2.6.2.1 RepTrak™ within the context of the NWU

Van der Waladt (2017:86) states that the RQ and RepTrak™ are the two most popular and effective instruments used to measure an organisation's corporate reputation. RepTrak™ is furthermore an instrument that is much broader compared to most other available instruments, as it measures an organisation at a wide scale with four main themes, seven dimensions and 23 attributes (refer to section 2.6.1). Moreover, it can be used for assessment in terms of all stakeholders of an organisation. This is especially helpful in the case of the NWU, as it is a large institution with a variety of stakeholders such as prospective students and parents, current students and parents, alumni, academic staff, support staff, HES role players and the communities in which the three NWU campuses are situated.

Although the study aims to include only the staff of the NWU, this is a stakeholder group that differs greatly in terms of language, race, culture, religion, socio-economic circumstances, and demographics. In essence, RepTrak™ was chosen for the purpose of this study as it is a single instrument that can accurately measure the corporate reputation of an organisation despite such differences. The themes, dimensions, and attributes that RepTrak™ makes use of are all appropriate to use when assessing the perspectives of the NWU's staff. In terms of the NWU, these dimensions are discussed as follows:

- The **products and/or services** of the university are the various academic programmes that the university offers, the graduates it yields and the research that it produces. Teaching and learning, research and innovation, and service delivery such as Statistical Consultation Services (SCS), laboratory services, healthcare services, and general support services such as IT and student administration, are the key value creators of the NWU. The research and graduates produced by the NWU link strongly to this value creation as they serve as an indication of the quality thereof. When measuring its corporate reputation, the NWU should assess whether the teaching and learning and service delivery they provide, as well as the research they produce are of high quality, are

of value for money to stakeholders, and whether these stakeholders feel that the NWU does enough to show that they are in full support of these provided services/products (if they stand behind them). Receiving high assessments in this dimension will allow the NWU to enjoy likability, admiration, and trust by its stakeholders.

- **Innovation** at the NWU can refer to products/services that elicit an emotional response from stakeholders that result from research such as the NWU Solar, or initiatives such as the annual Science Convention⁸ or GeeXpo⁹ competition. Prospective students, for example, who attend Science Conventions, partake in GeeXpo, or attend a Solar Car event will likely feel excited about the NWU, and gain respect and admiration for the university. This, in turn, has an influence on prospective students when deciding whether to apply to the NWU. Successful innovations such as the Solar Car or research produced by a department that can benefit society will also lead to other organisations and institutions wanting to partner with the NWU, for example where Nemedussa¹⁰ has partnered with the Research Group for Nematology at the NWU. In addition, the rate at which the NWU can adapt to change, for example the quick move from being an in-person teaching and learning university, to a virtually-based institution with the emergence of Covid-19 (refer to section 2.3.2.8), also influences the admiration and respect that stakeholders have for the university. When assessing this dimension, the NWU should focus on whether stakeholders perceive the university as being innovative, whether the NWU is able to launch new and existing products/services/research/programmes without copying the ideas of other universities, and whether they adapt quickly to change when needed.
- In terms of **workplace**, assessment thereof is critical when the NWU is assessing the perspectives of its staff, as in the case of this study. If the NWU can provide a working environment in which staff are comfortable and happy, the university will be able to attract and keep paramount staff for extended periods. Producing such an environment requires the NWU to provide all staff over all three campuses with equal opportunities, reward all staff appropriately and take an interest in staff's wellbeing. The NWU attempts to reward staff through events such as faculty-based acknowledgement functions, research awards,

⁸ Grade 11 and 12 learners from the Free State write an Olympiad annually. Learners who achieve high marks in this are invited to the NWU. Learners present SETHI-based projects and are taken on tours of the Faculties of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, Health Sciences, and Engineering.

⁹ An annual competition for grade 12 learners based on IT projects presented by the School of Computer Science and Information Systems. Winners receive various prestigious prizes and even bursaries to study IT at the NWU.

¹⁰ A project that aims to increase education on nematodes.

teaching and learning awards, promotions, and service bonuses. The wellbeing of staff also seems to be a priority for the NWU as the university houses departments dedicated to stakeholder wellbeing.

- The **governance** of the NWU refers to the structures such as the University Management Committee (UMC), Faculty Management Committees (FMCs), the SRC and department management, as well as the process that these structures put in place in times of crises, such as the Covid-19 protocols that all staff and students had to adhere to. How effective and transparent the communication is that results from these processes by these structures, will lead to how the affected stakeholders of the NWU will perceive the university in terms of trust in and admiration for the NWU. In terms of assessing its governance, the NWU should question whether stakeholders feel that the university conducts fair business, behaves ethically and whether all communication from the NWU with stakeholders is transparent and open.
- In terms of **citizenship**, the NWU will gain respect, admiration, and support from its stakeholders if the university can prove that it is environmentally friendly, supports good causes and has a positive influence on society. The NWU attempts to enhance this dimension by housing a department specifically for CSR and by supporting good causes through initiatives such as the Canned Food Day¹¹ and the Gender Awareness Week¹².
- The **leadership** of the NWU can be identified as individuals such as Dr Bismark Tyobeka (the Vice-Chancellor of the university), the three deputy vice-chancellors, the deans and deputy deans of faculties, the executive directors, directors and managers of departments, the directors, deputy directors and subject group leaders of the various schools, and the student leaders of the NWU. As leadership influences financial performance, media attention and investment/partners, the NWU should assess whether stakeholders perceive its leadership to be well organised, appealing, excellent in managing the NWU, and whether these leaders all share a clear vision for the university.
- Proper financial **performance** by the NWU will allow the university to be able to undertake initiatives such as the development of new academic programmes, new and innovative research, instrumentation, and practical experience for students, employ and keep skilled staff, and support good causes through events such as the Gender Awareness Week.

¹¹ Student associations at the NWU collect canned food items annually to donate to those in need.

¹² An annual campaign by the NWU to increase education of all genders.

Together, advantages such as these create a positive perception of the NWU in the eyes of its stakeholders. The NWU should therefore assess whether they are profitable, have strong growth prospects and produce better results from activities undertaken than what was originally planned.

Taking the discussions presented in section 2.6 into consideration, the fourth guiding theoretical argument for the study is formulated hereunder:

Guiding theoretical argument 4:

Corporate reputation measurement is the way in which an organisation determines what their **stakeholders' perceptions** of the organisation are. **Measuring corporate reputation** will allow an organisation to better **understand their corporate reputation** and how it needs to be managed to produce positive **stakeholder perceptions**. Organisations must furthermore identify an instrument that is best suited to their nature and that of the specific stakeholder groups whose perceptions are being assessed. The NWU should furthermore use the measurement instrument, **RepTrak™**, which measures corporate reputation according to four themes (**trust, admiration, esteem and feeling**) through seven dimensions, namely (1) **products and services**, (2) **innovation**, (3) **workplace**, (4) **governance**, (5) **citizenship**, (6) **leadership**, and (7) **performance**. By measuring its corporate reputation with **RepTrak™**, the NWU will be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses in its corporate reputation, which will allow the university to strategically plan how to better manage its corporate reputation in the future.

Throughout the discussion pertaining the definition, trends, elements, management, and measurement of corporate reputation, it was noted that, on several occasions, a strong corporate reputation would lead to some sort of a positive effect, such as good financial performance, products/services being perceived as high quality or employees positively projecting the organisation from the inside-out. A strong corporate reputation therefore holds advantages for the organisation. Accordingly, the proceeding section discusses the advantages of a strong corporate reputation.

2.7 The advantages of a strong corporate reputation

There are many advantages that organisations will experience if they have put in the time and effort to build and project a strong corporate reputation (Ingilis *et al.*, 2006:935). Research tends to focus on the fact that an organisation that enjoys a strong corporate reputation will also experience **stable revenues and consistency in its performance** (Cravens & Oliver, 2005:294; Ang & Wight, 2009:23; Van der Walddt, 2015:116). However, a strong corporate reputation does

not only provide financial advantages, but also more intangible advantages. Many of these advantages are linked to the advantage of sound financial performance in the sense that they lead to it in some way, shape or form.

Acquiring a strong corporate reputation will create a **competitive advantage** for an organisation (Ang & Wight, 2009:23; Glandfield *et al.*, 2017:135). Moreover, when an organisation has a strong corporate reputation, its products and/or services are perceived as **high quality**, which, in turn, allows consumers to be more willing to overlook expensive price tags and creates a high level of **brand loyalty** (Ang & Wight, 2009:23; Van der Waladt, 2015:110). The “reliability and expectation” of products and/or services will also be more closely aligned (Van der Waladt, 2015:110).

Strong corporate reputations also contribute to first-time customers being more easily convinced to purchase from the organisation (Ang & Wight, 2009:23). In addition, it will assist in building better relationships with stakeholders, as well as aid in the management of **stakeholder relations** (Van der Waladt, 2015:110; Glandfield *et al.*, 2017:135:).

Organisations that enjoy a strong corporate reputation can attract, **employ, and keep specialist staff** who contribute to the success of the organisation (Ang & Wight, 2009:23; Van der Waladt, 2015:110; Glandfield *et al.*, 2017:135).

Strong corporate reputations have furthermore proven to **decrease the likelihood** that an organisation will experience **crises and risks** (Ang & Wight, 2009:23; Van der Waladt, 2015:110). Within the public eye, an organisation with a strong corporate reputation will also be scrutinised a lot less compared to organisations that do not enjoy a strong corporate reputation (Van der Waladt, 2015:111).

From this, this study states that a strong corporate reputation results in the organisation being able to:

- Attract, employ, and keep specialist staff,
- Create a suitable and friendly workplace, which results in staff having a positive perception of the organisation, which they project from the inside-out,
- Create a competitive advantage for the organisation and position it favourably within its sector,
- Create the impression that its products/services are of high quality, which leads to customers being willing to overlook high prices,
- More easily attract first-time buyers,
- Assist the organisation in times of crises and reputational risk, which leads to

- Being less scrutinised in the public eye in times when reputational risks and crises have affected the organisation, and together these advantages lead to the organisation being able to
- Enjoy a stable and/or increase in financial performance.

Attaining a strong corporate reputation would yield advantages such as these for the NWU as well. The proceeding section discusses section 2.7 within the context of the NWU.

2.7.1 The advantages of a strong corporate reputation within the context of the NWU

Regarding a financial benefit, by attracting and maintaining students, the university will be able to generate revenue in terms of tuition fees (refer to section 2.6.2). With this, as a strong competitive advantage is created by a good corporate reputation, the NWU would be able to attract more students with a good corporate reputation and, in doing so, contribute to this revenue. Prospective students and other stakeholders will also perceive the NWU's products and services as high quality.

By building a strong reputation, the NWU will furthermore be able to attract specialist and expert staff in both their support and academic fields, which again will aid in attracting more students and other stakeholders to the university. Maintaining these staff members will be made possible if the NWU is positively perceived in terms of its workplace.

A strong corporate reputation for the NWU will furthermore aid the university in future crises management and mitigating risks such as the Corona Virus and the restructuring process. In conclusion, by building a strong corporate reputation, the NWU can create a cycle of advantages that influence and build on one another.

2.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to answer the first specific research question of this study, namely:

What are the theoretical points of departure regarding corporate reputation management?

To answer this question, the chapter provided a literature review that investigated corporate communication as the umbrella under which corporate reputation falls, as well as corporate reputation as part of this umbrella in terms of its definition, trends, elements, management, measurement and advantages.

Corporate communication was found to be an organisational function that is crucial to the success of an organisation as it consists of activities that attempt to create favourable relationships with stakeholders, and therefore directly influences how these stakeholders perceive the organisation. Moreover, corporate communication was found to comprise three types of communication that each consists of its own strategies and objectives. These three types of communication were identified as management communication, marketing communication and organisational communication. Management communication was found to be the strategies and activities aimed at internal stakeholders of an organisation. Marketing communication was found to be strategies and activities aimed at external stakeholders, but especially at an organisation's customers. The main objective of marketing communication is to sell products/services, and this is achieved through activities such as advertising, personal selling, sales promotions, public relations, and direct marketing. Organisational communication was defined as communication activities and strategies aimed at both internal and external stakeholders such as the media or investors, but in a more formal manner as opposed to management or marketing communication. Moreover, corporate communication was linked to corporate reputation in the sense that corporate communication is defined as the communication activities aimed at stakeholders that aim to favourably position the organisation, and corporate reputation can be seen as one of these activities that can create positive stakeholder perceptions of the organisation, which will lead to a favourable position of the organisation.

More specifically, corporate reputation was defined as being a valuable and core asset of an organisation that yields both tangible and intangible benefits, and which is characterised as being either a negative or positive collective perception of the organisation by its various stakeholder groups. These perceptions are developed over time from these stakeholders' past experiences and will continue to develop because of future interactions that stakeholders will have with the organisation. Moreover, corporate reputation is a concept affected by various trends such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the 4th industrial revolution, virtual organisations, digital information, social technologies, social media parody accounts and online reputation management. Corporate reputation furthermore comprises five elements, namely corporate identity, corporate image, corporate brand, corporate personality and corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture. These elements influence each other at times, as well as influence the corporate reputation of an organisation on both an individual and collective level.

Corporate reputation management was found to be essential. To manage corporate reputation, organisations need to understand what corporate reputation is and what its importance is, and then to define the construct within their specific nature. The organisation should furthermore ensure that it understands each of its stakeholder groups and ensures that the organisation's

goals and vision are aligned with what these stakeholders want and need. Moreover, organisations must undertake regular assessments of their corporate reputation to ensure that their goals and vision are in line with stakeholder needs. Such assessments are conducted through corporate reputation measurement.

Various instruments for corporate reputation measurement exist. However, the two main instruments used by organisations are the RQ and RepTrak™. Although the RQ was identified as being a viable instrument to measure corporate reputation, this chapter placed focus on RepTrak™. RepTrak™ was found to be a measurement instrument built around four themes that influence stakeholder perspective (trust, admiration, esteem and feeling) and that measures these perspectives in terms of seven dimensions (products/services, innovation, workplace, governance, citizenship, leadership, performance). To assess these dimensions, RepTrak™ divides each dimension into three or four attributes (having a total of 23 attributes), which collectively provide a description of how stakeholders perceive the organisation in terms of each dimension. RepTrak™ was furthermore stated to be the instrument of choice for this study to determine what the perceptions of staff members at the NWU are of the university.

When an organisation can define corporate reputation, manage it and measure it, the organisation will enjoy a strong corporate reputation that brings with it additional advantages, including stable financial performance, high quality perception of products, easy mitigation of crises and risks, brand loyalty, a competitive advantage, and favourable stakeholder relations.

This chapter furthermore identified key constructs that were used to create the framework for the qualitative research undertaken by this study. These constructs, namely corporate reputation, corporate reputation trends, the elements of corporate reputation, corporate reputation management, corporate reputation measurement and corporate reputation advantages, were used in the creation of the interview schedule (refer to section 4.4.1.3). This interview schedule was used to determine what the North-West University's approach to the university's current corporate reputation management is by posing the content thereof to the management of the NWU's Corporate Relations and Marketing Department. The second specific question posed by this study aims to determine exactly this, while the third aims to determine what the perceptions of the NWU's staff are of the university's corporate reputation management through the use of RepTrak™. The discussion on RepTrak™ (refer to section 2.6.1) was therefore used to implement the use of the instrument in this study. However, before discussing how these methods will be implemented, it is important to provide a more extensive context of the NWU, to gain clarity on why corporate reputation and the management and measurement thereof should be deemed essential for the university. The proceeding chapter, therefore, discusses the NWU within context.

CHAPTER 3: THE PAST AND PRESENT CONTEXT OF THE NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a literature review to determine what the theoretical points of departure of corporate reputation are. Specifically, the chapter investigated corporate communication in terms of its definition and composition, and its relation to corporate reputation (refer to section 2.2). The chapter then proceeded to analyse corporate reputation in terms of its definition, the trends surrounding it, the elements of which it is compromised, the management thereof, the measurement thereof and finally, the advantages thereof.

The identification and exposition of these constructs led to determining what the theoretical points of departure regarding corporate reputation are. The chapter found that corporate reputation is an organisational asset that is defined as an organisation's stakeholders' perceptions, which develop over time in accordance with past, and future, interactions between stakeholders and the organisation (refer to section 2.3.1). Corporate reputation is affected by seven main trends, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the 4th industrial revolution, virtual organisations, digital information, social technologies, social media parody accounts, and online reputation management (refer to section 2.3.2). Moreover, corporate reputation was determined to comprise five elements, namely corporate identity, corporate image, corporate brand, corporate personality and corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture (refer to section 2.4). Corporate reputation management was furthermore found to be essential to the success of an organisation and should be done through aligning organisational goals with stakeholder needs (refer to section 2.5). It was also found that there are various measurement instruments of corporate reputation available, but emphasis was placed on one instrument, namely RepTrak™, which was furthermore identified as the measurement instrument for use by this study (refer to section 2.6). Finally, Chapter 2 noted that a strong corporate reputation brings advantages such as a competitive advantage, stable revenues, and attracting skilled staff, among others (refer to section 2.7).

Chapter 3 now adds context to the study by investigating the past and present context of the North-West University (NWU). To do so, the chapter starts with a broader perspective of the environment in which the NWU functions, namely the higher education sector (HES). The discussion then descends to the NWU and factors that have had and continue to have an influence on the university's corporate reputation. To discuss the NWU within context, this chapter is therefore divided into three main sections, namely: (1) the international and local landscapes of the HES, (2) the NWU in terms of its history and past and present challenges, and (3)

conclusions pertaining to the chapter. The following section explores the landscape of local and international HES.

3.2 Introduction to international and local higher education landscapes

This section discusses the HES in terms of both the international and local, in this case, the South African, landscapes. The proceeding section starts the discussion with the international landscape by discussing it in terms of its nature and matters that affect the sector.

3.2.1 The playing field of the international higher education sector

Higher education is a sector that enjoys active participation and is a necessity on a global scale, and which can play a vital role in society (Mzangwa, 2019:3). Many countries see the need for higher education among citizens as that an educated population in specialist fields holds many advantages for the country that aid in the development of the country and the welfare of its people. These advantages include improvement of the country's economy, its socio-culture, equality among citizens, quality of services provided to citizens, such as healthcare, and technological advances (Barr & Crawford, 2005:265; Sarkar, 2012:31; Goksu & Goksu, 2015:1152). To enhance development, countries have therefore placed emphasises on higher education training among their citizens, which has created a competitive international landscape in the HES (de Haan, 2015:45; Keser, 2015:58). This competitive landscape has resulted in higher education institutions (HEIs) focusing on ranking levels and successfully defining and projecting their identity, meaning, image and reputation (Hemsley-Brown *et al.*, 2016:3019; Thomson-Whiteside, 2016:244).

The international HES is in the middle of a transformation. 2015 saw the end of endeavours such as *Education for All* (EFA) and *Millennium Development Goals* (MGD) as well as the beginning of *Education 2030*. EFA is an international movement that encourages nations to provide free primary education for all by 2015, arguing that primary education is a basic right and should therefore be free, and that educating all willing citizens of a nation will improve a country's economic growth, development and equality (Daniel, 2010:2-6; Gove & Cvelich, 2011:3). MGD is defined as a list of common goals that the United Nations (UN) wanted the world to achieve by 2015 that had the objective of, among others, combating global poverty, improving environmental protection, addressing gender inequality, and improving education (Sachs, 2012:2206; Fehling, 2013:1109). Education 2030 is the new international development strategy that was put into action in 2015 by the UN to combat environmental, economic, and social challenges on a global scale. It is aimed at further transforming the HES by 2030 in terms of inclusion, equity and quality education. The theme of Education 2030 is to move the HES *towards inclusive and equitable*

quality education and lifelong learning for all (Yoshida & Van der Walt, 2018:39; OECD Education, 2018:3).

The revised form and shape of the international HES has brought along new challenges that the various sectors and their institutions must now face (Knight, 2013:84; Chan, 2016:2; Mzangwa, 2019:3). Many institutions across the globe have begun to partake in activities that play a role in facing such challenges. Universities have reformed and reshaped themselves in reaction to these challenges (Billot, 2010:710; Webbstock & Fisher, 2016:5).

Using content from the Council for Higher Education (CHE), as authored by D Webbstock (Director of Monitoring and Evaluation at CHE) and G Fisher as a framework, with supporting literature derived from academic journals, articles and books regarding the HES, this study identifies four matters that affect the international HES. These matters are identified as (1) issues regarding the governance of the sector, (2) the internationalisation of the sector, (3) lifelong learning and technological advances, and (4) the identification of eight megatrends that will have an immense effect on the sector by the year 2030.

These matters are discussed in the proceeding sections, beginning with the governance of the sector.

3.2.1.1 Governance

Governance refers to the policies, structures and processes that active role players within a sector or organisation put together to solve problems, and consequently how these policies, structures and processes are developed and implemented (Davies, 2005:143; Capano, 2011:1625; Sah & Abdullah, 2011:34). HEIs are prone to social, political and economic influences and the governance of the sector therefore seeks to address such issues by requiring HEIs to partake in processes, policies and activities aimed at solving these issues (Webbstock & Fisher, 2016:5; Banka, 2019:38).

Webbstock and Fisher (2016:9) highlight that universities should be governed according to a collective system and purpose, rather than autonomously, and state that the sector has seen this happen. However, Hemsley-Brown *et al.* (2016:3020) found that each HEI is unique and uses strategies to address issues specific to their institution and should therefore be governed differently according to their own “cultures, development stages, resources, politics, and student profiles” (Hemsley-Brown *et al.*, 2016:3020). This is challenging for HEIs because, as the debate within the sector continues, HEIs are still required to adhere to these governance policies, even if they or their stakeholders do not agree with it.

Moreover, the international sector has seen an increase in parties that have begun to play a governing role within it. National governments are not the only ones calling the shots anymore, causing difficulties in the institutional management of HEIs (Capano, 2011:1626; Solesin, 2020:1). Taking South Africa as an example, the HES is influenced by various parties that play a role in its governance such as SETAs, NSFAS, the DHET and the CHE (DHET, 2020).

The following section discusses the second matter that influences the international HES, namely internationalism.

3.2.1.2 Internationalisation

Internationalisation is defined as the processes or procedures and knowledge that integrate an international dimension into sectors or organisations that form part of these sectors (Fletcher *et al.*, 2016:2). Within the HES, internationalisation has played an integral role in the transformation of the sector through drivers such as political, socio-cultural, economic, and academic influences as well as changing stakeholder perceptions (Knight, 2013:84; De Wit *et al.*, 2015:6).

Internationalisation of the HES has furthermore seen an escalation in interest from students considering taking their studies abroad, resulting in students moving across borders to attend universities outside of their national options. This dramatically increased by the second half of the 20th century, playing a big role in how the international higher education landscape is structured today (Badat, 2010:5; Wilkins *et al.*, 2012:414). Internationalisation remains a trend that continues to shape the HES. It is predicted that by 2030, an increase of 120 million students will enrol for higher education, while 2.3 million of them will be classified as international students (Choudaha & Van Rest, 2018:41). HEIs are then also pressured by not only local social, political and economic factors, but also by having to provide what has become known as ‘cross-border’ education. This suggests that the international HES is slowly moving toward becoming a collective system (Hemsley-Brown *et al.*, 2016:3020; Tandlich *et al.*, 2018:10). In addition, internationalisation of the HES increases the competitiveness of the already competitive sector (Fletcher *et al.*, 2016:5; Hemsley-Brown *et al.*, 2016:3019).

While internationalisation of the HES originally intended to share knowledge, values and ideas across cultures, the matter has also contributed significantly to the strategies used within the context of the HES, reaching not only institutions themselves, but also their associates, national governments and international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), among others (Knight, 2013:88; De Wit, 2019:10).

Just as internationalisation of the HES can result in benefits, it also challenges the sector in terms of issues such as the increase in the amount of English taught curriculums in countries where English is not a first language, and the active recruitment by national sectors focused on obtaining quality international students, instead of focusing on their own local prospective students (Choudaha & Van Rest, 2018:18; De Wit, 2019:15).

The following section explores the third matter that influences the international HES, namely lifelong learning and technological advances.

3.2.1.3 Lifelong learning and technological advances

Lifelong learning is a concept that stemmed from two perspectives, namely (1) people can gain knowledge throughout their lifespan, and (2) learning within a field does not only happen in terms of the training provided at HEIs, but also within the workplaces that graduates move on to (Slowey & Schuetze, 2012:3). A need for lifelong learning has become a prerequisite of the HES and its comprising institutions, as these HEIs aid in training students who will become lifelong learners, and who will, in turn, aid in the development of academia and practice (Dindar & Bayracki, 2015:11).

The need for development in academia and practice can be attributed to the changing business environment and development of technology, which have propelled us into the 4th industrial revolution (refer to section 1.1.1). Moreover, Industry 4.0 has resulted in a new type of stakeholder (Manda & Dhaou, 2019:245; Ghobakhloo, 2020:6). These stakeholders, mainly Millennials and Gen Z'ers, rely on the virtual world and other trends that come along with it, such as social media, daily (Setiawan *et al.*, 2018:4; Curtis *et al.*, 2019:3). As these stakeholders are entering the HES as students and staff, HEIs have had to transform to meet the needs of these digitally inclined generations (refer to section 1.1.2).

The HES will continue to be faced with issues that require attention from the sector over the next few years. These issues will arise because of what has been identified as megatrends within the sector. These megatrends are outlined in the proceeding section.

3.2.1.4 Megatrends

The HES is currently in the middle of a transformation brought about by Education 2030 (refer to section 2.3.1). However, Education 2030 is not the only trend that will affect the HES within the next decade. The HES will also change because of megatrends that have also surfaced within the sector (Gidley, 2010:1045; Choudaha & Van Rest, 2018:2). Megatrends are defined as large, external, and long-term factors that transform, and have a big effect on the world, as they have

the potential to define the future of the economy, various sectors, societies, and individuals (Retief *et al.*, 2016:52; Artuso & Guijt, 2020:9).

Choudaha and Van Rest (2018:30) identify eight megatrends that will have an impact on the HES at an international level within the next decade. These trends are (1) an aging world (described as being the search for new employment opportunities and thus the need and development for new educational programmes), (2) shifts in the labour markets (focused mainly on automation of certain functions), (3) a mismatch of skills (referring to the gap between what skills students are taught and what skills employers expect them to have), (4) rapid urbanisation (referring to the shift in which more and more graduates will settle in larger cities to ensure stable careers and the growth thereof), (5) stricter immigration policies (specifically with regard to the mobility of international students to high-income countries), (6) shifts in the economy (referring to the dependence of economic growth on emerging markets), (7) an imbalance in capacity (referring to the demand that emerging economies have compared to the supply that developed economies have), and (8) pressures on budgets (referring to the fact that public funding for HEIs will start to drop).

It is important to take note of the international playing field of the HES as the international HES will affect the national HES in which the university in question of this study, the NWU, exists. The NWU functions within the South African HES. The following section therefore addresses the HES within a South African context.

3.2.2 South Africa's higher education sector

Chapter 1, *introduction and orientation to the study*, explored the HES in South Africa (refer to section 1.1.2). This section continues the examination of the sector according to three sections, namely (1) the history of South Africa's HES, (2) its structure and, (3) its nature.

3.2.2.1 The history of South Africa's higher education sector: Transformation from then until now

Similar to the international HES, South Africa's HES has undergone a considerable transformation over the past few decades. The sector was created when the first South African university, the University of the Cape of Good Hope, was established in 1873. This University has since become known as the University of South Africa (UNISA) as of 1916 (UNISA, 2016). This was followed by the establishment of more colleges and universities and by the three decades following 1930, most universities in the country had developed into mature institutions (Ferreira, 2003:51). By this time, predominantly white universities and smaller, predominantly black universities comprised the HES in South Africa. The first transformation that the HES underwent

was in the 1980s when universities began working toward 'non-racial higher education', allowing non-white students entrance to predominantly white universities (Ferreira, 2003:51; Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017:785).

The new millennium quickly became known as the *knowledge era* in which higher education played an essential role (Teferra & Altbach, 2004:29). Modernisation and political influences, such as *The Higher Education Act*, were the next form of transformation that the South African HES underwent. Modernisation and political transformation of the HES were characterised by achieving "social justice through a redress", which involved implementing a programme that corrected the imbalances of the country's past, such as social, political and economic discrimination and inequalities, and which intended to provide a single co-ordinated and diverse HES that was fair and open to all (Badat, 2010:3; Webbstock & Fisher, 2016:18). Transforming the HES in this way was necessary to achieve national goals that were also directly related to correcting the inequalities of the nation's apartheid past (Shawa, 2020:106).

By transforming its HES, South Africa attempted to correct these inequalities through the belief that education was the solution (Mzangwa, 2019:2). By producing a system uninhibited by racial borders in a progressive democracy, the nation would be able to yield "critical, independent citizens" and "skilled and socially committed graduates" (Webbstock & Fisher, 2016:22). This was a critical task to achieve as individuals who possessed these characteristics would be able to aid in the development of the country's economy, unemployment, equality, quality of life, and technological advances (Sarkar, 2012:31; Goksu & Goksu, 2015:1152; Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017:780).

The transformation continued with what has become known as the *size and shape* of the HES. Over the next few decades, this transformation saw some institutions close, while others merged with one another to create new institutions representative of the nation's post-apartheid democracy (Ferreira, 2003:51). The re-sizing and re-shaping of the HES were considered to be a restructuring process led by political motivation, debate and negotiations. The mere mention of the re-size and re-shape of the HES was actively protested by institutions with the sector. Many were not willing to change and reform to the "government meddling" that the process entailed (Pretorius, 2017:36).

These closures and mergers resized the HES from consisting of 36 to 26 universities. These institutions were grouped as 11 predominately white universities (further grouped as seven Afrikaans and four English universities), ten predominantly black universities, eight predominately white technikons and seven predominately black technikons (Webbstock & Fisher, 2016:37; Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017:785).

While some of the institutions involved in this restructuring have resulted in institutions that embody the ideals of transformation, others have not been as successful (Shawa, 2020:106). Although this process was started with good intention, the implementation thereof has been challenging. The challenges of this restructuring process have been documented by various scholars. From consulting the works of Badat (2010:9), Webbstock and Fisher, (2016:41), Gelderblom and Dirk (2017:342), and Albertus (2019:1), this study identifies these challenges as follows: (1) the process was drawn-out, (2) it consisted of too many large goals to be achieved in a short period of time, (3) the institutions that comprised the sector differed greatly in terms of economic, social, cultural and traditional characteristics, (4) language differences played a big role as the sector was previously Afrikaans dominated; (5) there were many challenges pertaining to the governance and leadership of the institutions in question, (6) there were practical difficulties involved in multi-campus institutions that were spread over a wide geographical spectrum, (7) the stakeholders within the sector differed greatly from one another, (8) different 'organisational structures' existed and had to be co-ordinated, and (9) allegiances existed between different groups and/or individuals associated with the HEIs in the sector.

The past few years have also seen numerous politically- and economically-driven protests by students regarding these issues, which have collectively hindered the transformation process (Gelderblom & Dirk, 2017:343). However, the transformation of South Africa's HES continues, as the proceeding section will show.

3.2.2.2 The current structure of South Africa's higher education sector

Previously, Ferreira (2003:50) explained the structure of the HES in South Africa as comprising the Department of Education as run by the ministry, and several other bodies such as the CHE, The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC), The Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP), The South African Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA), HEIs, research and development organisations, and finally associations and regional consortia.

The HES in South Africa later comprised four types of public and private institutions, namely Higher Education and Training Institutions (HEIs), Further Education and Training (FET) colleges, Adult Education and Training (AET), and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) (SouthAfrica.Info, 2013). Specifically, at this stage, the South African HES comprised 23 state-funded tertiary institutions (11 universities, six universities of technology and six comprehensive institutions), which functioned autonomously, although subsidised by the state, and reported to their own councils rather than government. Furthermore, 50 public and 249 private FET colleges,

3 289 public and 66 private AETs, and 21 government established SETAs also comprised the sector at this time (SouthAfrica.Info, 2013).

Currently, the sector has once again changed. It now comprises various bodies and institutions that fall into six categories (refer to section 1.1.2). These are identified as (1) universities of technology, otherwise known as technikons; (2) traditional universities, (3) comprehensive universities; (4) private universities and colleges; (5) TVET colleges; and (6) SETAs and other role players and authorities reporting to the DEHT (Tjønneland, 2017:2; DHET, 2020).

Section 1.1.2 identified two major differences between these institutions/bodies, namely (1) the type of qualifications offered by each (stating that universities of technology provide diplomas and/or degrees that are vocation oriented, traditional universities offer degrees that are theoretically oriented, comprehensive universities provide qualifications that are a combination of those provided by traditional universities, and TVET colleges offer vocational, occupational and artisan training) (DHET, 2020; Southafricaeducation.info, 2020); and (2) the level of education offered by these institutions (stating that universities require higher AP-scores as prerequisites and focus on subjects such as physical science and mathematics, while TVET colleges require students to only have completed grade 9) (DHET, 2020).

Section 1.1.2 also stated that SETAs represent specific fields, e.g., AgriSETA represents the field of Agricultural Science in the HES (National Government of South Africa, 2020), while other role players (such as NSFAS and the CHE) within the HES provide services either to institutions or their students or play a role in how institutions are managed (DHET, 2020).

In terms of governance of the sector, education and science and technology have a ministry in South African government. The Ministry of Science and Technology must implement the agenda of government regarding “scientific research and development in the country”, while parties such as the National Research Foundation (NRF) further assist in implementing this agenda (Tandlich *et al.*, 2018).

Table 3-1 hereunder presents the various institutions and authorities that comprised the HES in South Africa in 2020.

Table 3-1: Institutions comprising the HES of South Africa

HEIs and authorities that comprise the South African higher education sector
Comprehensive universities
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University University of Johannesburg University of South Africa University of Venda University of Zululand Walter Sisulu University
Traditional universities
North-West University Rhodes University University of Cape Town University of Fort Hare University of KwaZulu-Natal University of Limpopo University of Pretoria University of Stellenbosch University of the Free State University of the Western Cape University of the Witwatersrand
Universities of technology
Cape Peninsula University of Technology Central University of Technology Durban University of Technology Mangosuthu University of Technology Tshwane University of Technology Vaal University of Technology
Private universities and colleges

AFDA, The South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance

Auckland Park Theological Seminary

Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa

Boston City Campus and Business College

Cornerstone Institute

CTI Education Group

Damelin

Doxa Deo School of Divinity

George Whitefield College

IMM Graduate School of Marketing

Inscape Design College

Management College of Southern Africa

Midrand Graduate Institute

Milpark Business School

Monash South Africa

Oval Education International

Qualitas Career Academy

Regenesys Business School

South African Theological Seminary

St Augustine College of South Africa

Stenden University South Africa

Varsity College

TVET colleges

Boland TVET College

Buffalo City TVET College

Capricorn TVET College

Central Johannesburg TVET College

Coastal TVET College

College of Cape Town for TVET

Eastcape Midlands TVET College

Ehlanzeni TVET College

Ekurhuleni East TVET College

Ekurhuleni West TVET College

Elangeni TVET College

Esayidi TVET College

False Bay TVET College

Flavius Mareka TVET College

Gert Sibande TVET College

Goldfields TVET College

Ikhala TVET College

Ingwe TVET College

King Hintsa TVET College

King Sabata Dalindyebo TVET College

Lephalale TVET College

Letaba TVET College

Lovedale TVET College

Majuba TVET College

Maluti TVET College

Mnambithi TVET College

Mopani South TVET College

Motho TVET College

Mthashana TVET College

Nkangala TVET College

Northern Cape Rural TVET College

Northern Cape Urban TVET College

Northlink TVET College

Orbit TVET College

Port Elizabeth TVET College

Sedibeng TVET College

Sekhukhune TVET College

South Cape TVET College

South West Gauteng TVET College

Taletso TVET College

Thekwini TVET College

Tshwane North TVET College

Tshwane South TVET College

Umfolosi TVET College

Umgungundlovu TVET College

Vhembe TVET College

Vuselela TVET College

Waterberg TVET College

West Coast TVET College

Western College for TVET

SETAs and other role players reporting to the DHET

Agricultural Sector Education and Training Authority (AgriSETA)

Banking Sector Education and Training Authority (BANKSETA)

Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority (CHIETA)

Coastal TVET College

Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA)

Council on Higher Education (CHE)

Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHSSETA)

Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA)

Energy and Water Sector Education and Training Authority (EWSETA)

Fibre Processing and Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority (FP&M SETA)

Finance and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority (Fasset)

Food and Beverage Manufacturing Industry Sector Education and Training Authority (FoodBev SETA)

Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA)

Insurance Sector Education and Training Authority (Inseta)
Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA)
Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority (merSETA)
Media, Information and Communication Technologies Sector Education and Training Authority (MICT SETA)
Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA)
National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS)
National Skills Fund (NSF)
National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)
Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA)
Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO)
Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority (SASSETA)
Sedibeng TVET College
Services Sector Education and Training Authority (SSETA)
South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)
Transport Education Training Authority (TETA)
Universities South Africa (USAf)
Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA)

Source: Southafrica.info (2020); National Government of South Africa (2020)

The following section explores the nature of South Africa's HES.

3.2.2.3 The current nature of South Africa's Higher Education Sector

Table 3-1 (refer to section 3.2.2.2) shows that the HES in South Africa comprises many HEIs. Therefore, prospective students are presented with a vast variety regarding their options in tertiary studies. This has resulted in an increase in competitiveness between the institutions within the HES (Degenaar, 2018:2; DHET, 2020). Furthermore, the production of research and development in the HES is another strong characteristic thereof (Tandlich *et al.*, 2018:10; DHET, 2020).

Previously, this chapter briefly highlighted the reality of transformation and internationalisation of the HES (refer to section 3.2.1.2). Such transformations are not only present at an international level, but also at national levels. South Africa is one nation in which transformation has played a major role over the past two-plus decades. However, although a great deal of transformation has

already taken place within the nation, the need to multiply such transformations remains (Webbstock & Fisher, 2016:40; Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017:786). Moreover, South Africa's population is growing quickly, and although it has the most developed economy on the African continent, the country is unfortunately still experiencing high volumes of unemployment and inequality. The inequality spreads through to education, as previously disadvantaged groups still struggle to gain access to higher education (Tandlich *et al.*, 2018:10; Mzangwa, 2019:1).

It seems that South Africa has been faced with the necessity to transform in order face certain challenges head on. These challenges are mainly the improvement of education and skill development, reducing unemployment and "achieving a more equitable society" (Tandlich *et al.*, 2018:12). Higher education and training have become a key aspect in transformation as it is believed that by improving on this, these challenges can be solved (Mzangwa, 2019:1).

Accordingly, HEIs within the sector had to, and in some cases still must, adapt to the forward moving transformations. These transformations "should include problem solving approaches to meet specific societal challenges in the South African context" (Tandlich *et al.*, 2018:16).

The NWU is one institution that has embraced this transformation and has attempted to guide the university into the new era of the South African HES (NWU, 2012b:1; NWU, 2020). The following section examines the nature of the NWU.

3.3 The North-West University

The discussion of the nature of the NWU is divided into two sections, namely (1) the history of the NWU, and (2) the past and present challenges affecting the university's corporate reputation. This discussion is important as it provides the study with substance in terms of understanding why an assessment of the university's corporate reputation is so crucial at present.

Moreover, while various sources have been used in this discussion, the framework thereof is based on the book by Pretorius (2017), *Forging Unity: The story of the North-West University's first ten years*. An additional primary contributing source for the discussion is a book by Prinsloo (2016), *North-West University (NWU): A merger and incorporation story, 2004-2014*.

3.3.1 The history of the NWU

The Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PU for CHE) was established in 1869. The university consisted of one school (Theology), five students and two lectures (NWU, 2018c). In 1966, the Vaal Triangle Campus, known today as the Vanderbijlpark Campus, was established as a satellite campus of the PU for CHE in response to a public demand for business and industry development in the Gauteng Province. Around this time, the Mafikeng community

raised funds to establish the University of Bophuthatswana, which later became known as the University of the North West (UNW), with campuses in Mmabto and Mankwe (Prinsloo, 2016:17; NWU, 2018a).

In 2004, the PU for CHE, a traditionally white university, and the UNW, a traditionally black university, along with a third party, the Sebokeng Campus of the Vista University, also a traditionally black university, merged to establish what is known today as the North-West University. This merger saw the closing of the UNW's Mankwe Campus (Kamsteeg, 2008:433; NWU, 2015a:3; Prinsloo, 2016:17). The merger took place because of the reshaping of South Africa's HES as implemented by the South African Government, headed by the then Minister of Education, Prof Kader Asmal (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2011:243-244; Pretorius, 2017:18). The merger of the NWU placed the university in a uniquely difficult situation in terms of demographics. Its constituting campuses were spread hundreds of kilometres away from one another. Moreover, the types of staff and students at each campus differed greatly in terms of socio-economic, financial, cultural and racial factors. These were factors that no other South African university had yet to deal with (Kamsteeg, 2011:54-55; Pretorius, 2017:20).

After the merger, the NWU became a "unitary multi-campus institution" controlled by the same "set of policies, systems and standards" and driven by the same "set of constitutionally based values", which intended to "promote unity in diversity, develop its own brand and identity, and a unique culture based on the unity and value system of the university" (NWU, 2015a:2).

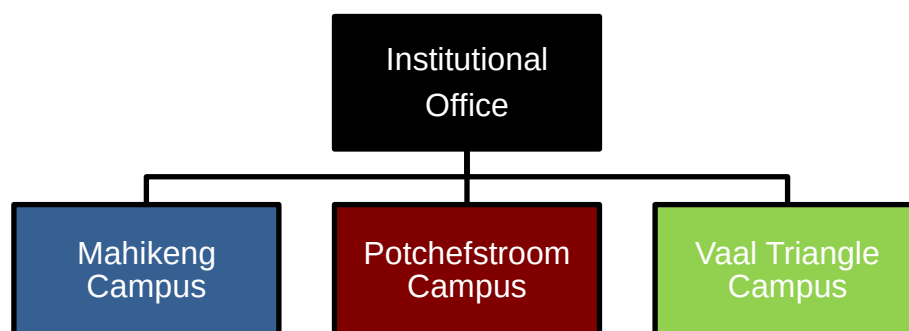
At this stage, the NWU assumed a divisional structure. This structure later experienced many criticisms as it was considered to be a federal model, which was thought to be unfitting within a university context. Negative perceptions among stakeholders ran high at the mention of the merger. It was thought that the merger would construct a university headed by the former PU for CHE – seen as the Potchefstroom Campus – and that the Mafikeng Campus would be swallowed up by the Potchefstroom Campus (Prinsloo, 2016:134). However, the university feels that it identified these perceptions as problematic and were able to efficiently counter these perceptions in its early stages. This resulted in all three campuses being able to function as "productive divisions of the NWU" (NWU, 2015a:4-15).

Although the merger is seen as being successful today, this success did not come without obstacles. As the first merger between historically black and historically white universities in South Africa, the merger symbolised the vision of the HES's restructuring, but just one year in and the university already started experiencing difficulties (Kamsteeg, 2011:55-56; Prinsloo, 2016:136-138). These difficulties included conflict between the university's council members. The targets of the conflict were Dr Theuns Eloff and Prof Dan Kgwadi, the then vice-chancellor of the NWU and

rector of the Mafikeng Campus, for the merger not going as smoothly as Prof Asmal had envisioned (Pretorius, 2017:21). Today, the merger has been said to be one of the most stable and successful mergers with regard to HEIs in South Africa. It symbolised reconciliation and national building a decade after South Africa's first democratic elections. It increased financial gain and student pass rates, research outputs began climbing and the NWU was brought up to par in terms of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Moreover, the merger brought about "changes in the values, mission, vision, governance and strategic and operational plans" of the university (NWU, 2018a).

At this time, the management structure of the NWU was a mother-brand that was divided into three campuses and eventually ran at an institutional level. Each of the three NWU campuses had their own management committees, culture, identity, and characteristics, and were responsible for their own activities in terms of teaching and learning, research and innovation, community engagement and support functions (refer to section 1.1.3). The NWU cleverly categorised themselves in this regard as being a "unitary multi-campus university" (NWU, 2012a:8; Prinsloo, 2016:60; Degenaar, 2018:5).

Specifically, each semi-autonomous campus was run by a rector, and the sum of the specific campuses' staff reported to its campus rector. Over-heading these three campuses was the Institutional Office, which serviced all three campuses and was headed by the Vice-Chancellor (VC). Although the Institutional Office was in Potchefstroom, it held the same affiliation with the Potchefstroom Campus as it did the Mahikeng and Vaal Triangle (Vanderbijlpark) Campuses (Kamsteeg, 2011:55; NWU, 2015a:4). In other words, the Institutional Office was separate from, and higher than all campuses, and responsible for more unitary based functions such as the university's strategy and processes. The NWU was therefore run according to a divisional structure depicted in Figure 3-1 hereunder.



Source: Author's own interpretation

Figure 3-1: The North-West University's previous divisional structure

After the establishment of the NWU in 2004, each constituent campus retained its “historical niche markets” that were “based on language and/or institutional culture”. These niche markets were furthermore “protected and served to strengthen the perception that the campuses served language or cultural niche markets” (NWU, 2015a:15). However, many staff members of the NWU, especially those based on the Mahikeng and Vaal Triangle (Vanderbijlpark) Campuses, felt that the Institutional Office was not as removed from the Potchefstroom Campus as it was from them. The term *Potchefication* came to light referring to how the Potchefstroom Campus benefitted from institutional services such as “finances, human resources and IT” that were housed in the Institutional Office (Pretorius, 2017:101). Staff from the Mahikeng and Vaal Triangle (Vanderbijlpark) Campuses also began to feel neglected and that these services, and later other processes such as “systems, policies and practices”, were run according to how the Potchefstroom Campus wanted it to be (Kamsteeg, 2011:57; Pretorius, 2017:142). The term later referred to anything new implemented by the Institutional Office on the three campuses as Mahikeng and Vaal Triangle (Vanderbijlpark) representatives felt that the Potchefstroom Campus and the Institutional Office were one and the same. The Potchefstroom counterparts, however, thought that their way of implementing things was in the best interest of the NWU, and did not realise that their input and implementation were so negatively received (Pretorius, 2017:142).

At the time of the establishment of the NWU, 15 faculties existed between its three campuses (NWU, 2012a:3; Prinsloo, 2016:245). Some faculties were ‘duplicated’ on more than one campus, either as an individual faculty or as part of another faculty. The number of faculties that were present on each campus was directly linked to the number of students that studied at the specific campus. That would explain why the Vaal Triangle (Vanderbijlpark) Campus, for example, which was the smallest of the three, only had two faculties compared to the eight faculties for the Potchefstroom Campus – the biggest of the three (NWU, 2015a:15; Council of Higher Education, 2017:5). Table 3-2, as derived from a report by the Council of Higher Education (2017:5), depicts these faculties at time in relation to their respective campus or in some cases, campuses.

Table 3-2: The fifteen faculties of the NWU prior to the restructuring process

Mafikeng Campus	Potchefstroom Campus	Vaal Triangle Campus
• Faculty of Agriculture, Science and Technology • Faculty of Commerce and Administration • Faculty of Education • Faculty of Human and Social Sciences • Faculty of Law	• Faculty of Arts • Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences • Faculty of Education Sciences • Faculty of Engineering • Faculty of Health Sciences • Faculty of Law • Faculty of Natural Sciences • Faculty of Theology	• Faculty of Economic Sciences and Information Technology • Faculty of Humanities

Source: Adapted from Council of Higher Education (2017:5)

Each faculty comprised various schools and research entities that were not cross-campus, but rather campus specific. This resulted in academic programmes being specific to campuses as well – qualifications were therefore not aligned on a unitary level (NWU, 2015a:15).

This was also evident in the support departments of the NWU, as the departments on each campus were not identical, were also campus-based and were therefore structured and functioned accordingly (NWU, 2015a:15; Council of Higher Education, 2017:5). In its profiles dating from 2012/2013 to 2016/2017, the NWU described the Mahikeng Campus as the second largest NWU campus, which enjoyed both national and international ambience in terms of its enrolled students (NWU, 2014:5; NWU, 2016a:6). The NWU also placed emphasis on the campus' "peri-urban profile that lends itself to a rural development focus in terms of academic offerings" (NWU, 2014:5). The Potchefstroom Campus was described as the largest and oldest of the three campuses, and as having the most enrolled students when compared to its sister campuses (NWU, 2012a:8). Moreover, these institutional profiles placed emphasis on the high amount of research outputs produced by the Potchefstroom Campus, as well as its unique approach to language in both academic and support activities and structures (NWU, 2014:5).

The Vanderbijlpark Campus was described as the smallest of the three campuses. The institutional profiles placed emphasis on its unique geographic setting, stating that it had a focus of "acting as a catalyst for economic growth" (NWU, 2014:5).

The 2004 merger also called for a visual re-brand of the university. The visual re-brand was necessary to represent the new institution to its stakeholders accordingly (Prinsloo, 2016:223). In accordance with the re-branding, the NWU developed a logo characterised by "inter-locking links"

that represented the “unity of the merged university” and reflected the three colours of the three NWU campuses (Figure 3-4). The logo seemed to be an adapted version of the PU for CHE’s logo, which saw two inter-locking links featuring the *PUK*¹³-related maroon and a shade of blue (Figure 3-3). This was, however, not the first logo of the PU for CHE. Figure 3-2 hereunder shows the four logos used by the institution before the establishment of its second campus to provide a clear, and full, history of the NWU (NWU, 2018c).

 Burgersdorp emblem Used prior to 1921.	 Toutious-kamp emblem Used as the official university emblem from 1923-1939. Corporate colours for the university were established along with this emblem. These colours were namely, maroon, silver, and gold.
 Hendriksz Used as the official university emblem from 1952-1992.	 From 1992 the official university emblem was a slight modification of its predecessor.

Source: NWU (2018c)

¹³ A name associated with the PU for CHE and NWU Potchefstroom Campus

Figure 3-2: The four logos of the PU for CHE



Source: NWU (2018b)

Figure 3-3: The PU for CHE logo after the establishment of its second campus

The new institutional logo of the merged university in 2004 simply added a third link to the PU for CHE's most recent logo – representing the newly added Mafikeng Campus – and alternated its colour pallet, although retaining the maroon.



Source: NWU (2010:9)

Figure 3-4: The NWU logo after the 2004 merger

The logo for the NWU depicted in Figure 3-4 consists of three colours, each of which was awarded to a specific campus. The maroon represented the Potchefstroom Campus, the green represented the Vanderbijlpark Campus, and the blue represented the Mafikeng Campus. This is a classic example of how each campus operated under the NWU umbrella, but remained unique and separate to an extent in representing different niche markets. Together, they formed the institutional NWU brand. However, this logo was not accepted by all stakeholders, as the Mahikeng Campus felt that the logo was a clear indication of the university's federal model, placing the Potchefstroom Campus at the top, sending the message that this campus was in charge (Kamsteeg, 2011:56).

In relation to its multi-campus identity, the use of the NWU logo was specified as campus logos, with the specific campus name prominently displayed in the related campus' colour underneath the NWU logo (see Figure 3-5). The Potchefstroom Campus, which was also well known as PUK or PUKKE, also made use of the 'nick name' as an additional logo form quite often (see Figure 3-

6). Often, the campus-specific logos were also used in conjunction with a 'swoosh' (see Figure 3-7) in the specific campus colour, which was done away with by mid-2017.



Source: NWU (2010:9)

Figure 3-5: A campus-specific logo, Potchefstroom logo used as example



Source: NWU (2010:9)

Figure 3-6: The frequently used PUK/PUKKE logo pertinent to the Potchefstroom Campus



Source: NWU (2010:9)

Figure 3-7: A campus-specific swoosh, Potchefstroom swoosh used as example

The transition from 2004 was not implemented without challenges, but by the end of the decade, the at-times 'rocky-road' seemed to have smoothed over. The NWU had become a well-established unitary university with campus-specific identities and reputations that drew in diverse students and staff. Stakeholders relative to each campus carried the NWU's holistic brand with

them, but associated more with their affiliated campus and the aspects by which it was characterised (Kamsteeg, 2011:59; NWU, 2015a:10).

The structure according to which the NWU was managed had a few advantages. These advantages, according to the NWU's *Report on Restructuring* (NWU, 2015a:16), included:

- (1) Local campus ownership, which allowed for operational functions to be handled at a campus level.
- (2) Each campus being responsible for its own financial issues and, in turn, having to "generate its own surpluses".
- (3) The NWU accommodated and marketed to specific language and cultural niche markets as each campus was unique in this way, although this was also seen as a risk as it could be interpreted as racial separation.
- (4) Each campus was free to develop its own strategy, although this did not contribute to the unity of the institution.
- (5) Each campus could foster a unique student life based on the culture of the students indigenous to the campus in question, which was also labelled as a risk factor.

As with any situation, advantages were most certainly accompanied by disadvantages. The NWU *Report on Restructuring* (NWU, 2015a:16) also identifies the disadvantages of this structure as follows:

- (1) The financial model, which demanded that each campus was to produce its own surplus, was not able to assist in the redress of inequality that stemmed from apartheid. This was especially disadvantageous as the previous section of this study saw that there was, and remains to be, a great need for such a redress at a national level (refer to section 3.2.2.1).
- (2) The financial model also created further inequality causing larger campuses to be able to afford more, while smaller campuses struggled on.
- (3) Duplications in various support structures were identified as being 'wasteful' and led to 'inconsistent' and 'unclear reporting lines' and 'delays in achieving alignment and/or coordination'.
- (4) The duplication of faculties and/or schools made academic alignment impossible.
- (5) Without alignment, professional accreditation of academic programmes became problematic.
- (6) Because every campus, and therefore its faculties, functioned autonomously, alignment of academic programmes did not progress causing the threat of de-accreditation to become a reality.

- (7) Inequality regarding departmental size was an issue of all three campuses.
- (8) The academic leaders of the university – the deans – were “far too removed from the Vice-Chancellor” in this structure and it was felt that they needed to play a larger role in the management structure of the NWU.
- (9) Niche markets specific to campuses posed a significant racial and political threat.

The disadvantages of this structure clearly outweighed the advantages. At the time of the assessment of the NWU’s structure in 2015, the university highlighted that issues pertaining to these disadvantages had yet to be dealt with (NWU, 2015a:17). Ignoring these disadvantages would cause the NWU to be unable to effectively cope with current and future challenges facing the university.

Taking the efficiency of the NWU management structure into consideration, it became clear that the need for change was inevitable. “It is clear that the purpose of building a unitary university with a more coherent and aligned product offering and a clearer and coherent brand will not be achieved with the current organisational structure and management model” (NWU, 2015a:17). This emphasised the need for the university to consider a restructure. By July 2014, the NWU had compiled a new strategy and structure for the university and by the end of November 2015, the NWU Council approved it. The new strategy was also in reaction to the call for transformation within the HES by the Council of Higher Education (NWU, 2016c:2).

The acceptance of the new strategy was subject to fine-tuning during its implementation and in compliance with legal matters (NWU, 2016c:3). The new strategy highlighted the need for further transformation within the forward-moving South African HES. In 2017’s *NWU Annual Performance and Strategic Plan*, the then Vice-Chancellor, Prof Dan Kgwadi, stated that “the strategy is aimed at creating a more unitary university transformed and committed to making a significant contribution to higher education in South Africa and further afield” (NWU, 2017:1).

From this development, it became clear that to further transform the national HES, the institutions that comprised it would have to transform. This strategy propelled the NWU into the development and implementation of three major processes, namely changing from a federal to a unitary model, which was followed by the process of restructuring the university, and then aligning the university over its three campuses (these processes are discussed in sections 3.3.2.1.1 to 3.3.2.1.3 to follow). This study argues that these changes have had an immense effect on the NWU’s corporate reputation. However, the changes brought about by the political call for transformation are not the only issues that have influenced the university’s corporate reputation. This study further identified challenges pertaining to financial implications, student protests, the 4th industrial

revolution and the Covid-19 pandemic as challenges that have, and continue to, affect the university's corporate reputation (refer to section 1.1.4).

This brings the study to its next point of analysis, namely the past and present challenges of the NWU affecting its corporate reputation.

3.3.2 Past and present challenges of the NWU affecting its corporate reputation

This section outlines the challenges that have had, and continue to have, an effect on the NWU's corporate reputation. This analysis is important to the context of the study as the study argues that because challenges such as these affect the university's corporate reputation, the corporate reputation of the university needs to be assessed (refer to section 1.1.4).

Chapter 2 identified seven trends that affect corporate reputation (refer to section 2.3.2). Each of these trends was also presented within the context of the NWU in Chapter 2 as (refer to section 2.3.2.8). However, four challenges stood out as having a great effect on the NWU's corporate reputation. Two of these were identified trends in Chapter 2, while the other two were challenges identified in Chapter 1 (refer to section 1.1.2).

The four challenges that have affected the NWU's corporate reputation over the past two decades were therefore identified by the study as (1) political issues and the call for transformation, (2) student protests and negative media coverage at the NWU, (3) the 4th industrial revolution, and (4) the Covid-19 pandemic (refer to section 1.1.4).

The following section explores the political issues and call for transformation at the NWU.

3.3.2.1 Political issues and the call for transformation

Section 3.3.1 ended with statements from the NWU's VC that highlighted the need for the NWU to further transform into a more unitary institution in response to the CHE's call for transformation in the HES. The NWU therefore created a new strategy that focused on the development and implementation of three major processes, namely changing from a federal to a unitary model, restructuring the university, and aligning the university (refer to section 3.3.1). To explore the political issues and the call for transformation at the NWU, this section therefore examines each of these processes.

The following section investigates the establishment of a unitary model at the NWU.

3.3.2.1.1 Establishing a unitary model

With the establishment of the NWU in 2004, the university was said to be governed according to a federal model (Kamsteeg, 2011:56; NWU, 2015a:15; Prinsloo, 2016:17). According to Pretorius (2017:85), a federal model within the university's context can be described as "a system that ensures that each campus retains its own character with general fields (such as the Arts) on all three campuses, and with specific centres of excellence that are not be duplicated among campuses." It is furthermore a "strongly centralised" approach, says Pretorius (2017:85). This model was simply explained as the NWU's divisional structure where every campus retained its own identity, was run autonomously for the most part, and reported to the central administration/governing point known as the institutional office (refer to section 3.3.1).

At the time of the merger, the federal model was probably favoured as it would allow for each campus to remain independent. The preservation of campus identities seemed to be important to the staff and students of each campus. However, it was later found that a federal model is one that causes a divisional structure, which meant that it was not suitable within a university context (NWU, 2015a:4; Pretorius, 2017:130).

For a university that consisted of "one Council, one Senate, one Vice-Chancellor and one set of values, policies and procedures" (Prinsloo, 2016:221), it is clear why a model that caused a three-way division was dubbed unsuitable (Pretorius, 2017:131). The perception that such a model was unfitting for the NWU became a hot topic a decade after the 2004 merger took place. The transformation of the HES in South Africa called for unity and the federal model was anything but unitary. This model was keeping the NWU in a box that did not allow the university to establish a unitary culture and brand (NWU, 2015a:15; Pretorius, 2017:130).

In 2014, the NWU was asked to provide their strategy for the next few years. This placed emphasis on the unfitting use of the federal model (NWU, 2016c:2; Pretorius, 2017:130). It was here where the NWU was pressured into coming up with a suitable alternative. Its answer was to implement a unitary model and leave the federal model in the past.

The unitary model was to do away with individual campus identities and autonomously governed campuses and to create an institution that would be characterised as one university with three campuses and eight aligned faculties. Under the unitary model, schools would report to faculties, and faculties and support departments to an institutional level. Here, deans (of faculties) and directors (of support services) would be integrated into university management (NWU, 2016c:2). From the investigation hereabove, the Table 3-3 lists the advantages and disadvantages of each model (federal and unitary), respectively. This puts the need for the change into prospective.

Table 3-3: The advantages and disadvantages of the federal model vs the unitary model

The advantages and disadvantages of the federal model vs the unitary model	
Federal Model	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Assisted in the completion of the 2004 merger between PU for CHE, UNW and Vista University by calming tensions surrounding an unwanted merger (Pretorius, 2017:130). Allowed for every campus to keep its culture and preserve its history (Pretorius, 2017:130). Campuses were able to function independently (Pretorius, 2017:130). Operational functions could be handled at a campus level (NWU, 2015a:16). Each campus being responsible for its own financial issues (NWU, 2015a:16). The university accommodated and marketed to specific language and cultural niche markets as each campus was unique in this way (NWU, 2015a:16). Each campus was free to develop their own strategy (NWU, 2015b:16). Each campus could foster a unique student life based on the culture of the majority of the niche of students indigenous to the campus in question (NWU, 2015a:16).	“Anti-transformational” (Pretorius, 2017:130). The specific niche marketing per campus was borderline racial separation (NWU, 2015a:16). Campus-specific strategies did not contribute to the unitary of the institution (NWU, 2015a:16). “Not politically correct” (Pretorius, 2017:131). Programme alignment is not possible (Pretorius, 2017:131). <i>Potchefication</i> of NWU policies, procedures structures and systems. Campuses that originated from historically black universities were financially worse off than campuses that originated from historically white universities (NWU, 2015a:16). Financial inequality further resulted due to bigger campuses having more students and therefore bringing in more money (NWU, 2015a:16). Duplications in various support structures (NWU 2015a:16). Professional accreditation of academic programmes was problematic (NWU, 2015a:17). Inequality regarding departmental size was an issue on all three campuses. (NWU, 2015a:17). Blurred reporting lines. The academic leaders – the deans – did not play a big enough role in the NWU’s management structure (NWU, 2015a:17).

	Campus-specific niche markets were a politic threat (NWU, 2015a:17).
Unitary model	
Advantages The NWU would be a single brand with a single identity and culture. Political threats would most likely be lower. Racial segmentation would be addressed. Alignment of academic programmes over all three campuses would be possible. Professional accreditation of programmes would become more easily attainable. Reporting lines would become clearer. Duplications of schools and faculties would be eliminated. Duplications of support services would be eliminated. Centralised administration. Financial and resource equity over all three campuses. Assisted in transforming the NWU in adherence to the transformation of the HES. Academic leaders of the NWU would be more active in the university management.	Disadvantages Potchefication. Tension between staff and students from various campuses. Resistance from staff and students.

For the success of the proposed unitary model, the structure of the university had to be reconsidered. This resulted in what has become known as the restructuring process, a massive change that affected each campus and the NWU's stakeholders.

3.3.2.1.2 The restructuring process

“We need to transform the NWU as a unitary institution of superior academic excellence, with a commitment to social justice”

- NWU Strategy Statement (NWU, 2016c:1).

In reaction to the proposed strategy statement of the NWU, Prof Dan Kgwadi, the VC of the NWU, highlighted the importance of achieving a greater unity for the NWU to create a specific university-based culture for NWU students, and to ensure equity and superior academic quality. Moreover, Kgwadi (2016:1) stated that he need not highlight the necessity for social justice to take place to stakeholders, as they should carry the knowledge of the eminent need thereof. Kgwadi (2016:1) further pointed out that South Africa’s history demands social justice, a need identified also by scholars such as Badat (2010:3) and Webbstock and Fisher (2016:18) (refer to section 3.2.2.1). Moreover, the statement continues to add that the NWU, as a reputable and influential HEI in South Africa, was in the position to be able to – and therefore should – play a significant role in attaining social justice (NWU, 2016c:1). From this statement, it was clear that this strategy of the NWU supported the overall political strategic transformation of the nation’s HES.

The restructuring process was defined as having the objective to move the NWU “towards becoming a more unitary institution with equity, resources and student experience” (Council on Higher Education, 2017:5). The NWU highlighted that the restructuring process was implemented to achieve a more successful managerial structure for the university (NWU, 2015a:19). A successful model for a university such as the NWU, characterised as a multi-campus institution that finds itself spread over a large geographic area, furthermore, needed to consist of facets advantageous to the university to be considered effective. The restructuring process comprised six steps. These steps are identified by the Council on Higher Education (2017:5) in their quality enhancement project’s institutional feedback report, as published in 2017. This report is therefore used as a framework to further discuss the restructuring process. These steps are listed in Table 3-4 hereunder.

Table 3-4: Steps of the restructuring process

Step:	What the steps entailed:
1	Reduce the number of faculties within the NWU.
2	Align support services across the unitary institution.
3	Transform teaching and learning at the NWU.
4	Position the NWU as the leader in multimodal education.
5	Revise the language policy of the NWU.
6	Rebrand the NWU.

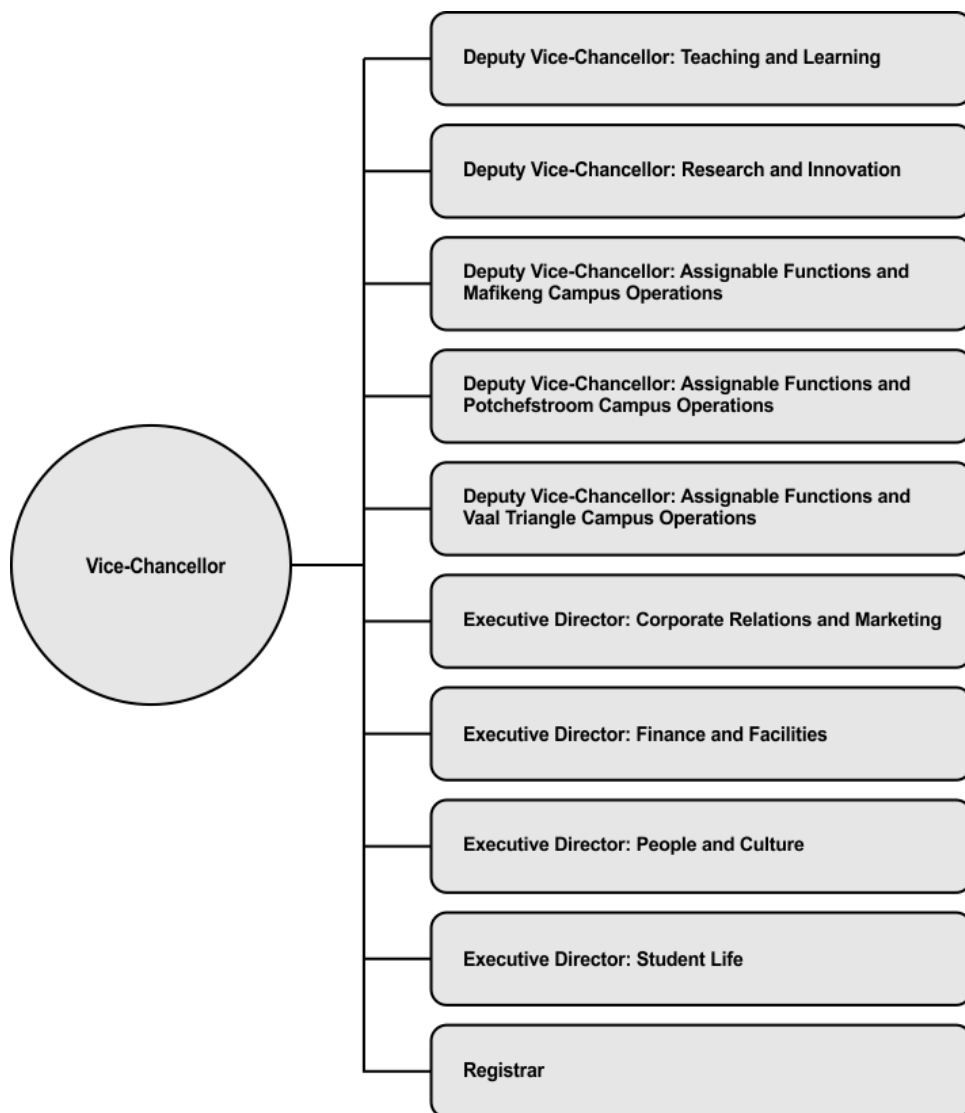
The first step of the restructuring was **to reduce the number of faculties within the NWU from 15 campus-based faculties to eight institutional faculties** (NWU, 2015a:24). As this chapter previously identified, the previous 15 campus-based faculties were defined as being situated on a specific campus, functioning independently of one another (refer to section 3.3.1). Some faculties were duplicated on more than one campus, either as an individual faculty or as part of another faculty. The aim of reduction to eight faculties was to establish institutional faculties. Institutional faculties are defined as being “multi-campus, with one executive Dean” (NWU, 2016c:2; Council on Higher Education, 2017:6). The institutional faculties therefore attempted to ensure alignment in terms of both structure and programmes across campuses. However, the NWU is sensible to admit that it is not possible to present every programme, from every faculty, on every campus. This point of the restructuring then tasked institutional faculties to identify specialities per campus, keeping in mind that collectively the sum of these areas equals the faculty. At the time of the Council of Higher Education’s report, this step had yet to be implemented. Today, the implementation has been completed and niche areas have been categorised according to campus placement. Moreover, the executive deans also have delegated deputy deans placed strategically by the faculty in question on each campus in accordance with these niche areas. The three deputy deans represent areas of (1) teaching and learning, (2) research and innovation, and (3) assigned functions. Each of the eight institutional NWU faculties follows this structure (NWU, 2022).

Secondly, the restructuring focused on **aligning support services across the unitary institution**. In addition to the alignment of faculties across the institutional borders, the restructuring called for revision of the structure of support services. The restructuring intended to combine not only campus-based departments with one another, but rather to combine multiple campus-based departments to create *new* departments with regard to support services. These departments were to be run at an institutional level (NWU, 2015a:16; Council of Higher Education, 2017:6). This step of the restructuring process has also since been completed.

After considering that each faculty and support service was strategically restructured, it makes sense that the NWU management structure from top to bottom would also have to be amended. The restructuring process did indeed employ a revision of the entire NWU management structure. For a firmer understanding thereof, it is beneficial to briefly revert to Figure 3-1 depicting the previous NWU structure. The previous NWU structure was a two-tier divisional structure characterised by each campus functioning autonomously for most part, and later answering to the NWU Institutional Office (refer to sections 1.1.3 and 3.3.1).

The management of the NWU is now structured as having the VC at the top of its managerial chain. The second chain comprises three deputy vice-chancellors (DVCs), each with their own portfolio, four executive directors which also each has a specific portfolio, and finally the registrar. Each of these are then naturally followed by directors encompassing portfolios of the branched-out support services and executive deans. Furthermore, deputy deans, subject chairs and senior labelled positions enter the chain. The structure then trickles down to bottom-line management and employees.

The first two chains of the NWU management structure are depicted hereunder in Figure 3-8.



Source: NWU (2019a)

Figure 3-8: NWU management structure

This chain is further linked to include Executive and Deputy Deans per faculty. The following image (Figure 3-9) taken from the NWU's Staff Intranet visually represents the whole NWU Management Structure as of 19 August 2022 (NWU, 2022):

MANAGEMENT

Management



Source: NWU (2022)

Figure 3-9: NWU Management Structure for 2022

The governance of the NWU also takes place at an institutional level as it is divided into various committees, namely the Executive Committee (EXCO), Audit Risk and Compliance Committee (ARCC), Finance Committee (consisting of a Tender Committee, Investments Committee and Assets Committee), People and Culture Employment Equity Committee (P&CEE), Transformation Oversight Committee (TOC), Student Oversight Committee (SOC), Honorary Awards Committee, Remuneration Committee (RemCom), Technology and Information Governance Committee (TIGov) and the Social and Ethics Committee (SEC) (NWU, 2019a).

Thirdly, the restructuring process was aimed at **bringing transformation to teaching and learning**. The Project for the Transformation of Teaching and Learning (TransfTL Project) makes use of the *Framework for Student Access, Retention, Attainment and Success* in conjunction with the university's institutional *Teaching and Learning Strategy* to address related issues (Council on Higher Education, 2017:6). The *Framework for Student Access, Retention, Attainment and Success* was developed by the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The framework attempts to pinpoint the key areas regarding HEIs being able to fulfil students' 'aspirations' in terms of "access, retention, attainment and progression" (Sanders & Higham, 2012:12). Moreover, the framework calls for success in each of the four aforementioned areas. The framework is most effective if implemented at an institutional level and adopted by all programmes and staff across the institution (HEA, 2015).

Fourthly, the restructuring process attempted **"to position the NWU as the leading provider in multimodal education"** in the country (Council on Higher Education, 2017). This stems from the continued success within the NWU's Open Distance Learning (ODL). The NWU defines ODL as "a delivery mode and teaching and learning approach that focuses on increased access to education and training where barriers caused by time, place and pace of learning are eliminated" (NWU, 2018d). With around 30 000 enrolled ODL students, the NWU is the second largest OLD provider in the country, after UNISA (Council on Higher Education, 2017; NWU, 2018d). The NWU ODL provides programmes in teaching, nursing, theology, information technology, policy practice as well as preparatory programmes (NWU, 2018d).

Fifthly, the restructuring process placed **focus on revision of the language policy of the NWU**. The use of language by the NWU is a challenging factor for the university (Council on Higher Education, 2017; Pretorius, 2017:190). The NWU chose to address the challenge by implementing a new language policy that would acknowledge the variety of languages spoken by NWU staff members and students at an institutional level (NWU, 2015a:57).

This is an issue that has sparked many a debate between NWU stakeholders. Stakeholders, especially students and parents, both current and prospective, have taken to social media

platforms to express their despondent views on the matter. The matter has become a big deal to NWU students. This can be proved in the use of social media as well as activities such as when student media, like the Potchefstroom Campus' newspaper, the *Wapad*, published the revision of the policy as a front-page article. The Student Campus Council (SCC) on the Potchefstroom Campus also spoke out about their dissatisfaction on social media and even nationally recognised media, such as the *Beeld* and *Rapport*, have had their fingers in the pie.

In a statement made by Prof Dan Kgwadi, the NWU highlights that the university's language policy, which is supposed to be intended to satisfy the diverse stakeholder groups' demands, seems 'contradictory', although adding that the need for revision comes from the Language Policy for Higher Education (LPHE). The LPHE, together with the new NWU Statute, calls for "a functioning multilingual environment" that "must be flexible and functional, and must redress language imbalances of the past and promote multilingualism, access, and integrate a sense of belonging" (Kgwadi, 2018). Once again, this change is driven by the force of transformation that has encapsulated the nation and its HES.

This statement was provided in response to public speculations on social media, especially where stakeholders complained that the language policy intended to do away with Afrikaans completely and provide only a monolingual culture in teaching and learning at the NWU. This outrage was sparked among students and parents who felt that the NWU Potchefstroom Campus is the only remaining Afrikaans HEI, and that it should be kept that way. Kgwadi (2018) highlighted that the NWU has always enjoyed a multilingual culture having English, Afrikaans, and Setswana as official NWU languages. Kgwadi (2018) therefore continued by stating that a monolingual culture is by no means on the cards for the university. The revised language policy would simply attempt to further broaden the multi-linguistic culture at the NWU by doing away with the current binary approach.

Further allegations from various stakeholder groups stated that the NWU would implement a new language policy without proper consultation from important NWU stakeholders. Kgwadi (2018) provided clarification on this additional allegation stating: "Management, like any other consulting structure, must explore all possibilities aimed at maximising student access and success in relation to the sustainability of the university as community and institution". Moreover, he further highlighted that the allegation does not comprehend that the NWU Council approved the policy "with the approval of the Senate" (Kgwadi, 2018). With this, the NWU attempted to clarify that the revision of the language policy was, and is, not a decision by NWU management alone. Rather, the university views it as a necessity that is a direct result of the need for transformation.

Currently, the NWU boasts a unique language policy that corresponds with their multilingual policy. While English and Afrikaans remain the university's instruction languages, this policy sees the NWU actively promoting Setswana and Sesotho as possible future languages of instruction. These languages are promoted and used by the NWU as their student market is predominately made up of these four language groups (NWU, 2018c:8). Furthermore, the NWU makes use of interpreting services in classes as well as all other means of communication where possible (NWU, 2021a).

The allegations against the NWU discussed hereabove most likely came to light after stakeholders expressed disappointment and anger on various media platforms regarding the final point of discussion of the restructuring process: the **visual rebranding of the NWU**.

The NWU decided that a visual rebrand of the university was necessary as the restructuring process created a unitary institution that should be reflected in such a manner. The use of the green, maroon and blue would have continued to separate each campus and therefore would not reflect the new unitary institution as it should. Management then conducted a consultation process in which the opinions of NWU staff and students were asked regarding the corporate colours of the university. In a video (which has since been removed) posted by the Potchefstroom Campus' then Student Representative Council (SRC) (now known as the Student Campus Council – SCC), Jacques Hugo the Potchefstroom SRC's chairman at the time, accused the NWU management of providing stakeholders with information on the process of the colour consultation, and then acting in a way that was contradictory to the disseminated information. This, according to Hugo (2017), caused a breach in trust between NWU students and the university's management. The SRC vowed that they will take the situation further in the new academic year of 2018. Many students and parents reacted to the video agreeing with Hugo, while others condemned the SRC's actions and highlighted the need for social transformation to move forward. Kgwadi (2017) attempted to "set the record straight" on 1 December 2017 in a statement posted on the NWU website.

In this statement, Kgwadi (2017) also condemns the accusations by, and actions of, Hugo. The statement further clarifies that the consultation process regarding the implementation of a new visual identity for the NWU was aimed at collecting the views of the various NWU stakeholders regarding the process. Moreover, these views were then "taken into consideration" by management. The statement continues that although there was an ample call for the old colours to be retained, that there was an equal positive reaction toward the implementation of the new colours, namely purple, grey, and teal. Management therefore decided to go ahead with the visual re-brand in terms of corporate colour of the NWU.

The restructuring process saw the implementation of the new corporate colours of the NWU by the end of 2017. The NWU retained its inter-linking logo that was now branded with a primary colour of purple and supported by grey and teal as secondary colours. Faculty colours were also altered and awarded to each of the eight NWU faculties to match, or compliment, the corporate colours of the university.

The placement of the NWU logo on official documentation changed from the right to the left-hand corner, and marketing materials incorporated a new triangular design element in the upper left-hand corner as opposed to the previous logo placement in the lower right-hand corner of such materials.

Figures 3.-10 to 3-12 and Table 3-4 depict the new visual rebrand of the NWU as transformed by the restructuring process.



Source: NWU (2019b:6)

Figure 3-10: New NWU logo (acronym)



Source: NWU (2019b:6)

Figure 3-11: New NWU logo



Source: NWU (2019b:6)

Figure 3-12: New NWU design element for marketing materials

Table 3-5: NWU faculty colours

Colour	Faculty
	Economic and Management Sciences
	Educational Sciences
	Engineering
	Health Sciences
	Law

	Natural and Agricultural Sciences
	Theology
	Humanities

Source: NWU (2019b:14)

For the NWU to be seen as a unitary institution, however, more than just restructuring was needed. The university also saw the need for alignment to take place over its three campuses. Accordingly, the university also undertook this venture. The following section addresses this process.

3.3.2.1.3 Aligning the NWU

Pretorius (2017:132) defines the alignment of the NWU as the “standardisation of core programmes across campuses”.

The need for alignment of academic programmes was already visible with the shift toward the unitary model. As this study has previously mentioned, academic alignment became a necessity for mainly two reasons: (1) the university had various wasteful duplications of schools and faculties over its three campuses; and (2) professional accreditation of academic programmes offered by the NWU were difficult to obtain (refer to section 3.3.2.1.1). The early stages of the transformation of the HES in South Africa also highlighted the need thereof. Prof Asmal was quoted speaking specifically about the transformation of the NWU in its early stages: “A BA programme on the Potchefstroom Campus should not be different from a BA programme on the Mahikeng Campus” (Pretorius, 2017:140). The NWU furthermore states that the alignment process was one of the main goals of its transformation process (NWU, 2012b:2).

This was a big task for the university to undertake. It required a great deal of work from faculty management, academics, and faculty advisors. Yearbooks had to be rewritten and combined and the final product had to be without fault, which took many revisions. The project took a toll on

many of those who were tasked with its completion. The alignment of the university's academic programmes had to be done as this was the final step in creating a truly unitary institution. It was needed to complete the merger (Pretorius, 2017:148; NWU, 2021b).

While the alignment within some faculties was quickly completed, the process was much slower in others. This was accredited to the nature of the faculties. Law, for example, is quite standardised as it was easier to align than the larger and more complex Economic and Management Sciences (Pretorius, 2017:148).

After the shift toward a unitary model, the implementation of the restructuring process and the current attempt at aligning the academic programmes of the NWU, the university feels successful enough to refer to itself as being a new and united institution within the HES. The following section touches on how the NWU now views itself.

3.3.2.1.4 The new NWU: A united institution

The NWU states that today, their core activities are those of teaching and learning, research and innovation and community engagement. All these take place on all three campuses situated in Potchefstroom, Mahikeng and Vanderbijlpark (NWU, 2019c:4)

The NWU refers to itself as “a united institution” by stating that it “is committed to functioning as a unitary, integrated multi-campus university that will enable equity, redress and globally competitive teaching and research across all campuses” (NWU, 2018c:3).

From the discussion regarding the NWU thus far, this study has found ample evidence to state that the NWU is an institution that, on a managerial level, fully supports transformation and social justice, and attempts to redress the inequalities experienced by the nation because of its (the nation's) past. The NWU attempts to do so through the way in which it functions and reviews and aligns its strategy and structure when needed to achieve transformation and social justice.

The NWU is governed accordingly by a vision and mission, dream, strategy and purpose and values. All the aforementioned are now part of a unitary approach adopted by the institution and deployed throughout the NWU at every level.

The NWU describes each of these facets as follows:

(1) The spirit of the NWU

The NWU feels that the university's spirit is reflected by the actions of the university that allow their stakeholders the ability to “unlock their future” and achieve their dreams (NWU, 2018c:2)

(2) Dream

The NWU describes its dream as being: “an internationally recognised university in Africa, distinguished for engaged scholarship, social responsiveness and an ethic of care” (NWU, 2018c:3).

(3) Purpose

The NWU’s purpose is “to excel in innovative learning and teaching and cutting-edge research, thereby benefitting society through knowledge” (NWU, 2018c:3).

(4) Values

“NWU will foster engaged and caring staff and students and embed the following foundational values, based on the constitutional values of human dignity, equality and freedom: ethics in all endeavours, academic integrity, academic freedom and freedom of scientific research, responsibility, accountability, fairness and transparency, and embracing diversity” (NWU, 2018e).

Furthermore, the NWU characterises themselves by placing emphasis on the following activities implemented by the university:

- (1) Ensuring appropriate gender and race-based composition of both staff and students (NWU, 2018c:6).
- (2) Empowerment of previously disadvantaged groups by ensuring members of these groups are well represented in the university’s staff make-up and within university management (NWU, 2018c:6).
- (3) Ensuring active and quality research outputs by increasing research capacity and recruiting postgraduate students (NWU, 2018c:7).
- (4) Implementing a language policy that is inclusive of all staff and students (NWU, 2018c:8).
- (5) Providing quality teaching-learning in both contact and distance learning characterised by choice and flexibility (NWU, 2018c:9-10).
- (6) Ensuring that programmes offered by the university address the need for critical and scarce skills in South Africa (NWU, 2018c:10).
- (7) Ensuring active partaking in internationalisation of the HES (NWU, 2018c:15).
- (8) Initiating and partaking in community-based projects/activities (NWU, 2018c:16).
- (9) Engaging with its surrounding communities to develop and enable those where needed (NWU, 2018c:17).
- (10) Undertaking various projects that partner the university with schools (NWU, 2018c:17).
- (11) Ensuring a going green initiative (NWU, 2018c:18); and
- (12) Researching innovative activities for future implementation (NWU, 2018c:19).

The following section examines the second challenge that has affected the university's corporate reputation, namely student protests and negative media coverage of the NWU.

3.3.2.2 Student protests and negative media coverage of the NWU

The South African HES has been afflicted by various student protests of over past decade. These protests range from issues surrounding language policies, the *#FeesMustFall* movement, issues surrounding apartheid culture and memorabilia on university campuses and most recently, the failure of NSFAS to pay student fees on time (Badat, 2015:71-72; Postma, 2016:1-2). As these issues have affected the HES, the NWU has also been affected.

The issues regarding language policies at the NWU were previously addressed as part of the NWU's restructuring process (refer to section 3.3.2.1.2). Here, it was stated that many stakeholders, especially students, were unhappy at the mere mention of transformation in terms of the university's language policy. This led to out-cries from students and negative perceptions of the NWU were shared among students and parents on social media. Fuel was added to the fire when the NWU Potchefstroom Campus' SRC chairman posted a video on YouTube condemning the planning and implementation of the policy, suggesting that it did not meet the desires of the NWU's stakeholders (refer to section 3.3.2.1.2).

The *#FeesMustFall* movement of 2015/2016 was started by students unhappy with the annual increase of university tuition fees, as many students felt that the increase was making it more and more difficult for the youth of the country to be able to afford going to, and finishing, university. The protests affected universities across the nation, and although at times peaceful, the protests did turn violent in some cases (Naicker, 2016:54; Langa, 2017:6). The NWU suffered from this movement after its main building on its Mahikeng Campus, the Administration Building, was burnt down during these protests. These actions of students suggest that way in which the NWU therefore handled reputational risk and crisis management was not successful. When crisis management and reputational risk management are not effective, the corporate reputation of the NWU will suffer (refer to section 2.5.4.3).

Further protests were witnessed when statues on university campuses were destroyed after students felt that these statues of colonial figures were memorabilia of the nation's apartheid regime and should therefore be removed (Cornell & Kessi, 2017:1888). At the NWU, a stand-off between black and white students arose on the Potchefstroom Campus in 2015 when the call to remove a statue of an Afrikaans poet, Totius, from the campus was responded to by Afrikaans students forming a human wall around the statue to protect it. The group of students who made the call, predominately black students, stood close by and expressed their emotion through

struggle songs. It was later decided that the statue be removed and placed in the care of the Administrative Bureau of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA) in Potchefstroom (Quintal, 2015). The NWU was further highlighted in the media on occasions in which the university was criticised for its initiation practices that portrayed first years as Nazis, and a student drowning that was said to be because of an activity of initiation. In response, the NWU did away with traditional initiation practices, which angered stakeholders pertinent to the Potchefstroom Campus (Pretorius, 2017:176).

Most recently, in 2020, the NWU was again highlighted in the media after violent student protests at its Mahikeng and Vanderbijlpark Campuses in reaction to NSFAS fees not being paid. Students led to the closure of these campuses for a few days. The closure was enforced to protect staff, students, and university property (Motse, 2020; Sobuwa, 2020).

This study has noted on numerous occasions that the trend of the 4th industrial revolution has also had, and continues to have, an effect on the NWU's reputation (refer to sections 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.4, and 2.3.2). The proceeding section therefore recaps the discussion of the 4th industrial revolution.

3.3.2.3 The 4th industrial revolution and the NWU

The 4th industrial revolution was previously defined as being a technologically characterised revolution that embodies CPS, IoT, and cloud computing, technologies that integrate the virtual and physical worlds. It was furthermore determined that Industry 4.0 has brought with it a new culture of stakeholders, namely Millennials and Generation Z, who are changing the way in which organisations must interact with stakeholders (refer to section 2.3.2.2).

Section 2.3.2.8 further noted that the NWU has transformed itself in terms of the 4th industrial revolution by making use of the technologies such as online platforms (e.g. eFundi and Citrix), and social technologies (e.g. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn) to interact with stakeholders. Industry 4.0 relates closely to the dimensions of innovation, workplace, and products/services as identified by RepTrak™ (refer to section 2.6.1). It therefore stands to reason that Industry 4.0 has had, and will continue to have, an effect on the NWU's corporate reputation, even though the results thereof are not as dually documented as that of the restructuring process, for example.

The final and most recent trend identified by this study that has influenced the NWU's corporate reputation, is the Covid-19 pandemic. Again, as this trend has already been discussed by this study on various occasions (refer to sections 1.1.3, 1.1.4, 2.3.2.1 and 2.3.2.8), the proceeding section provides a recap of the trend.

3.3.2.4 The Covid-19 pandemic and the NWU

The HES was taken by surprise in 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic hit. The pandemic caused the sector and its constituent parties, including the NWU, to have to rapidly and abruptly reconsider the way that they reached their objectives (refer to sections 1.1.3 and 2.3.2.8).

In addition, staff were ordered to work from home, which, in its own, brought about many challenges for the NWU and its staff, including additional expenditure from staff's pockets for matters such as at-home workspaces, telephone costs, and internet costs as well as emotional factors such as home-schooling for many staff members (refer to section 2.3.2.8).

In terms of the NWU's corporate reputation being affected, some staff members have reported feeling unhappy and overworked since having started working from home. As the decrease in national Covid-19 levels came about, the NWU implemented stages in which staff were brought back to the physical workplace. As this process progressed while the National State of Disaster was still in place, NWU staff fell within one of three work situations, namely (1) working from the office fulltime, (2) working from home fulltime or as much as possible, or (3) following a hybrid approach where their hours were split between working from the office and from home. This also proved to be problematic as many staff members who were called back to the office felt that they could continue to work from home, or that it was unfair that their colleagues could continue to work from home. In addition, staff who worked from home for extended periods, reported feeling disconnected from the NWU and their colleagues, as well as having trouble switching off from work after hours. The final scenario, where staff followed a hybrid work model working from home for a certain percentage of the week, and from the office for the rest of the week, also provided negative feedback due to the inconvenience of having to lug their equipment between home and office and having to adapt between two different workspaces on a regular basis (refer to section 1.1.3). However, although the virus is still doing its rounds, South Africa's National State of Disaster has been terminated, and all sectors can therefore resume business as usual. All NWU staff are therefore required to be back at their physical workplace (refer to section 2.3.2.8)

The NWU had to quickly replan its teaching and learning strategy to move to a solely online method during the pandemic. The NWU had to ensure that all its students were geared to continue with online learning. This resulted in a large-scale survey among students and staff to be handled very quickly. The survey was to determine how ready students and staff were to go over to online learning and what the university had to do to ensure smooth sailing. The survey resulted in the NWU identifying that a large portion of their students and staff did not have internet at home, and some students did not even have smart devices to connect to the internet. This caused high-cost implications for the NWU that had to provide devices to students and internet

to staff and students (refer to section 2.3.2.8). The NWU Department of Information Technology also had their work cut out for them in negotiating with network suppliers for zero-rated NWU sites and platforms and in finding platforms that were suitable for the NWU to use. This all took time, and time caused frustration among some stakeholders.

Collectively, these factors, as birthed from the pandemic, have affected stakeholder perceptions of the NWU. However, as discussed, the pandemic was merely part of other trends and challenges that affected the corporate reputation of the NWU. The following section therefore provides a recap and timeline of these events.

3.3.2.5 A timeline of events affecting the NWU from the merger of 2004 until 2022

This section summarises the events that led to this study's argument that the NWU should assess its corporate reputation. The recap is derived from the discussions of Chapter 1 (refer to sections 1.1.1, 1, 1.1.2, 1.1.3 and 1.1.4) and that of hereabove. Starting from the oldest event, namely the start of Industry 4.0, and ending with the most recent event, namely the Covid-19 pandemic, the timeline of events that have affected the NWU's corporate reputation reads as follows:

The 4th industrial revolution emerged in the 19th century and started playing a major role in the HES by the start of the 20th century (refer to section 1.1.1). Thereafter, 2004 saw the next event that influenced the NWU's corporate reputation – the merger between the UNW and the PU for CHE (refer to section 3.3.1). This merger took a few years to completely pan out, and just after it had, the next event hit. At the start of 2014, the NWU was requested to provide a new strategy for the next decade in reaction to the call for transformation within the HES by the Council on Higher Education (NWU, 2016c:2; Pretorius, 2017:130). This request emphasised the requirement for a shift to a unitary model (Pretorius, 2017:130).

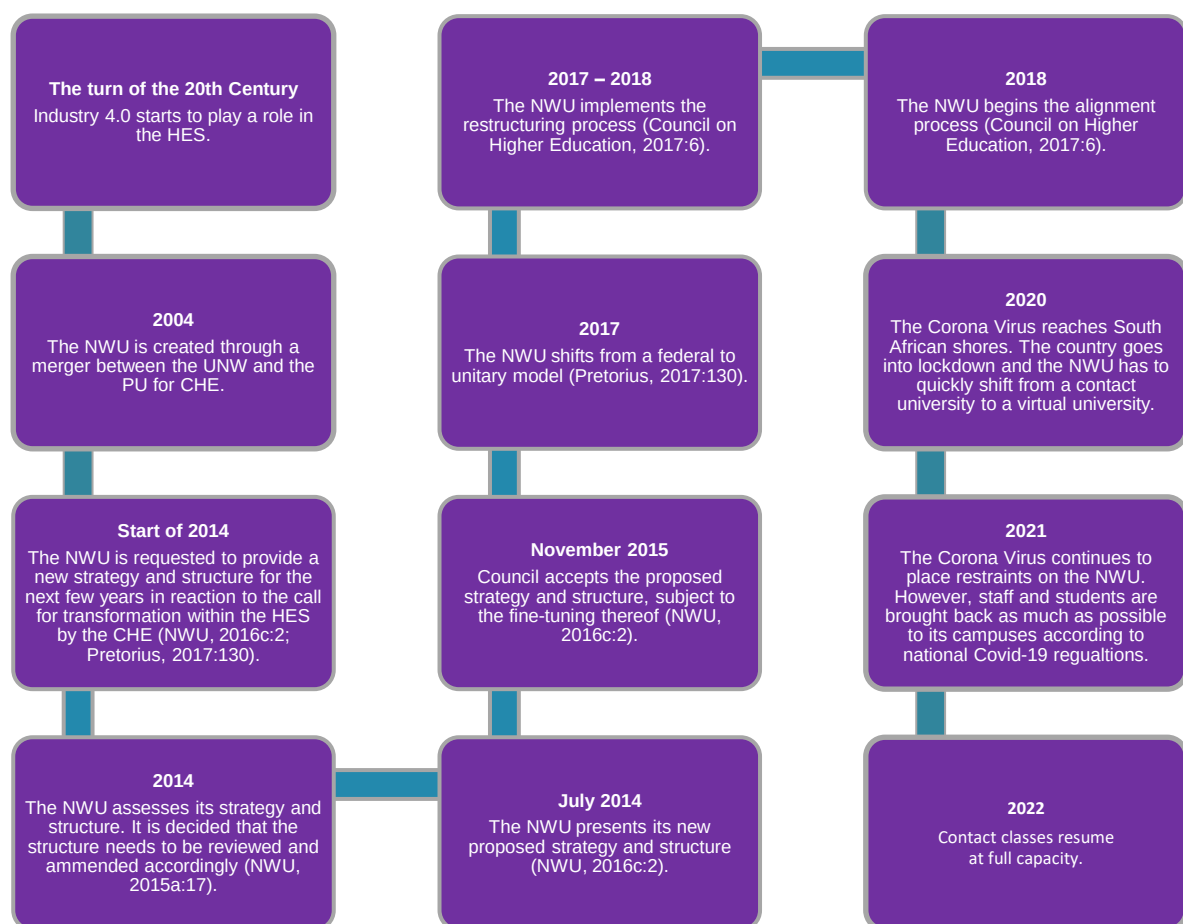
Moving forward, 2014 further saw the NWU assess its strategy and structure as requested. With this, it was decided that the structure of the NWU needed to be reviewed and amended accordingly (NWU, 2015a:17).

By July 2014, the NWU presented its new proposed strategy and structure (NWU, 2016c:2). This included three major changes, namely the shift to a unitary model, a restructuring of the university and an alignment process. In November 2015, the council adopted the proposed strategy and structure, subject to the fine-tuning thereof (NWU, 2016c:2). After the acceptance of the NWU's new proposed strategy and structure, 2017 saw the implementation thereof. This began with the shift to the unitary management model. From 2017 to 2018, the NWU also implemented the restructuring process. This included reducing the number of faculties at the NWU, alignment of support services across the unitary institution, transformation of teaching and learning, positioning

the NWU as the leader in multimodal education, revision of the university's language policy and the rebranding the NWU (Council on Higher Education, 2017:6).

In 2018, the NWU began to implement its alignment process, which was concluded by 2020. However, 2020 brought with it a new challenge, the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced a partial shutdown of the university and resulted in the traditionally contact university to move to a virtual institution. By the start of 2021, the university began calling some staff and students back to its campuses for work and practical classes, and by 2022 the NWU was back to functioning as a contact institution at full capacity.

The timeline depicted in Figure 3-13 below graphically represents these events.



Source: Researcher's own interpretation

Figure 3-13: Timeline of events that transformed the NWU

The proceeding section provides concluding remarks on this chapter.

3.4 Conclusion

This purpose of this chapter was to discuss the past and current context of the NWU. The chapter did not serve a purpose in terms of the study's general or specific research questions and objectives. Rather, it was merely a chapter that provided insight as to why the study argues that it is necessary for the NWU to assess its corporate reputation.

The chapter discussed the NWU by starting with a discussion regarding the international HES, which then descended to a discussion pertaining to the HES of South Africa, followed by a discussion of the NWU in terms of its history, its current situation and factors that are influencing its corporate reputation.

It was found that the international HES has changed dramatically over the past two decades and will continue to change over the next decade leading up until 2030, when further revisions will possibly be on the cards. Moreover, the HES in South Africa has been undergoing radical changes in its nature, governance and structure because of calls for transformation that have taken place since the late 1980s to as recently as the past 10 years. HEIs within the sector have had to transform to stay in sync with the sector's transformation. The NWU was among these institutions.

The establishment of the NWU was furthermore as a direct result of this transformation. The transformation of the NWU started when it merged from the PU for CHE, UNW and Vista University in 2004. This was a unique challenge that no other university in South Africa had yet to deal with. The merger was challenging due to the vast difference in geographical distance between campuses and the socio-economical, racial, cultural and language differences between students and staff of the various institutions/campuses. A decade after this merger, further transformation was called upon within the HES, which meant that once again, the NWU would have to further its transformation. This was achieved through three main processes: (1) shifting the NWU from being governed by a federal module to a unitary module, (2) restructuring the management and organisational structures of the NWU, and (3) aligning academic programmes of the NWU across its three campuses. Each step of the transformation of the NWU from its early years to its present day has been difficult. Tensions and concerns arouse between staff and students from all three campuses at the mere mention of change. The NWU has had to ensure that change is brought about in the correct manner to keep as many of their stakeholders as possible happy, while still adhering to the requisite of transformation. Issues such as *Potchefication* have yet to be properly dealt with. This, combined with the mistrust that developed between staff and students with management, has surely taken a toll on the university's corporate reputation. In addition, external factors such as student protests and negative media coverage,

the 4th industrial revolution and the Covid-19 pandemic have also had an effect on the university's corporate reputation. It is therefore advisable for the NWU to assess stakeholder perceptions to ensure the effective understanding and management of its corporate reputation.

This study proceeds to assess what the perceptions of NWU staff are to determine what the key reputation drivers of the NWU should be. The framework of the previous chapter, *literature review – defining, managing, and measuring corporate reputations*, was used to formulate the research design of the study. The research design, along with its comprising methods, are discussed in the next chapter, namely *Chapter 4: Research methodology*.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters focused on literature pertaining to corporate reputation in terms of its definition, trends, elements, management, measurement, and advantages, and then proceeded to give context to the study by looking at the past and current position of the North-West University (NWU) and the sector in which it functions. In terms of the latter, Chapter 3 argued that higher education institutions (HEIs) within the international and local higher education sector (HES) are not exempt from the need for effective management and measurement of their corporate reputation. This is due to the transformations and challenges that have shaped, and continue to shape, the HES such as governance, internationalisation, life-long learning and technological advances, megatrends, and the call for transformation within the sector (refer to sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2). Within a South African context, the call for transformation of the HES is the main challenge that the sector has had to face (refer to section 3.2.2).

Chapter 3 furthermore concluded that although many HEI's within a South African context have been affected by these transformations, the NWU was faced with a unique challenge when it came into existence in 2004, having to be the product of the combination of multiple institutions that differed greatly in terms of geographical, socio-economical, racial, cultural and language factors (refer to section 3.3.2.1). A further call for transformation within the HES placed additional strain on the NWU, which led to the university changing to a unitary model, restructuring itself and aligning its academic programmes (refer to sections 3.3.2.1.1 to 3.3.2.1.3). Moreover, external factors such as student protests, negative media coverage, Industry 4.0 and most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic have also affected the NWU (refer to section 3.3.2.4). Taking all the aforementioned into consideration, Chapter 3 concluded that these challenges have had an adverse effect on the NWU's corporate reputation (refer to section 3.3.2.5). Chapter 3 therefore added context to the study in terms of why an assessment of the NWU's corporate reputation is necessary.

Preceding this contextual exposition, Chapter 2 argued that corporate reputation is a valuable and core asset for any organisation and is closely related to the stakeholder relations of the organisation at hand (refer to section 2.3.1). Corporate reputation was found to be influenced by trends such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the 4th industrial revolution, virtual organisations, digital information, social technologies, social media parody accounts and online reputation management (refer to section 2.3.2). After providing a definition and a discussion pertaining to the trends that influence corporate reputation, Chapter 2 proceeded to show that the concept

comprises five elements, namely corporate identity, image, brand, personality and ethics, behaviour, and culture (refer to section 2.4). Furthermore, the literature review placed emphasis on the need for organisations to manage their corporate reputation by providing basic principles surrounding the concept as well as guidelines for comprehensive corporate reputation management (refer to section 2.5). Measurement of corporate reputation was also found to be essential (refer to section 2.6). Moreover, the chapter found that RepTrak™ is currently one of, if not the most, effective measurement instruments for corporate reputation and determined that this instrument would be used for this study (refer to section 2.6.1). The chapter concluded by providing a list of advantages that a strong corporate reputation could result in (refer to section 2.7). Moreover, after each of these discussions, Chapter 2 applied the theoretical points from each to the context of the NWU, showing that corporate reputation, the management, and measurement thereof are applicable in the case of the NWU. The findings in Chapter 2 furthermore answered the first specific research question posed by this study, namely: *What are the theoretical points of departure regarding corporate reputation management?* (refer to section 1.2.2). These findings, identified as concepts and constructs and tabled in the qualitative research design of this chapter (refer to section 4.3), also lay the foundation for the qualitative research design to answer the second specific research question posed by the study, namely: *What is the North-West University's approach to the university's current corporate reputation management?* (refer to section 1.2.2). After Chapter 2 identified that RepTrak™ would be used to assess the corporate reputation of the NWU in terms of staff members, the study indicated that RepTrak™ would be used answer the third and final specific research question posed by the study, namely: *What are the perceptions of NWU staff regarding the university's current corporate reputation management according to the RepTrak™ measurement instrument?* (refer to section 1.2.2). This chapter therefore takes the study to its next step by discussing the research approach and methods used to answer the second and third specific research questions.

The research approach comprises both qualitative and quantitative methods, creating a mixed-method approach for the study. These include a literature review as concluded in Chapter 2, which will not be repeated in this chapter, semi-structured interviews with management of the NWU's department for Corporate Relations and Marketing, and the use of RepTrak™ characterised by a quantitative electronic survey posed to all staff members at the NWU.

The chapter is divided into seven sections, namely: (1) a theoretical exposition pertaining to the mixed-method research approach, (2) the study's research design, (3) an outline of the specific research methods used in the study, in terms of how they were implemented and how the data attained was processed, (4) the problems and limitations experienced during the research

process, (5) a reflection on the validity and reliability of the overall study, (6) ethical considerations for the study, and (7) conclusions drawn from the chapter.

4.2 Mixed-method research approach

When choosing a research approach and accompanying methods for a research study, the topic of the study as well as the research aim, and research objectives and questions should be taken into consideration. Moreover, the approach and methods that are chosen should allow the researcher to “identify, collect and analyse” the data in a manner that allows for conclusions to be drawn (Basias & Pollalis, 2018:92). In section 1.5, the study proposed that its research approach was to make use of both a qualitative and quantitative approach. Through combining these two approaches, a mixed-method approach is created (Creswell, 2013:4; Zohrabi, 2013:254). Section 1.5 further stated that the qualitative and quantitative approaches utilized by the study would be implemented parallel to one another, creating a concurrent mixed-method approach.

The use of the mixed-method approach is favourable as the study will enjoy the benefits of both comprising approaches (Shekhar *et al.*, 2019:6). In the case where the use of both approaches are suitable to use within a study, making use of a combination of methods aids in allowing the data, and the interpretation thereof, to be more trustworthy and dependable (Queirós *et al.*, 2017:371). In addition, using just one approach sometimes causes limitations in terms of the yielded results, and by using a mixed method, these limitations are minimised (Berthod *et al.*, 2017:300).

4.2.1 Using a mixed-method approach to assess corporate reputation at the NWU

This study was able to make use of both a qualitative and quantitative approach. The qualitative approach was required to determine the NWU’s current approach to corporate reputation management. For this to be achieved, an investigation using a specific sample of respondents (the executive director and the three directors of NWU CRM) who understand what corporate reputation is and how it is managed and measured at the NWU was required. The quantitative approach was required to determine what the opinions of NWU staff regarding the university’s current corporate reputation were by using to RepTrak™.

By using a mixed-method approach, the study enjoyed the advantage of being able to (1) assess corporate reputation within the specific context of the NWU through the university’s stakeholder perceptions, (2) yield a feasible conclusion regarding corporate reputation at the NWU in terms of staff member perception, (3) provide a discussion of the perceptions of the NWU’s CRM management regarding current corporate reputation management at the university, and (4) provided statistical data.

4.2.2 Qualitative approach

Section 1.6.1 explained that a qualitative research approach is a research paradigm used to study “human interaction from an insider’s perspective” with the objective to describe and understand (Babbie & Mouton, 2012:53). The approach focuses on the ‘natural context’ within which the sample group finds itself, allowing for an understanding of the specific situation identified by the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017:275). The qualitative approach attempts to explain the concepts being studied by providing a descriptive understanding and in-depth observation of the topic (Basias & Pollalis, 2018:94; Shekhar *et al.*, 2019:6; Chang *et al.*, 2020:57).

Qualitative research can be done by applying a variety of approaches and methods. The three main approaches related to qualitative research are identified as the *Grounded Theory* approach, an *Ethnography* approach, and a *Phenomenology* approach (Alase, 2017:11). The difference between these approaches can be seen in the discipline, domain, field of investigation, and focus of the approach (Korstjens & Moser, 2017:276). The differences between these three approaches are: The Grounded Theory approach is mainly used within sociology, in the domain of a social setting, investigating “social structural processes”, while providing a theory of the social concept at hand. Ethnography is usually used in anthropology, in the domain of culture, probing inquiry into culture, with the focus on being able to understand the “meanings and behaviours” of a group. Phenomenology is more than often used in psychology or philosophy, in the domain of ‘lived experiences’, investigating these experiences of individuals within a specific context, while focusing on identifying how these individuals feel about these experiences to provide a descriptive explanation thereof (Korstjens & Moser, 2017:277).

Case studies, observations, in-depth interviews (either in narrative, structured or semi-structured form), conducting focus groups and content analysis are identified as methods of a qualitative research approach (Ahmed & Asraf, 2018:1504; Hennink *et al.*, 2020:10). Table 4-1 hereunder provides a definition for each of these methods.

Table 4-1: Defining qualitative research methods

Method	Definition
Case study	A method by which the researcher focuses on a single person, group of persons or an event that has occurred within a specific context to draw in-depth and descriptive deductions regarding the occurrence (Gaya <i>et al.</i> , 2016:532).
Narrative interview	An interview that allows the respondent to tell the researcher a story regarding the topic at hand. The researcher ordinarily starts the interview by asking an open-ended question, to which the respondent is asked to answer elaborately. The narrative of the interview is therefore controlled by the interviewee as they decide what information is provided and what information is not (Muylaert <i>et al.</i> , 2014:185; Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:631-632).
Structured interview	A formal interview consisting of predetermined close-ended questions that are asked exactly as they are documented in the research design, and which are not deviated from (McLoed, 2014:1-2).
Semi-structured interview	A less formal interview that is a conversation between the researcher and the interviewee (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019:1). The interview consists of open-ended questions which can be followed up or deviated from (Kallio <i>et al.</i> , 2016:6).
Focus groups	An informal interview by which the researcher interviews a group of people together. For a focus group, the researcher has prepared open-ended questions regarding a specific topic to guide the interview, but the respondents are also able to guide the topic of conversation (Tausch & Menold, 2016:1).
Content analysis	Analysing and referencing various documents and graphics pertaining to the study.

When using a qualitative research approach, the researcher does not make use of a statistical process as is the norm in a quantitative approach. Rather, the qualitative approach entails the in-depth study of the “experiences, behaviours and relations” of the sample’s respondents (Mmutle *et al.*, 2017:14; Basias & Pollalis, 2018:94). In addition, smaller samples are used in a qualitative approach compared to a quantitative approach (Chang *et al.*, 2020:57).

The advantages of a qualitative approach include (1) being able to investigate the concept of study within a specific nature or context, (2) the observation associated with the approach allows for a theory of this concept within its specific context to be generated, (3) it includes a literature review which – when done correctly – diminishes the chance of biased results, (4) it allows for the researcher to have individual contact with the respondents creating an in-depth understanding of the respondents views, (5) it has a “flexible research design”, (6) the researcher being able to better understand the complex nature of the concept being studied, and (7) it makes it possible for research to be done on concepts that are regarded as relatively new and that are not accompanied by abundant research (Basias & Pollalis, 2018:94; Chang *et al.*, 2020:57).

Chang *et al.* (2020:57) also point out that because researchers tend to provide an inadequate amount of what they refer to as ‘sufficient evidence’, studies that make use of a qualitative research approach may result in ‘subjective’, and less valid and reliable results. Further disadvantages of the of the approach include (1) researchers not taking ‘contextual sensitivities’ into account, (2) researchers placing too much focus on the respondent’s experiences, (3) a smaller sample cannot be used as a population generalisation, and (4) the processing of data is time consuming and challenging (Rahman, 2017:104).

4.2.2.1 Choosing a qualitative method to assess corporate reputation at the NWU

A qualitative research approach is usually chosen in the following instances: (1) when a researcher wants to describe the “what, how, when and/or where” of a concept; (2) if the concept is relatively new and requires more information; and (3) if the researcher feels that the concept requires more clarity within the study’s specific context (Basias & Pollalis, 2018:95). However, Chang *et al.* (2020:57) state that conducting a literature review should be part of the approach and not reason for the approach. Therefore, all three of these points can be used as rationale for the use of a qualitative research approach within this study. Point 1 can be used as a justification as the researcher described the ‘what’, ‘how’, and ‘when’ of corporate reputation and the management thereof with application on the NWU by means of a literature study. Point 2 is used in the sense that a literature review was part of the qualitative approach of this study. Moreover, point 3 is used as a justification for the use of a qualitative research approach in this study as, even though extensive literature pertaining to the concept of corporate reputation as well as some information regarding corporate reputation and the management thereof within a university context is available, there has been no study regarding corporate reputation and the management thereof in terms of staff member perspectives, specifically within the context of the NWU (refer to section 1.8).

When it comes to choosing a method, or methods, for a study's qualitative research approach, it is important for the researcher to note the nature and context of the study, and to choose a method that is in line with this nature and context (Alase, 2017:11). In terms of this study, a literature review was undertaken as the first qualitative method and completed with the completion of Chapter 2. However, the study made use of a second qualitative method, namely four semi-structured interviews with senior communication, stakeholder and marketing staff members at the NWU. Section 4.4.1 explores these semi-structured interviews in terms of their definition, process, schedule and analysing of results.

As previously mentioned, the study made use of a mixed-method approach (refer to sections 1.6 and 4.2). Therefore, in addition to a qualitative research approach, the study also makes use of a quantitative research approach. The proceeding section explores the quantitative approach within a similar framework as used for the qualitative approach's exposition.

4.2.3 Quantitative approach

A quantitative research approach was described as one that functions according to controlled levels and focuses on "the quantification of constructs" (Babbie & Mouton, 2012:49) (refer to section 1.6.2). The outcome of this approach is to produce generalised results characterised by numerical measurements (Elkatawneh, 2016:4; Shekhar *et al.*, 2019:6). Quantitative research asks, "how many/much and how often?" (Korstjens & Moser, 2017:275).

A quantitative approach is usually used in either of the following situations: (1) where there is a substantial amount of data that needs to be processed, or (2) where the research is of such a nature that it does not require in-depth and individual inquiry methods and can be done according to methods such as structured questionnaires characterised by closed-ended questions (Basias & Pollalis, 2018:93). Compared to qualitative research, when conducting quantitative research, the researcher will use a much larger sample group and focus on quantifying predetermined objectives of the study within this sample (Korstjens & Moser, 2017:276; Chang *et al.*, 2020:57). If these samples are large compared to the total population, they are deemed to be an appropriate representation of the entire population (Rahman, 2017:105; Queirós, *et al.*, 2017:370).

The key characteristic of a quantitative research approach is that its investigation of a concept involves attaining and processing numerical data. This data then serves as the researcher's observation (Antwi & Hamza, 2015:217-219; Basias & Pollalis, 2018:92). Analysing this data allows the researcher to draw conclusions for a broad base of questions pertaining to the study (Apuke, 2017:40). Moreover, this data analysis usually makes use of statistical-based software, such as SPSS (Rahman, 2017:106).

When considering which research method to use for a study, a researcher should always make their decision based on the consideration of which method will be able to yield credible results that can be used in the future (Alase, 2017:9). As with a qualitative approach, a quantitative research approach also consists of various methods. These include field experiments, simulation, surveys, correlation studies and multivariable analysis (Phakiti, 2015:29; Queirós *et al.*, 2017:380). Table 4-2 hereunder provides definitions for each of these methods.

Table 4-2: Defining quantitative research methods

Method	Definition
Field experiments	In a field experiment, the researcher identifies an environment and changes factors within the environment to measure the behaviours of the interviewees within the chosen environment. These interviewees ordinarily and preferably do not know that they are part of an experiment (Gneezy, 2017:140).
Simulation	A method that imitates a real-life scenario, experience, or system (Queirós <i>et al.</i> , 2017:381).
Surveys	A questionnaire consisting of predetermined and standardised questions designed to help researchers conclude what the target population thinks and knows, what they have done and are planning to do and what their attitudes or beliefs are toward the concepts being studied (Roopa & Rani, 2012:273-274).
Correlation studies	Correlation studies explore the possibility of a 'relationship' existing between "two or more variables" (Queirós <i>et al.</i> , 2017:381).
Multivariable analysis	The application of various methods to measure one concept, sometimes across various samples (Queirós <i>et al.</i> , 2017:382).

As with a qualitative research approach, the use of a quantitative research approach enjoys a few advantages. The quantitative approach results in numerical data and the deductions drawn therefrom cannot be biased or influenced by the 'feelings or opinions' of the researcher. Furthermore, when compared to a qualitative approach, the processing and comparison of the data in a quantitative approach are a much simpler and less time-consuming task that also allows for valuation indicators (Basias & Pollalis, 2018:92). However, the quantitative research approach also suffers a few disadvantages, such as (1) quantitative research cannot be used to describe

the feelings, opinions or experiences of respondents, (2) the results are usually very specific to an event, and (3) the researcher does not have a 'direct connection' with the respondents (Rahman, 2017:107).

In summary, a quantitative research approach can be defined as being characterised by using mathematical and/or statistical methods and/or software to analyse data that is collected from formal measurement instruments from a large sample group in an objective and systematic manner (Queirós *et al.*, 2017:370).

4.2.3.1 Choosing quantitative methods to investigate corporate reputation at the NWU

Section 4.2.3 hereabove stated that a quantitative approach is used when there is a substantial amount of data that needs to be processed, and/or where the research is of such a nature that it does not require in-depth and individual inquiry methods and can be done according to methods such as structured questionnaires characterised by closed-ended questions (Basias & Pollalis, 2018:93). In the case of assessing corporate reputation in terms of staff member perceptions at the NWU, both these instances are true and the use of a quantitative approach within the framework of this study is therefore justified.

The stakeholder group that the study identified, namely the staff of the NWU across all three its campuses, is a large population. Reaching the entire population by means of qualitative methods would not be possible. The researcher therefore concluded that by using a quantitative method, which will produce numerical data that can be analysed by means of statistical software such as AMOS and SPSS versions 25 (refer to section 1.6.2.2), will allow for an accurate result in a suitable timeframe. Moreover, although not every staff member who received the request to participate in the quantitative approach did participate, the sample that did take part was large enough to be used by the study, although not large enough to generalise the perceptions for the entire population (refer to 4.4.2.3). Finally, the study also made use of a formal measurement instrument, namely RepTrak™ (refer to section 2.6.1), which, according to Queirós *et al.* (2017:370), is a characteristic of a quantitative research approach (refer to section 4.2.2). RepTrak™ was furthermore used to create an online survey that was characterised by close-ended statements, which were rated by interviewees on a five-point Likert scale. The latter is discussed in more detail in section 4.4.2, while the following section first provides the research design for the study.

4.3 Research design

Section 4.2 stated that the study made use of a concurrent mixed-method approach, i.e. both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

In terms of the qualitative approach, the study made use of two methods, namely a literature review as concluded in Chapter 2, and the four semi-structured interviews with NWU CRM management. The literature review provided the study with concepts and constructs pertaining to corporate reputation, which formed the framework of the research design. This framework was used to aid in the planning and conduction of the semi-structured interviews. It also aided in creating the research design for the quantitative approach.

In terms of the quantitative approach, the study made use of RepTrak™ characterised by an online survey sent to the NWU's staff members via email in the NWU *Daily Comms* (refer to section 1.6.2.1).

Tables 4-3 and 4-4 hereunder provide a description of these methods by means of the specific research questions investigated, the specific guiding theoretical statements formed, the concepts identified, and the constructs measured by the study. Moreover, each table provides an indication of the method how each of the constructs was measured.

Table 4-3: Qualitative research design

Specific research questions	Specific guiding theoretical arguments	Identified concepts	Measured constructs	Method: semi-structured Interviews (number refers to question in schedule)
Specific research question 2: What is the North-West University's approach to the university's current corporate reputation management?	Argument 1: Corporate reputation is a corporate asset characterised by the perceptions of an organisation's stakeholders from their past and future interactions that they have had and will have with the organisation. When managed correctly, a good corporate reputation allows an organisation to be unique, adds competitive advantage and contributes to the long-term success of the organisation. Corporate reputation is influenced by trends, identified by this study as Covid-19, the 4 th industrial revolution, virtual organisations, digital information, social technologies, social media parody accounts and online reputation management. The NWU has been influenced by all these trends and has the potential to be influenced by any other new trends that arise. The NWU should therefore be constantly aware of such trends and the influence that they may have on its corporate reputation.	Defining and understanding corporate reputation	Corporate reputation	4
		Trends affecting corporate reputation	Covid-19	5, 6a, 7
			4 th industrial revolution	5, 6b, 7
			Virtual organisations	5, 6c, 7
			Digital information	5, 6d, 7
			Social technologies	5, 6e, 7

			Social media parody accounts	5, 6f, 7
			Online reputation management	5, 6g, 7
	<i>Argument 2:</i> Corporate reputation comprises five elements, namely corporate identity, corporate image, corporate brand, corporate personality and corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture. How each of these elements is defined, managed, and measured by an organisation contribute to the overall success of the organisation's corporate reputation. The NWU should therefore ensure that it is aware of the influences that these elements, their management, and measurement have on the university's corporate reputation, and manage and measure these elements accordingly.	Elements of corporate reputation	Corporate identity	8, 9a, 10a
			Corporate image	8, 9b, 10b
			Corporate brand	8, 9c, 10c
			Corporate personality	8, 9d, 10d
			Corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture	8, 9e, 10e
	<i>Argument 3:</i> Corporate reputation management is essential as corporate reputation is a key asset that aids in the success of an organisation. Corporate reputation should be managed by determining what the goals and objectives of the organisation are, and then aligning these goals and objectives with stakeholder perception. Stakeholder perceptions should furthermore also be managed, monitored, and measured when managing corporate reputation. When managing corporate reputation, organisations should ensure that they understand the concept of corporate reputation, its elements and that it requires a strategic plan. Corporate reputation management must be	Stakeholder management	Stakeholder relations	11, 12, 13
		Basic understanding and the guidelines of corporate reputation management	Responsibility	15
			Strategic goals	16

	proactively and continually managed throughout the life span of the organisation by top management and specialist communication staff. The NWU should follow a comprehensive reputation management strategy to build and maintain a strong corporate reputation to reach its objectives, gain competitive advantage within the HES, and aid in facing challenges, risks and/or crises.		Guidelines	17
			Crisis communication	18
			Risk management	18
	<i>Argument 4:</i> Corporate reputation measurement is the way in which an organisation determines what their stakeholders' perceptions of the organisation are. Measuring corporate reputation will allow an organisation to better understand their corporate reputation and how it needs to be managed to produce positive stakeholder perceptions. Organisations must furthermore identify an instrument that is best suited to their nature and that of the specific stakeholder groups whose perceptions are being assessed. The NWU should furthermore use the measurement instrument, RepTrak™, which measures corporate reputation according to four themes (trust, admiration, esteem and feeling) through seven dimensions, namely (1) products and services, (2) innovation, (3) workplace, (4) governance, (5) citizenship, (6) leadership, and (7) performance. By measuring its corporate reputation with RepTrak™, the NWU will be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses in its corporate reputation, which will allow the university to strategically plan how to better manage its corporate reputation in the future.	Basic understanding of corporate reputation measurement	Measurement of corporate reputation	19, 20
		RepTrak™	Products/services	21
			Innovation	22
			Workplace	23
			Governance	24
			Citizenship	25
			Leadership	26
			Performance	27

	General questions not associated with guiding arguments but pertinent to the specific research question.	Results of corporate reputation	Advantages of a strong corporate reputation	28
		South African HES	NWU within the sector	29

Table 4-4: Quantitative research design

Specific research questions	Specific guiding theoretical arguments	Concepts identified	Constructs measured	Method: RepTrak™: online survey (number indicates question in survey)
<i>Specific Research Question 3: What are the opinions of NWU staff regarding the university's current corporate reputation management according to the RepTrak™ measurement instrument?</i>	<i>Argument 4: Corporate reputation measurement is the way in which an organisation determines what their stakeholders' perceptions of the organisation are. Measuring corporate reputation will allow an organisation to better understand their corporate reputation and how it needs to be managed to produce positive stakeholder perceptions. Organisations must furthermore identify an instrument that is best suited to their nature and that of the specific stakeholder groups whose perceptions are being assessed. The NWU should furthermore use the measurement instrument, RepTrak™, which measures corporate reputation according to four themes (trust, admiration, esteem and feeling) through seven dimensions, namely (1) products and services, (2) innovation, (3) workplace, (4) governance, (5) citizenship, (6) leadership, and (7) performance. By measuring its corporate reputation with RepTrak™, the NWU will be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses in its corporate reputation, which will allow the university to strategically plan how to better manage its corporate reputation in the future.</i>	Emotional Themes	Trust	7
			Feeling	8
			Admire	9
			Esteem	10
		Products/services	High Quality	11
			Value for money	12
			Stands behind	13
			Meets customer needs	14
		Innovation	Innovative	15
			First to market	16

			Adapts quickly to change	17
		Workplace	Rewards employees fairly	18
			Employee well-being	19
			Offers equal opportunities	20
		Governance	Open and transparent	21
			Behaves ethically	22
			Fair in the way it does business	23
		Citizenship	Environmentally responsible	24
			Supports good causes	25
			Positive influence on society	26
		Leadership	Well organised	27

			Appealing leader	28
			Excellent management	29
			Clear vision for its future	30
		Performance	Profitable	31
			Better results than expected	32
			Strong growth prospects	33

Continuing the discussion of the methods used to answer the study's specific research questions, the following section explains each of these methods in more detail by providing information pertaining to how the methods were planned and implemented, and how the data attained from each method was processed.

4.4 Research methods

This study used a mixed-method approach, implementing both quantitative and qualitative methods (refer to Tables 4-3 and 4-4 in the preceding section). The implementation of these methods allowed the study's second and third specific research questions to be answered (*What is the North-West University's approach to the university's current corporate reputation management, and What are the opinions of NWU staff regarding the university's current corporate reputation management according to the RepTrak™ measurement instrument?*). These methods are semi-structured interviews and the online survey derived from the themes, dimensions and attributes of RepTrak™.

4.4.1 Qualitative methods

In terms of the qualitative method, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the management of the NWU's department for CRM to determine what the NWU's current approach to corporate reputation management at the time was. This section provides the rationale for the use of the semi-structured interviews, the interview schedule, the process of these interviews, and the way the data attained therefrom was processed.

4.4.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a method of a qualitative research approach characterised as being a conversation between a researcher and an interviewee that allows a researcher insight to the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of the interviewee. The conversation takes place in question-and-answer format. The questions are to be flexible and open-ended to allow the researcher to ask follow-up questions (Kallio *et al.*, 2016:6; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019:1).

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews conducted in this study was to determine what the NWU's current approach to corporate reputation management was – the second specific research question of the study, namely:

What is the North-West University's approach to the university's current corporate reputation management?

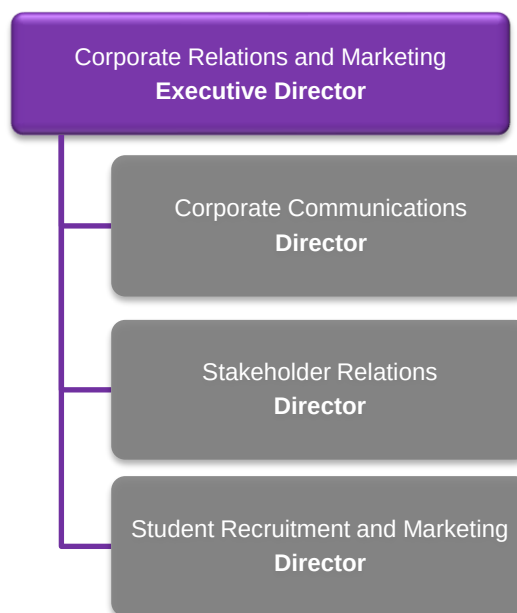
The study made use of a questionnaire constructed by the researcher. In total, the questionnaire consisted of 29 open-ended questions, some of which had the potential to be deviated from and led to further questions that were not part of the original set of questions, depending on the interviewee's answers. These questions are listed as the interview schedule in Table 4-5 in a proceeding section of this chapter (refer to section 4.4.1.3). The proceeding section, however, discusses the sample of the semi-structured interviews by identifying the respondents thereof.

4.4.1.2 Identifying the respondents

The four respondents of the semi-structured interviews were identified as the executive director of the NWU's department for CRM, and each of the three directors of the three sub-departments that fall under CRM, namely Corporate Communications, Stakeholder Relations, and Marketing and Student Recruitment.

These participants were chosen as CRM is the NWU department responsible for measuring and managing the university's reputation and the elements it consists of. Figure 4-1 hereunder depicts the respondents for the semi-structured interviews from CRM.

Interviews with participants were conducted as individual interviews.



Source: Adapted from NWU (2020b)

Figure 4-1: The directors of North-West University's department for Corporate Relations and Marketing

4.4.1.3 Interview schedule

The semi-structured interviews each consisted of 29 open-ended questions. These questions are listed in Table 4-5 hereunder.

Table 4-5: Interview schedule

Question number	Content of question	Concepts	Constructs measured
1	Please state your name and your position at the NWU.		
2	How long have you been employed at the NWU?		
3	How long have you fulfilled your current position at the NWU?		
4	In your professional opinion, how would you define the term corporate reputation?	Defining and understanding corporate reputation (refer to section 2.3)	Corporate reputation (refer to Chapter 2)
5	Corporate reputations are sometimes affected by trends that arise within the sectors in which organisations function. What trends do you think have arisen over the past 3 decades that have an effect on corporate reputation?	Trends affecting corporate reputation (refer to section 2.3.2)	Covid-19 (refer to section 2.3.2.1) 4th industrial revolution (refer to section 2.3.2.2) Virtual organisations (refer to section 2.3.2.3) Digital information (refer to section 2.3.2.4) Social technologies (refer to section 2.3.2.5) Social media parody accounts (refer to section 2.3.2.6) Online reputation management (refer to section 2.3.2.7)

6	What is your understanding, or definition, of each of the following trends?		
a	The Covid-19 pandemic		Covid-19 (refer to section 2.3.2.1)
b	The 4 th industrial revolution		4 th industrial revolution (refer to section 2.3.2.2)
c	Virtual organisations		Virtual organisations (refer to section 2.3.2.3)
d	Digital Information		Digital information (refer to section 2.3.2.4)
e	Social technologies		Social technologies (refer to section 2.3.2.5)
f	Social media parody accounts		Social media parody accounts (refer to section 2.3.2.6)
g	Online reputation management		Online reputation management (refer to section 2.3.2.7)
7	In what way have these trends, or any of the trends that you identified, affected the NWU?		Covid-19 (refer to section 2.3.2.8) 4 th industrial revolution (refer to section 2.3.2.8) Virtual organisations (refer to section 2.3.2.8) Digital information (refer to section 2.3.2.8) Social technologies (refer to section 2.3.2.8)

			Social media parody accounts (refer to section 2.3.2.8)
			Online reputation management (refer to section 2.3.2.8)
8	According to a review of academic literature, corporate reputation comprises various elements. In your professional opinion, what are the elements of corporate reputation? In other words, what comprises corporate reputation?	Elements of corporate reputation (refer to section 2.4)	Corporate identity (refer to section 2.4.1)
			Corporate image (refer to section 2.4.2)
			Corporate brand (refer to section 2.4.3)
			Corporate personality (refer to section 2.4.4)
			Corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture (refer to section 2.4.5)
9	What is your understanding, or definition of, each of the following elements of corporate reputation?		
a	Corporate identity		Corporate identity (refer to section 2.4.1.1)
b	Corporate image		Corporate image (refer to section 2.4.2.1)
c	Corporate brand		Corporate brand (refer to section 2.4.3.1)
d	Corporate personality		Corporate personality (refer to section 2.4.4.1)

e	Corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture		Corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture (refer to sections 2.4.5.1, 2.4.5.2, and 2.4.5.3)
10	How would you explain each of these elements within the context of the NWU?		
a	Corporate identity		Corporate identity (refer to section 2.4.6.1.1)
b	Corporate image		Corporate image (refer to section 2.4.6.2.1)
c	Corporate brand		Corporate brand (refer to section 2.4.6.3.1)
d	Corporate personality		Corporate personality (refer to section 2.4.6.4.1)
e	Corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture		Corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture (refer to section 2.4.6.5.1)
11	What stakeholder groups are identified by the NWU? (Who are all the stakeholders of the NWU?)	Stakeholder management (refer to sections 2.3.1.2 and 2.5.1)	Stakeholder relations (refer to sections 2.3.1.2 and 2.5.1)
12	Of these stakeholders, which group, or groups, are the NWU's most important stakeholders?		
13	How does the NWU manage stakeholder relations with each of these groups?		
14	What is your understanding or corporate reputation management?	Basic understanding and the guidelines of	Responsibility (refer to section 2.5.1)
			Strategic goals

		corporate reputation management (refer to section 2.5)	(refer to section 2.5.1)
			Guidelines (refer to section 2.5.1)
			Crisis communication (refer to section 2.5.1)
			Risk management (refer to section 2.5.1)
15	Who should be responsible for corporate reputation management?		Responsibility (refer to section 2.5.1)
16	How does corporate reputation management connect to aiding in the attainment of strategic goals?		Strategic goals (refer to section 2.5.1)
17	What are the guidelines that should be followed regarding corporate reputation management?	Basic understanding of corporate reputation measurement (refer to section 2.6)	Guidelines (refer to section 2.5.2)
18	How does corporate reputation management relate to crisis communication and reputational risk management?		Crisis communication Risk management (refer to section 2.5.3)
19	What is your understanding of corporate reputation measurement?		Measurement of corporate reputation (refer to section 2.6)
20	How often do you think corporate reputation measurement should take place?		
21	What are your overall perceptions of the NWU's products and services?	RepTrak™ (refer to section 2.6.1)	Products/services (refer to section 2.6.2.1)
22	What is your overall perception of the NWU's workplace?		Innovation (refer to section 2.6.2.1)
23	What is your overall perception of the NWU's innovation?		Workplace (refer to section 2.6.2.1)
24	What is your overall perception of the NWU's governance?		Governance (refer to section 2.6.2.1)

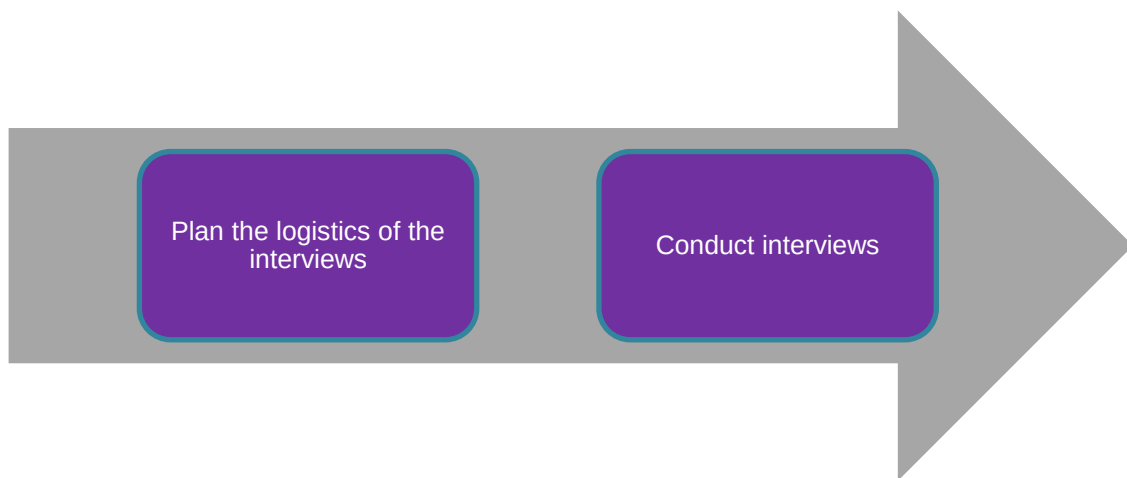
25	What is your overall perception of the NWU's citizenship? Referring to how good and ethical the NWU is and its corporate social responsibility activities.		Citizenship (refer to section 2.6.2.1)
26	What is your overall perception of the NWU's leadership?		Leadership (refer to section 2.6.2.1)
27	What is your overall perception of the NWU's financial performance?		Performance (refer to section 2.6.2.1)
28	What advantages do you think a strong corporate reputation results in?	Results of corporate reputation (refer to section 2.7)	Advantages of a strong corporate reputation (refer to section 2.7)
29	How do you feel about the NWU's corporate reputation in terms of how it fairs against that of the university's competitors?	South African HES (refer to Chapter 3)	NWU within the sector (refer to section 3.3)

The semi-structured interviews furthermore took place according to a process. This process is discussed in the proceeding section.

4.4.1.4 The interview processes

After identifying who the semi-structured interviews should be conducted with, and planning the schedule thereof, the process of the semi-structured interviews entailed the following steps: (1) planning of the logistics, and (2) conducting the interviews.

Figure 4-2 hereunder visually depicts these steps.



Source: Author's own interpretation.

Figure 4-2: The process of the semi-structured interviews

This section discusses each of these steps, starting with the logistics of the semi-structured interviews.

4.4.1.4.1 Logistics

In terms of logistical planning, the researcher initially planned to conduct each of the four semi-structured interviews in person, in each of the four respondent's offices. However, at the time that the semi-structured interviews took place, the Covid-19 pandemic had an active influence on the NWU's workplace. At the time, NWU employees had the option from working from the physical workplace or from home. Moreover, the NWU's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) department had put into place various Covid-19 regulations that were mandatory to be performed by any persons when on university property. These regulations included social distancing in remaining at least two metres apart from any other person, wearing of masks, regular sanitation of hands, especially when entering a new venue, ensuring that venues were Covid-compliant and

ensuring that only a specific number of persons were allowed in any given venue, depending on the venue's size. The researcher had to take these regulations into consideration when planning the logistics surrounding the semi-structured interviews and accept that four in-person interviews would more than likely not be able to take place. The researcher therefore had to adapt her plan by considering an online platform to conduct the interviews. As the NWU widely made use of Microsoft Teams (hereafter referred to as MS Teams) to conduct meetings and other forms of business during the pandemic, the researcher opted to make use thereof as a viable option for the conduction of the interviews.

The researcher then contacted the NWU CRM executive director's personal assistant via email and requested her assistance in setting up the interview dates, times and venues. Due to the NWU Gatekeeper approval's conditions, the researcher was not allowed to make direct contact with the respondents (refer to section 1.6.1.2). Therefore, the personal assistant of the executive director had to facilitate the meeting logistics. The personal assistant did so through an email to all respondents. This e-mail briefly explained the nature of the study and why they were chosen as respondents. The e-mail continued to explain that the researcher was aware of OHS regulations, and therefore requested respondents to choose if they would like an in-person interview (should their office space comply with OHS regulations), or if they would prefer a virtual interview conducted via MS Teams. The e-mail further provided suggested dates and times for each interview and requested that respondents confirm availability. If respondents accepted, the researcher was then allowed to contact them. If respondents opted for a virtual interview, the researcher created an MS Teams link and sent the links to the respondents by scheduling an official appointment on their electronic diaries. However, the researcher contracted Covid-19 herself during the interviews, and therefore was not allowed on any NWU campus during her isolation period. Two interviews therefore had to be conducted via MS Teams. The remaining two interviews were conducted in person.

Table 4-6 hereunder provides the particulars of each semi-structured interview as arranged via e-mail.

Table 4-6: Particulars of semi-structured interviews

Department	Respondent	Date of interview	Duration	Method of interview (in-person or virtual)	If in-person, venue where interview took place:
Corporate Relations and Marketing	Executive Director	23 May 2022	1 hour, 5 min	MS Teams	*Researcher had Covid-19 and the interview therefore had to be on MS Teams.
CRM: Corporate Communications	Director	12 May 2022	40 min	In person	NWU Potchefstroom Campus, Building C1, Director's Office
CRM: Stakeholder Relations	Director	23 May 2022	1 hour, 15 min	MS Teams	*Researcher had Covid-19 and the interview therefore had to be on MS Teams.
CRM: Marketing and Student Recruitment	Director	8 June 2022	1 hour	In person	NWU Potchefstroom Campus, Building F21, Director's Office

After confirming the availability and willingness of each respondent to participate as well as how the interviews would take place, the researcher proceeded with the next step of the interview process, namely conducting the interviews on the dates and times as agreed upon. The following section proceeds to discuss this step.

4.4.1.4.2 Conducting the interviews

In the case where respondents opted for an in-person interview, the next step to conducting the interview was to ensure that all OHS regulations were adhered to. Specifically, the researcher ensured that both parties were wearing masks, had sanitised their hands, did not shake hands, and were able to sit at least two meters apart. In the case where interviews took place virtually, this step was skipped.

The researcher then explained that she required the interviewees to sign an informed consent form (refer to annexure F) to use the data attained from the interviews within the framework of the study. The researcher continued to explain that the data would only be used within the context of

this study. In terms of confidentiality, the researcher stated that the respondents' names were not listed anywhere in the study, although their occupations were. However, the researcher assured each interviewee that by no means would their responses be able to be linked directly to them as the discussion of results would merely refer to "the interviewees" or "interviewee A, B, C, or D". The researcher further asked the interviewees if she could record the interview. If interviewees opted to have an in-person interview, the recording was done by means of an iPhone. If interviews were virtual, the recording was done with the function to do so in MS Teams. The researcher reiterated that by signing the consent form, the respondents agreed to all the above. On agreement thereof, the researcher started the recording.

Thereafter, the overview, purpose, and way forward of the study were explained to each respondent. The researcher explained that these interviews were part of the qualitative method used by the study and its aim was to answer a specific research question posed by the study, namely: *What is the NWU's current approach to corporate reputation management?* It was stated that to answer this question, the researcher completed a comprehensive literature review regarding corporate reputation, management, and measurement and from that, various concepts and constructs were identified. The researcher then explained that these concepts and constructs were used to create an interview schedule consisting of 29 open-ended questions that would be posed to each interviewee. The researcher stated that the interview's duration would more than likely not take longer than one hour, but that two hours had been scheduled to ensure that the interview did not run out of time.

The researcher thanked the interviewees for their time and willingness to contribute to the study and their interview commenced. The first four questions pertained to information such as the respondents name, occupation, and duration of employment with the NWU. This was only to be used by the researcher to identify each recording. Questions 5 to 29 focused on the concepts and constructs identified by Chapter 2 (refer to Table 4.5).

Although it is most important to actively listen to what the respondent is saying during a semi-structured interview, the researcher noted that it was also important to "observe social and nonverbal cues" of the interviewees. Non-verbal responses support the tone of the verbal responses. Such cues are identified as being "the form of voice, body language, gestures and intonation". Moreover, the researcher should constantly encourage the respondents during the interviews. This can be done through nods and smiles and persuading the respondent to elaborate on their responses as much as possible (McGrath *et al.*, 2018:1004; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019:6). Both suggestions were actively considered by the researcher during each interview. Asking follow-up questions not necessarily listed in the interview schedule, but as a

form of conversation in response to the respondents' answers, was also kept in mind during the interviews.

On conclusion of the interviews, the researcher again thanked the respondents for their time and offered to provide them with a copy of the final study on completion thereof. The recording was then stopped.

The next step in completing the study for the researcher was to process the data attained from the semi-structured interviews. The following section discusses how this took place.

4.4.1.5 Processing the data

The method used to process the data from these semi-structured interviews was a qualitative relational content analysis. A qualitative content analysis is a method in which text data is systematically and objectively organised and described (Elo *et al.*, 2014:1; Mayring, 2014:12-13). The qualitative content analysis was conducted according to three steps, namely (1) transcription, (2) repeated analysis and reflection, and (3) presentation of findings.

The first step of transcription entailed that the semi-structured interviews were transcribed to attain four text data-sets. The researcher transcribed each interview in Microsoft Word herself, using the verbatim method. These text transcriptions are not available in the annexures, but can be made available to examiners of the study on request. Verbatim is defined as a method of transcription by which the researcher transcribes the audio data, from the audio recordings taken during an interview, as a word-for-word text document (Greenwood *et al.*, 2017:90; McGrath *et al.*, 2018:1004). Although considered to be a tiresome and long process, verbatim transcriptions are vital when undertaking interviews within a qualitative research approach as it reduces the chance of the researcher missing something that may be of importance (Loubere, 2017:1-2). The word-for-word recoding of data via verbatim allows the researcher to thematically analyse and become accustomed to the data, aiding in attaining a greater understanding of the perspective of the respondents, which allows for sufficient analysis and conclusions (Greenwood *et al.*, 2017:90; Esfehiani & Walters, 2018:3167). All transcriptions took place within a week of the interviews to ensure that all verbal and non-verbal cues were not forgotten. These cues were also added to the transcriptions, as is the norm when making use of the verbatim method (Esfehiani & Walters, 2018:3165). The second step involved repeated analysis and reflection of the data-sets to draw conclusions. Finally, the third step presented the data where the researcher discussed, compared, found links between, and presented the categories and themes that were uncovered. These findings feature in the following chapter of the study, namely Chapter 5: *Corporate reputation management and measurement: Empirical findings*.

The following section explains the process, distribution and data-processing of the quantitative research method posed by the study.

4.4.2 Quantitative method

As a quantitative method, the study made use of RepTrak™ to answer the third specific research question posted by the study, namely:

What are the opinions of NWU staff regarding the university's current corporate reputation management according to the RepTrak™ measurement instrument?

RepTrak™ was used to analyse the perceptions of the NWUs corporate reputation in terms of the university's staff members' perspectives via an online survey. The proceeding section discusses this method.

4.4.2.1 Online survey: outline and sampling

Surveys are methods of collecting data pertaining to the attitudes and behaviours of large samples that are ordinarily processed through statistical calculations (Apuke, 2017:41). A survey is characterised as being short and less in depth when comparing qualitative methods such as interviews. The survey is in essence a list of questions or statements that are designed to help researchers conclude what the targeted audience thinks and knows, what they have done and are planning to do, and what their attitudes or beliefs are (Roopa & Rani, 2012:273-274).

In terms of using a survey to measure corporate reputation of the NWU in terms of staff, the study implemented a survey characterised by RepTrak™. The distribution thereof was done with the assistance of the NWU's internal communications practitioner at the department for CRM. Again, this was done as the NWU Gatekeeper Approval's prerequisite was that the researcher was not allowed to have direct contact with any NWU staff. The internal communications practitioner placed an invitation to take part in the study in the NWU *Daily Comms*. A staff list pulled from the NWU system by the internal communication practitioner for April and May of 2022 showed that 6 594 respondents could be identified by the study through this survey. However, it must be noted that not all recipients chose to take part in the survey. The final number of submissions received was 242. The study therefore interpreted results in terms of a sample and not a population. However, as this study was for a Master of Arts degree, using a sample and not the entire population was deemed acceptable by the research leader.

If staff members clicked on the invitation link, they were redirected to a Google Form. Here respondents noted a message from the researcher providing information relevant to this study. This message started with the researcher identifying herself as a master's student in

Communication Studies at the NWU under the supervision of Associate Professor Lida Holtzhausen, director of the NWU School of Communication. An estimated time of 10 to 15 minutes regarding how long the survey would take respondents to complete was also provided. Furthermore, a closing date of 31 May 2022 for submissions to the survey was specified. The message from the researcher also explained the background and need for the study. Thereafter, an undertaking by the researcher regarding the ethical considerations of the study was provided. This stated that the information submitted would remain anonymous and used solely for the purpose of the study to provide statistical data that would be interpreted by the researcher. However, the message also stated that the NWU would be provided with the holistic results of the study should they request it.

In closing, the ethical clause stated that the study was given ethics clearance by the faculty under which it falls' (NWU Faculty of Humanities) research and ethics committee (NWU Faculty of Humanities Research Innovation Ethics and Higher Degrees), as well as BASSREC (ethics no. NWU-00620-18-A7) and that the NWU Gatekeeper Committee and department for CRM granted permission for the study to take place. The message also stated that both the researcher and study leader had completed four certificates in ethics training with TRREE (Annexure C). This message is depicted in Table 4-7 and the informed consent is available as Annexure E.

Table 4-7: Message to NWU staff regarding the quantitative survey

Dear NWU staff member

As a master's student in Communication Studies at the North-West University I, Ashleigh Pieterse, am conducting research for my dissertation entitled: "Assessing key reputation drivers in terms of staff members at the North-West University," under the supervision of Prof Lida Holtzhausen (Director, NWU School of Communication Studies and supervisor for this MA study).

With this, I request that you please participate in the electronic survey below.

The survey will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Submissions for the survey will close at 17:00 on 31 May 2022.

Background and need for the study:

This study poses the argument that due to the transformation and other challenges that have taken place within the Higher Education Sector over the past decade, institutions such as the NWU have had to start placing more focus on their corporate reputation management strategy, especially when considering their corporate reputation management in terms of how their employees view the institution.

The survey's questions were derived using RepTrak (2005), a scientific measuring tool developed by the RepTrak Company (aka the Reputation Institute) that has been used worldwide to measure the corporate reputations of various companies. The survey has also been assessed by the NWU's Statistical Consultation Services to confirm validity and reliability.

This study attempts to determine how NWU staff perceive the university's key reputation drivers.

Take note: Ethical considerations

Please note that the survey does not request you to fill in any personal information. All submissions will therefore remain anonymous, and the survey will have no way of determining from whom any submission was provided. All submissions of this survey will furthermore be used only for the purpose of this study and processed as statistical data which will be interpreted in the findings thereof. The NWU's Department for Corporate Relations and Marketing will be provided with the holistic results of the study should it be requested.

This study has received ethics clearance from the NWU Faculty of Humanities Research Innovation Ethics and Higher Degrees, as well as BASSREC (ethics no. NWU-00620-18-A7). The researcher and supervisor have, in addition, completed four certificates in ethics training with TRREE.

Permission for the undertaking of this study was also granted by the Director of NWU Corporate Communications, Mr Louis Jacobs. In addition, the study was approved by the NWU Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (NWU RDGC) chaired by Prof Jeffrey Mphahlele (NWU RDGC reference no: NWU-GK-22-009).

Thank you in advance for taking the time to assist in this study.

Kind Regards

Ashleigh Pieterse

Staff therefore had the choice to fill in the survey. If they chose to agree to the informed consent, the survey moved to the next sections, namely the demographic information and the RepTrak™ survey applied to the NWU where they were able to read and rate each statement on a five-point Likert scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree at a time, place, and pace with which they felt comfortable. The first six questions of the survey were aimed at gathering demographic information such as which campus the interviewees work on, how long they have worked for the university and information such as their age and gender and language preference. Questions 7 through to 33 were statements as laid out in Tables 4-9 and 4-10 (depicted in section 4.4.2.3). Each of these statements are connected to either/or one of the four measurable themes, 23 attributes of RepTrak™'s seven dimensions. The final section of the survey provided interviewees with the opportunity to add any comments as they felt fit in a text field.

On submission, the survey thanked the interviewees for their feedback and their answers were captured.

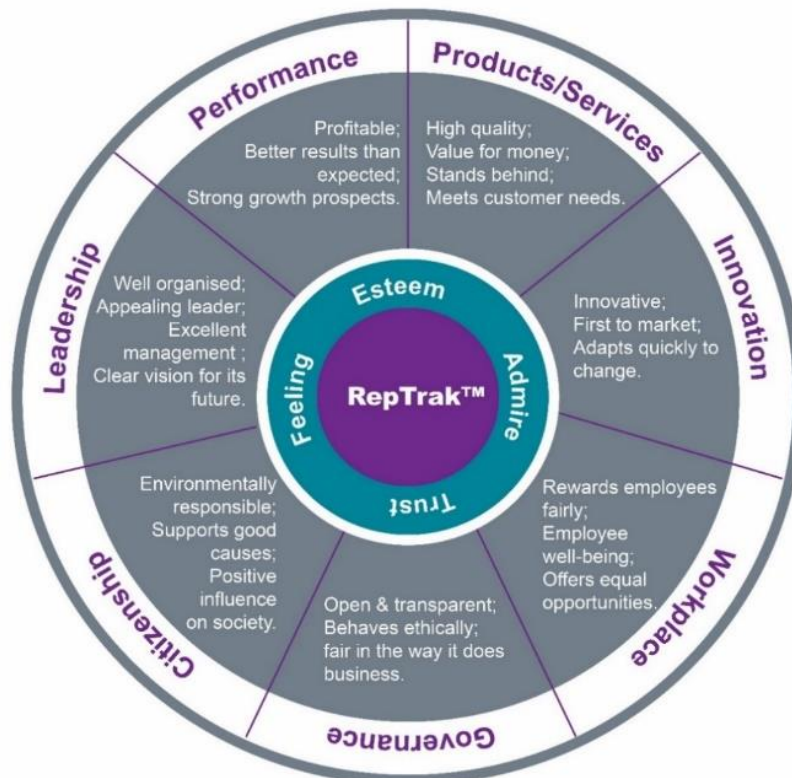
The survey was left open for a period of two months (start of April 2022 to end May 2022). Once the closing date passed, a consultant from the NWU Statistical Consultation Services (SCS) assisted in quantifying the responses to provide the researcher with statistical data to be used in the research results chapter of this study. The researcher also made use of the statistics captured by the Google Form (see section 1.6.2.1). This process is discussed in section 4.4.2.4 in more detail. The following section, however, discusses the measurement of RepTrak™.

4.4.2.2 Measurement Instrument: RepTrak™

This study previously discussed RepTrak™ as described in academic literature (refer to section 2.6.1).

To summarise, RepTrak™ is a corporate reputation measurement instrument that makes use of four major themes, namely trust, admiration, esteem and feeling. These themes are furthermore divided into seven dimensions, namely products and services, innovation, workplace, governance, citizenship, leadership, and performance, each of which are further characterised by three or four attributes (refer to section 2.6.1).

Derived from the Reputation Institute (2018), Figure 4-3 hereunder depicts the RepTrak™ system.



Source: Redesigned from Reputation Institute (2018)

Figure 4-3: RepTrak™

In practical use, each attribute is presented to respondents as a question or statement meant to collectively measure the dimension. This measurement explains “supportive behaviours that make up the reputation” of the organisation (Reputation Institute, 2018). Within the context of measuring NWU staff’s perspectives of the university’s corporate reputation, RepTrak™ was converted into a survey, comprising statements that were to be rated according to a five-point Likert scale. This survey was compiled by consulting articles by the Reputation Institute (2019) and researchers such as Ponzi *et al.* (2011) and Fombrun *et al.* (2015), where RepTrak™ was used as a corporate reputation measurement instrument by converting it into a survey.

The nature of the NWU was also taken into consideration in the creation of this survey in terms of each of the seven dimensions, as section 1.6.2.1 pointed out that RepTrak™ can easily be tweaked to depict specifics of an organisation. Section 2.6.2.1 furthermore identified specifics of each dimension within the context of the NWU, such as specifying the NWU’s products and services to be the academic programmes presented, research done and services such as SCS provided by the NWU. However, this study did not aim to determine the NWU staff’s perception of specific products, services, workplaces, projects, etc. Rather, the study aimed to determine an

overall perspective of the university's corporate reputation in terms of staff members. Therefore, the survey was not tweaked to include specific products/services, workplaces, etc. The survey's statements were simply tweaked to include the NWU, to measure the overall perceptions of the university's staff of each of RepTrak™'s seven dimensions at the NWU.

The design of the survey is shown in Tables 4-8 and 4-9 hereunder. Table 4-8 lists the four themes of RepTrak™ as statements, while Table 4-9 continues to divide the seven dimensions into their attributes, also listed as statements. In distribution, each statement was measured on a Likert-type scale using five points. These points were: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree. The final survey as distributed to staff (including demographic questions and all statements) is available as Annexure F.

Table 4-8: RepTrak™ themes for measuring concepts and constructs

Theme	Theme number	Statement used in electronic questionnaire to measure theme
Trust	T1	The North-West University (NWU) is an institution that I trust.
Feeling	T2	The North-West University (NWU) is an institution that I have a good feeling about.
Admire	T3	The North-West University (NWU) is an institution that I admire and respect.
Esteem	T4	The North-West University (NWU) has a good overall reputation.

Source: Ponzi *et al.* (2011:23)

Table 4-9: RepTrak™ attributes for measuring concepts and constructs

Dimension	Attribute number	Attribute	Statement used in electronic questionnaire to measure attribute
Products and services	1	High Quality	The North-West University (NWU) offers high quality products and services.
	2	Value for Money	The North-West University's (NWU's) products and services are of high value for money.
	3	Stands Behind	The North-West University (NWU) stands behind its products and services.

	4	Meets Customer Needs	The North-West University (NWU) meets the needs of its customers.
Innovation	5	Innovative	The North-West University (NWU) is innovative.
	6	First to Market	The North-West University (NWU) produces products and services first to the market.
	7	Adapts Quickly to Change	The North-West University (NWU) adapts quickly to change.
Workplace	8	Rewards Employees Fairly	The North-West University (NWU) rewards its employees fairly.
	9	Employee well- being	The North-West University (NWU) demonstrates concern for the well-being of its employees.
	10	Offers Equal Opportunities	The North-West University (NWU) offers equal opportunities to its employees.
Governance	11	Open and Transparent	The North-West University (NWU) is open and transparent in all communication.
	12	Behaves Ethically	The North-West University (NWU) behaves ethically.

	13	Fair in the way it does Business	The North-West University (NWU) is fair in the way it does business.
Citizenship	14	Environmentally Responsible	The North-West University (NWU) is environmentally responsible.
	15	Supports Good Causes	The North-West University (NWU) supports good causes.
	16	Positive Influence on Society	The North-West University (NWU) has a positive influence on society.
Leadership	17	Well Organised	The North-West University (NWU) is a well-organised institution.
	18	Appealing Leader	The North-West University's (NWU) management has an appealing leader.
	19	Excellent Management	The North-West University (NWU)'s management is excellent.
	20	Clear Vision for its future	The North-West University's (NWU) has a clear vision for the university's future.
Performance	21	Profitable	The North-west University (NWU) is profitable.

	22	Better Results than Expected	The North-West University (NWU) produces better financial results than expected.
	23	Strong Growth Prospects	The North-West University (NWU) shows strong prospects for growth.

Source: Fombrun *et al.* (2015:9)

In an appointment with the NWU SCS, the survey was discussed to identify whether it would be viable to carry out, and whether SCS would be able to capture and present the results in a quantitative format. The following section discusses how SCS ensured that this process was viable as well as the data-processing method of the survey.

4.4.2.3 Data-processing of the quantitative method

Once submissions for the online survey closed, the raw data was collected by SCS and processed according to statistical methods as this section will proceed to discuss. Statistics are ordinarily used to analyse data collected via a research study in four instances, namely (1) when there is a substantial amount of data that has been collected and needs to be processed, (2) previous research regarding the concept being investigated has not produced clear outcomes and a understanding of the concept, or there is not sufficient data pertaining to the concept, (3) it is possible for the collection of data to take place via methods such as close-ended questionnaires, and (4) the collected data is of such a nature that it can be presented via numerical methods (Basias & Pollalis, 2018:92). As the sample targeted by the online survey was so large, the fact that corporate reputation in terms of staff member perspective at the NWU had not yet been assessed, the allowance of the study to use an online survey, and the possibility for the data attained therefrom to be presented numerically, statistical data processing was therefore possible within the framework of this study.

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), software such as AMOS Version 27 and SPSS Version 27, nonparametric correlations, independent t-tests and one-way ANOVAS were used in the data-processing of the RepTrak™ characterised online e-mail surveys.

4.4.2.3.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics are classified as being the analysis of data in which the data is “summarised and described” through the discussion of the researcher's observations as well as the patterns identified within the data. This allows the researcher to be able to present the otherwise complicated data in a manner that is easily understandable (Conner & Johnson, 2017:52). Vetter (2017:1797) adds to this definition stating that descriptive statistics are a method of not only analysing, summarising, and describing data, but also ‘calculating’ it and then presenting the data in the form of tables, figures and/or as a written discussion. Descriptive statistics are mostly conducted through the measurement of the mean (the average), median (the middle) and mode

(that which is observed to be the most frequent factor within the data) of the data-set (Conner & Johnson, 2017:52).

SCS made use of SPSS Version 27 to provide descriptive statistics on factors describing the sample's demographic information. SPSS Version 27 is identified as being a computer-based software that is, in essence, used for statistical data analysis (Abraham *et al.*, 2019:15). The software assists in the data analysis process by allowing researchers to understand their data, analyse the trends that their data has produced and in doing so, allows the researcher to present the data in their findings (IBM, 2020b). The researcher made use of the graphs provided by Google Forms to describe how the sample perceived the themes, dimensions, and attributes of RepTrak™. These graphs produced statistics using percentages. The researcher converted the data into tables and presented a discussion for each table.

The data allowed the researcher to determine which themes, dimensions and attributes measured as good, average, or bad. From this, the researcher was able to make observations and comparisons of the data and present these findings as a written discussion, which is presented in the proceeding chapter.

4.4.2.3.2 Reliability

After accepting the raw data, SCS confirmed reliability of RepTrak™ by applying Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha is defined as a statistical method that tests the reliability of a measurement instrument used within a research study (Taber, 2017:1273). By measuring the 'reliability index' of such an instrument, Cronbach's alpha provides a measure between 0 and 1. An instrument that measures under 0.7 is regarded as an unreliable instrument, while anything above 0.7 is regarded as a reliable instrument (Chan & Idris, 2017:400). Moreover, Cronbach's alpha is regarded as the common method used by researchers to test the reliability of their chosen instrument (Taber, 2017:1274). The use of the method is especially popular in studies that seek to measure one 'construct' by use of 'multiple-item' instruments (Diedenhofen & Musch, 2016:51).

Using the mean obtained for RepTrak™ in total, the study calculated what the final RepTrak™ score of the NWU was out of 100 as RepTrak™ awards a corporate reputation score within this range to an organisation (refer to section 2.6.1). As previously indicated in section 2.6.1, Table 4-10 hereunder presents these scores and what they mean.

Table 4-10: RepTrak™ scores

Score	Ranking
0-39	Poor
40-59	Weak
60-69	Average
70-79	Strong
80+	Excellent

Source: Author's own interpretation of RepTrak™ 2022:3

4.4.2.3.3 Validity

CSC further alluded to the method also being determined valid in the initial consultation between the researcher and SCS for the same reason as why they saw it to be reliable. However, after accepting the data, SCS also confirmed validity of the method with a CFA in AMOS Version 27.

CFA is described as an analytical process used to test the validity of a measurement instrument that consists of four or more components (Hoyle, 2004:169) (refer to section 1.6.2.2). CFA furthermore allows the researcher to be able to determine whether the relationship between the measurable items and their concepts, and the distinction between these concepts, manifest in the collected data (Crede & Harms, 2018:18). CFA also assists the researcher in determining how the instrument's scoring should take place (Abraham *et al.*, 2019:15).

AMOS Version 27 is defined as computer software used within the field of statistics that makes use of processes such as CFA to assist with research analysis process through providing supportive data (IBM, 2020a). The software is further described as being “used to perform structural equation modelling” (Abraham *et al.*, 2019:15).

4.4.2.3.4 Biographical variables

SCS made use of SPSS Version 27 once more to accomplish another objective. This was to make use of nonparametric correlations, independent t-tests and one-way ANOVAs to determine the effect of biographical variables on RepTrak™.

- **Nonparametric correlations** are identified as statistics commonly used in research studies in the field of social sciences (Astivia & Zumbo, 2017:347). Zhang *et al.* (2016:440) define these correlations as being a “rank-based” and “size independent” coefficients usually used in large or complicated samples that allow a researcher to observe patterns within the data-set.

- **T-tests and ANOVAs** are defined as being parametric statistical methods that have the goal of testing a hypothesis (Surbhi, 2017). T-tests are used to determine to what extent groups within a sample differ from one another (Surbhi, 2020), while ANOVAs were identified as being statistical methods that test the difference between various (more than three) groups to determine whether the hypothesis put forth by the study can be accepted or whether it should be rejected (Glen, 2020).

All the processed data was analysed and used in the interpretation in the results chapter of this study (*Chapter 5: Corporate reputation management and measurement: Empirical findings*). This allowed the researcher to determine which of the seven dimensions measured high and which measured low. High measuring dimensions would be concluded as being managed well and positively influencing the NWU's reputation, while low measuring dimensions would be concluded as needing attention in terms of management and negatively influencing the NWU's reputation. The overall corporate reputation score for the NWU in terms of staff members was also calculated in this discussion.

4.5 Problems and limitations

The identified problems and limitations of the study are discussed in this section, starting with the problems.

4.5.1 Problems identified

The empirical research in this study occurred mostly without difficulty. Regarding the **qualitative research**, the main issues that arose during the research process of the semi-structured interviews were finding time slots for each interview to take place in close enough proximity to one another. This was due to the busy schedules of NWU CRM management. Interviews were to be done as close together as possible to increase the reliability of the study. In this way, the NWU remained in the same state of position at the time of all four interviews and interviewees' answers could not be influenced by any new issues surrounding the NWU that another respondent may not have been influenced by. Another issue surrounding the semi-structured interviews were the OHS regulations of the NWU because of the Covid-19 pandemic (refer to section 4.4.1.4.1). This resulted in longer in-person interviews as regulations had to be ensured before commencement of the interviews, and in other cases it resulted in in-person interviews not being possible. In these instances, virtual interviews had to take place.

Regarding the **quantitative research**, it was found that only a small sample of the NWU's staff population took part in the survey and the results thereof are therefore not 100% representative of the total population.

4.5.2 Limitations of the study

In terms of the limitations of the study, it should be noted that the study only measures the corporate reputation at the NWU and no other universities. The results and recommendations of the study can therefore only be used by the NWU. In addition, the study also measures the perceptions of staff, and the results can therefore not be applied to other stakeholder groups.

4.6 Reliability and validity of the overall study

It is important for researchers to consider the reliability and validity of a study where researchers construct and evaluate measurements (Babbie & Mouton, 2012:119). Ensuring that a study of this nature is reliable and viable, it needs to yield usable, accurate and trustworthy results (Noble & Smith, 2015:34).

Reliability can be explained as the assessment of a method used in a study to determine whether it would yield the same results when repeatedly applied to the same object (Babbie & Mouton, 2012:119; Noble & Smith, 2015:34). In terms of the qualitative method, the four interviewees were identified as NWU employees at a managerial level who work with the NWU's corporate reputation and the management and measurement thereof on a regular basis. The questions posed to interviewees were of such a nature that these interviewees would, in their professional capacity, have the knowledge to be able to answer them. Moreover, the quantitative method used in the study ensured reliability by asking all NWU staff over all three campuses to partake in the survey. Reliability for the quantitative method was furthermore confirmed through SCS's application of Cronbach's alpha.

Validity refers to the extent of integrity and application of empirical methods used in a study and furthermore to what extent the findings obtained are adequately reflective of the topic of investigation (Babbie & Mouton, 2012:119; Noble & Smith, 2015:34). In other words, did the instrument measure what it was supposed to? In terms of the qualitative method of this study, validity was ensured by ensuring the following: Each interviewee was asked the same set of pre-determined questions during their interview. All four interviews took place within a month of one another, ensuring that the current position of the NWU was the same at the time of all interviews to ensure that no unforeseen factors influenced any of the respondents' answers. Moreover, all

interviews took place in each of the respondent's offices or via MS Teams in areas where the respondents felt comfortable. This also ensured a private and quiet setting, allowing the respondent to answer truthfully and competently. The researcher was also able to record respondents' answers without any background interference. In addition, this qualitative method applied by the study namely, semi-structured interviews are suitable to be used within a study that aims to address "complex social-behavioural research questions" such as that of proposed study (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021:1316). In the quantitative method, namely the online survey characterised by RepTrak™, validity was ensured by sending the same questionnaire to all staff employed by the NWU at the time of distribution. As the survey was placed in the NWU *Daily Comms*, any new staff members in the time of April to May 2022 also received the survey. Respondents were able to answer the survey wherever they felt comfortable, allowing them to answer as truthfully and competently as possible. SCS also confirmed the validity thereof by use of a CFA in AMOS Version 25.

4.7 Ethical considerations

Implementing this study within the context of the NWU called for it to be done according to policies set out by the NWU. In response, the researcher ensured that permission was granted by the NWU CRM. The researcher also ensured that an application to the NWU Gatekeeper Committee was submitted, who then granted permission for the study to place as well.

Moreover, because the study asked staff to provide their personal opinions, the results of the RepTrak™ survey were strictly quantitative and no one person could be pin-pointed as being the author of a single submitted survey.

Ethics clearance for the study was also granted by the Ethics Committee of the NWU Faculty of Humanities and BASSREC (ethics no. NWU-00620-18-A7). This document is presented as annexure B. In addition, the researcher, and her supervisor, completed four certificates in ethics training.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research approach used in this study. Specifically, a mixed-method approach was used to generate usable feedback in the case of assessing the corporate reputation and the management thereof at the NWU.

In terms of a qualitative method, the chapter indicated that four semi-structured interviews with NWU CRM management were undertaken. These interviews were conducted according to an interview schedule (refer to Table 4-5) that was developed using the research design (refer to section 4.3). The research design was furthermore developed using the theoretical points of departure of corporate reputation and its management and measurement as identified by Chapter 2. The data attained from the semi-structured interviews was furthermore analysed with a qualitative content analysis (refer to section 4.4.1.5).

In terms of the quantitative method, the study made use of an online survey characterised and measured by RepTrak™. This survey was aimed at all NWU staff across all three campuses. The data attained from this method was processed by the SCS of the NWU's Potchefstroom Campus using statistical software such as SPSS Version 27 and AMOS Version 27. The data processing provided the researcher with descriptive statistics and biographical variables while also ensuring validity and reliability of the method through CFA and Cronbach's alpha.

Moreover, the chapter identified the Covid-19 pandemic as having an influence on the conduction of the semi-structured interviews. The chapter also stated that it had limitations and was ethically viable to carry out.

Finally, the chapter stated that the empirical findings of each method applied by the study would be presented in the proceeding chapters. The following chapter assesses and discusses the data attained from the qualitative and quantitative methods discussed in this chapter. The following chapter is then, *Chapter 5: Corporate reputation management and measurement: Empirical findings*.

CHAPTER 5: CORPORATE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT AND MEASUREMENT: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research methods utilised by this study. A mixed-method approach was adopted and, as such, the study made use of both qualitative and quantitative methods (refer to section 4.2.1). Chapter 4 continued to explain the difference between these two methods and indicated that, in terms of the qualitative approach, four semi-structured interviews with North-West University (NWU) Corporate Relations and Marketing (CRM) executive director and directors (hereafter referred to as NWU CRM management) were conducted, while the quantitative method consisted of an online RepTrak™ survey sent to all staff of the NWU. In this chapter, the results of the former are presented to answer the second specific research question posed by the study:

What is the North-West University's approach to the university's current corporate reputation management?

The four semi-structured interviews were facilitated using a list of open-ended questions (refer to Table 4.5) developed to provide an in-depth understanding by NWU CRM management regarding the predetermined constructs identified by the study (refer to Table 4.3). The semi-structured interviews were aimed at determining what the current approach to corporate reputation management at the NWU was at the time.

To discuss the results of the qualitative method adopted by the study, this chapter is divided into various sections. The first section focuses on the biographical profile of the interviewees. From the second section, this chapter begins to discuss the results of the constructs measured by the study by conferring how the interviewees defined and understood the term 'corporate reputation'. The third section discusses the interviewees' identification and understanding of the trends that surround corporate reputation. The fourth section provides a discussion of the interviewees' understanding of the six elements of corporate reputation (refer to section 2.4), discussing each as a sub-section. The fifth section discusses stakeholder relations as a construct of corporate reputation. The guidelines of corporate reputation are discussed in the seventh section, while the management thereof is discussed in the eighth section. The ninth section discusses the advantages of corporate reputation, and to end the discussion of the constructs measured by the study, the tenth section looks at the NWU within the South African HES. The eleventh section

then brings all the aforementioned together by providing general remarks regarding the NWU and its corporate reputation. Finally, the twelfth section provides a conclusion to the chapter.

Throughout this chapter, the study refers to the four interviewees of the semi-structured interviews as Interviewee A, B, C and D to keep their identities confidential. The first section that follows hereafter provides a biographical profile of these interviewees as stated in the previous paragraph.

5.2 Biographical profile of the NWU CRM's management

As stated in paragraph 5.1, four semi-structured interviews were conducted in this study. All interviewees held management positions in the NWU CRM, and all were all male. All interviewees have tertiary education qualifications in communication-related fields at different levels. The interviewees also differentiated from one another in terms of age and work experience.

To begin each interview, interviewees were asked to state their names and positions at the NWU (refer to Table 4.5). The answers to the former part of this question are not recorded in the study to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees for ethical reasons agreed upon between the researcher, the interviewees and the NWU Gatekeeper. Rather, this question was solely asked so that the researcher could identify each interviewee's interview recording. In terms of the latter part of the question, which is position, the study notes that all interviewees fulfil the role of executive director or director of a sub-department (namely Corporate Communication, Marketing and Student Recruitment, and Stakeholder Relations) of the NWU CRM. These positions were identified by the study for the semi-structured interviews as their key performance areas (KPAs) include corporate reputation and the management and measurement thereof (refer to sections 1.6.1.2 and 4.4.1.2). Again, to ensure anonymity, no correlation is made between the interviewees' positions and other aspects of the biographical profile.

The second and third questions posed by the interviews (refer to Table 4.5) were associated with the biographical information of the interviewees relating to their work experience at the NWU. Here, interviewees were asked how long they had worked at the NWU and, in this time, how long they had fulfilled their current position in NWU CRM management.

Table 5-1: Duration of interviewees' employment at the NWU and within CRM management

Interviewee	Total time employed at the NWU	Time employed as NWU CRM management
Interviewee A	14 years	14 years
Interviewee B	6 years	6 years
Interviewee C	9 years	5 years
Interviewee D	10 years	8 months (acting for 1 year prior)

Table 5.1 shows the duration that the interviewees had worked at the NWU and how long they had fulfilled their current position in this time. All interviewees had worked at the NWU for more than six years, two of whom had been employed by the university for give or take a decade, and one who had been at the NWU for 14 years. In terms of the time that interviewees had fulfilled their current positions in NWU CRM management, two interviewees (interviewees A and B) have been employed into their current positions as NWU CRM management since the start of their employment at the NWU; interviewee C worked at the NWU for four years before moving into the management position; while interviewee D was employed by the university for approximately eight and half years before obtaining the position. While interviewees C and D first fulfilled other positions at the NWU before taking on their current positions, the study notes that these interviewees' previous positions were also within the NWU CRM department.

From Table 5-1, we further note that, combined, the interviewees have 39 years of experience within the field of corporate relations and marketing within the context of the NWU, and between 26 and 27 years' experience within management within this same context. This combined experience and expertise should allow the NWU to be able to adequately manage corporate communication activities, such as corporate reputation (refer to section 2.1).

The interviewees who have been part of the NWU's workplace for more than six years (interviewees A, C and D) have seen the NWU go through its 2017 shift to a unitary institution and restructuring process (refer to section 3.3.2.1.1), while interviewee B was employed close the end of these processes. Furthermore, while interviewees B, C and D were placed into their management positions close the end of, or after the completion of these processes, interviewee

A obtained his management position nine years before these processes were implemented. Instances such as the latter could provide stability to the NWU's corporate reputation management when finding itself in situations such as the implementation of these processes, while the former might not.

Once the semi-structured interviews had obtained information to create a biographical profile, the researcher proceeded to measure the predetermined constructs identified by the study. The following section discusses the interviewees' understanding of corporate reputation.

5.3 Defining and understanding the term 'corporate reputation'

The first construct measured by the study was that of corporate reputation. Earlier, this study defined corporate reputation as how stakeholders of an organisation perceive an organisation based on their past, present, and future interactions with the organisation (refer to section 2.3.1). To measure the construct in the application of the qualitative method used by this study, interviewees were asked to describe the term in their professional opinion (refer to question 4 in Table 4.5). The question was open ended and allowed interviewees to answer as freely and broadly as they wished. While two interviewees provided a brief and concise definition, two others elaborated on the topic providing a more detailed discussion.

Table 5-2: Interviewees' definitions and understanding of corporate reputation

Interviewee	Answer
A	<i>"It is the public image of an institution, or the image that is formed by people whether it be staff, students or members of the public".</i>
B	<i>"...the perceptions, or the state, on how the public sees an organisation".</i>
C	<i>"Reputation is how stakeholders will perceive the North-West University. It is also informed by how they experience it".</i>
D	<i>"... any organisation, or any corporate, actually represents a community and that corporate relation, or reputation, is actually representative of that community's values and the way that they interact with the world".</i>

Two of the interviewees believed that corporate reputation is defined by the **perceptions** of stakeholders of an organisation, while one interviewee referred to it as the *'image'* that stakeholders have of an organisation, and the last as the extent to which the organisation is representative of the *'values'* of the community in which it functions.

Interviewees A and C applied their answers directly to the context of the NWU, with interviewee A naming key **stakeholders** of the university, specifically staff, students and members of the public, while interviewee C referred to the NWU specifically stating that corporate reputation is how stakeholders perceive the *'university'*. Interviewees B and D applied their answers within a theoretical context of the term.

Interviewee B added to his definition in terms of these perceptions stating that they (the perceptions that stakeholders have of an organisation) can be **positive, negative**, or neutral: *"It can be positive, it can be negative, or just neutral"*. In line with this, interviewee C also elaborated on his definition of corporate reputation stating that, by means of an NWU example, the actions of an organisation may very well influence how stakeholders feel about it as well as how they react: *"...what we're [the NWU] doing informs how people perceive our image or reputation of the university... with the Mahikeng Campus... almost every year there is a protest and we have tried to educate and bring this awareness to them that this affects the reputation of the university, in particular the campus... staff that want to work there, students that want to go there – they think about this kind of thing, so they might have a perception that, you know, the campus is not stable as compared to Potchefstroom or Vanderbijlpark Campus..."*. Interviewee C also indicated that situations such as this have a snowball effect that, in turn, begins to affect other activities of an organisation once the organisation's corporate reputation has been affected, again using the NWU as an example: *"...we deal with donors, and these kinds of things are very important to them"*. This statement by interviewee C suggests that donors may no longer want to do business with the university if the university were to have a bad reputation. Furthermore, interviewee C also included the term **'experience'** in his definition, stating that the perceptions that stakeholders have of an organisation are influenced by how these stakeholders experience the organisation: *"Those perceptions are formed by how they experience it [the organisation], how we compete... how they experience when they engage with us"*. Section 2.3.1 placed emphasis on the fact that a corporate reputation could be either negative or positive and that stakeholders will perceive an organisation in a certain way based on their past, present, and future interactions with the organisation. The emphasis placed on both the former and the latter resulted in both forming part of the definition of corporate reputation provided in the literature study (refer to the final

definition presented in section 2.3.1). Taking this into consideration, it should be noted that, except for interviewee B, no interviewees directly indicated that the perceptions that stakeholders have of an organisation can be positive or negative, although interviewee C did indirectly allude to this within his definition and example as described earlier. Interviewee A referred to *'how'* stakeholders see the organisation and interviewee D referred to the *'feedback'* of stakeholders. In addition, only two interviewees (interviewees C and D) indicated that the interactions, or *'experiences'*, between an organisation and its stakeholders have a direct effect on the corporate reputation of the organisation. While no interviewees directly stated that stakeholder perceptions are important when considering corporate reputation and that it had an effect on corporate reputation, each interviewee's answer showed that they at least understood that it was and that it did.

While interviewees A, B and C focused their definitions of corporate reputation in the field of corporate communications, interviewee D described his definition within the field of economics (*"I always think back to...business economics at school"*), stating that for an organisation to function successfully, the organisation must effectively manage its *capital, staff, natural resources* and *entrepreneurship*. Interviewee D then continued to state that an organisation and these *four principles* of the organisation *"function in a community"*. It is here where interviewee D then defined an organisation's corporate reputation as being representative of these communities' *values*.

While theoretically defining corporate reputation, section 2.3.1 touched on the importance of monitoring, measuring, and managing corporate reputation. Two interviewees briefly alluded to the management of corporate reputation in their definitions, namely interviewees C and D. Interviewee C stated that there should be a department within an organisation responsible for providing guidance to the organisation in terms of corporate reputation management: *"...Corporate Relations and Marketing division is responsible for managing, in fact we are facilitating... our role is to facilitate and provide guidance on how we [the university] should go about it..."*. Interviewee D alluded to corporate reputation management by stating that it has become more difficult to do in the modern era: *"It has become much more difficult with a lot more people having platforms, so it's not self-driven as much as in the past..."*. Neither of the remaining two interviewees mentioned corporate reputation management in their answer to this question specifically. In addition, only one interviewee alluded to the measurement of corporate reputation here. Interviewee D indicated that it is important for stakeholders to engage with an organisation and that organisations should be worried when they do not. He added that when stakeholders stop reacting to an organisation, that the organisation should then investigate the situation: *"... when people actually engage and try to keep you accountable...then your community is still*

buying in to you. It is when they become apathetic when you have to start worrying, and they don't give you feedback anymore, and you have to ask them what is happening?" Although these aspects were included in the discussion when defining the term in section 2.3.1, it should be noted that all interviewees did indicate knowledge of each aspect later in their interviews when these aspects were discussed specifically (refer to sections 5.7 and 5.8 that follow). Similarly, the fact that some interviewees did not provide insight into each or any of these aspects of corporate reputation in this part of the discussion could be attributed to how they understood this question that focused specifically on defining the concept.

Furthermore, the definition of corporate reputation provided by the study, as a conclusion to section 2.3.1, also indicated that corporate reputation is something that is developed over an extended period and that can, if managed correctly, provide various advantages for an organisation. None of the interviewees mentioned the aspects of time or advantages when answering this question. Again, however, all interviewees provided knowledge of the advantages of a good corporate reputation when asked about it directly (refer to section 5.9 that follows).

From the above discussion regarding the responses provided by interviewees when presented with the question *"In your professional opinion, how would you define the term corporate reputation?"*, it can be concluded that the understanding of the term of corporate reputation by the management of NWU CRM ranks from being quite comprehensive to at the least, accurate. Therefore, the understanding of the concept of corporate reputation in terms of NWU CRM management was sufficient as interviewees understood that the concept revolves around how stakeholders perceive an organisation and that, depending on the nature of these perceptions, they can affect the organisation at hand (cf. section 2.3.1). Moreover, the definitions provided by each interviewee were similar to one another. This is good for the NWU as the management team that heads corporate reputation at the university seem to be on the same page regarding what corporate reputation is.

Corporate reputations are furthermore affected by trends (refer to section 2.3.2). These trends were identified by the study as constructs that should be measured and discussed accordingly in the literature study. The proceeding section measures this construct in terms of the NWU CRM managements' understanding thereof.

5.4 Trends affecting corporate reputation

Section 2.3.2 identified seven trends that influence corporate reputations, namely (1) the Covid-19 pandemic, (2) the 4th industrial revolution, (3) virtual organisations, (4) digital information, (5) social technologies, (6) social media parody accounts, and (7) online reputation management.

To measure this construct, three questions were posed to interviewees. In the first question, interviewees were asked what trends they identified as having an influence on corporate reputation. In the second question, the researcher stated that her literature study identified the seven aforementioned trends and asked the interviewees to provide their understanding of each. The third question asked interviewees to indicate how they thought that each of these trends had affected the NWU. Section 5.4.1 hereunder presents the interviewees' understanding of these trends by discussing the first question pertaining the construct.

5.4.1 Identification of the trends affecting corporate reputation

As stated above, the first two questions that aimed to measure the construct of trends surrounding corporate reputation asked interviewees what trends they would identify as having an effect on corporate reputations (refer to question 5 in Table 4.5).

All the interviewees listed points not identified by the study as trends to be trends that influence corporate reputation. These included points such as *“service delivery”*, *“whether [organisations] live up to expectations”*, *“the age gap within the workplace”*, *“personalised messages tailored to specific stakeholder groups”*, and *“the need to be truthful, authentic, and ethical”*. Interviewee C, who identified this last listed *trend*, elaborated on the topic to state why he thought it to be a trend. He stated that in the past, organisations made use of what he referred to as *spin doctoring*, meaning that organisations had so much power to *control the narrative* of their organisations, that the messages or images that they put out were what stakeholders ultimately believed. He then continued to state that this is no longer the case, and that has resulted in the trend for organisations to *“be to be truthful, authentic and ethical”*: *“...spin doctoring, meaning an organisation had more influence and power and how they could influence the narrative that goes out there, and stakeholders would believe what organisations were saying. That has changed – we no longer control what stakeholders will say about us.”*

Although all the interviewees listed trends not identified in literature, three interviewees did list some. Only one interviewee did not list any of the identified trends. All three of the former mentioned interviewees mentioned *technology* specifically, while one of these interviewees

identified *digital information*, and two interviewees alluded the trend of *social technologies* with one interviewee stating *the advent of social media* and the other, *digital marketing communication platforms*.

However, interviewees identified three additional trends not identified by the study. These trends have been taken note of here as, when taking the discussions of Chapters 2 and 3 into account, one can understand how interviewees went about identifying these trends. When taking the discussion of stakeholder relations presented in Chapter 2 (the literature study) into account, the first of these trends, namely **the impact of stakeholders and how they are managed**, is noted. This trend was identified by two interviewees. Interviewee C identified it as *“the power that stakeholders have [as compared to in the past]”*, while interviewee D presented an elaborate discussion on the topic: *“historically because of the ways that institutions interacted with their stakeholders, the funnel was very easy to manage. You came in at one point and you managed that funnel to get to that point where they actually buy from you or do the actions that you actually want them to do. Because of the multitudes of touch points that institutions now have, you’re sitting in a situation where they can enter in the middle of the funnel, and you have to create opportunities for them to do that. Because of that, the customer orchestration has become much more vital for institutions to actually manage”*. The literature study placed emphasis on the importance of stakeholder relations within the context of corporate reputation. Here, the study found that due to the 4th industrial revolution (a trend identified by the study), stakeholders now have a bigger impact on the corporate reputations of organisations compared to the past, and that the way in which stakeholder relations are managed should therefore be re-evaluated as the *traditional* approach is no longer sufficient (refer to section 2.3.1.1). Referring again to the holistic discussion presented in the literature study, the second of these trends that should be taken special note of, is that as identified by interviewee B, namely **initiatives against climate change**. When taking the seven dimensions of RepTrak™ into account, this trend is noted, as one of the dimensions thereof is ‘citizenship’ which refers to specifically to how good and ethical an organisation is (refer to section 2.6.1). Interviewee B explained his identification of this trend stating that *“organisations are expected to be good corporate citizens in the sense that they respond positively to the needs of the communities”*. Finally, when taking the discussion of Chapter 3 (*the past and present context of the North-West University*) into account, it is understandable why the third of these trends was identified by a member of NWU CRM management specifically. This trend, namely **matters around social justice**, was also identified by interviewee B. This study previously stated that the HES in South Africa has been shaped by the need for transformation and the attainment of social justice (refer to section 3.2.1). In the same

discussion, the study identified that key role players within the HES, such as the Department for Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE), drive such initiatives strongly and that universities, such as the NWU, must comply with these initiatives. Later, the discussion regarding the past and present challenges of the NWU identified that the need to comply with transformation and matters surrounding social justice may have had an influence on the NWU's corporate reputation (refer to section 3.3.2).

In terms of the seven trends identified by the study, only three were either mentioned, or at least alluded to by the interviewees, namely the 4th industrial revolution (where interviewees alluded to *technology*), digital information, and social technologies (where interviewees alluded to social media platforms). The trends of the Covid-19 pandemic, virtual organisations, social media parody accounts and online reputation management were not identified, or alluded to, by any of the interviewees. While interviewees presented an understanding of the fact that there are trends that affect corporate reputation, their understanding of what these trends are specifically was not in line with that identified in literature (cf. 2.3.2).

The proceeding question aimed to measure the interviewees' understanding of each of the seven trends identified by the study. This is discussed in the following section.

5.4.2 NWU CRM's understanding of identified trends and how they affected the NWU

Section 5.4 stated that with regard to construct of trends that have an influence on corporate reputation, interviewees were asked three questions. The first was discussed in section 5.4.1. The second, namely what the interviewees' understanding of each of the seven identified trends was, and the third question, namely, how they thought that these trends had affected the NWU, are discussed in this section (refer to questions 6a-f and 7 in Table 4.5). Each trend is furthermore discussed separately, starting with the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.4.3 Covid 19

In terms of measuring the Covid-19 pandemic, interviewees were asked how they understood the trend (refer to question 6-a in Table 4.5) and how they thought the trend had affected the NWU (refer to question 7 in Table 4.5). The results of these questions are discussed in the proceeding sections.

5.4.3.1 Understanding of the Covid-19 pandemic

From the interviewees' answers and body language, it was obvious that all interviewees saw the Covid-19 pandemic as a challenge that had to be dealt with accordingly by organisations. One interviewee sighed heavily at the mention of the trend, while another started to laugh, indicating a frustration towards the trend. While interviewees A, C and D agreed that the pandemic could be seen as a trend that affects corporate reputation, interviewee B's immediate reaction at the mention of the trend was to disagree that it is, in fact, a trend. Although interviewee B did not agree with identifying the pandemic as a trend, he did agree that it had influenced organisations: *"Is it seen as a trend? ... I must say I personally don't see Covid-19 as a trend, but as an unpredictable intervention that got into the world [that] all organisations had to respond to. The way I understand it, it's one of those unforeseen circumstances that organisations must always be ready for"*.

All interviewees furthermore indicated a clear understanding of the pandemic and that it had influenced organisations worldwide. Interviewee A stated that the pandemic had affected organisations in the sense that they (organisations) *"had to just adapt"*. Two interviewees linked the trend of the pandemic to *technology*, a trend that they both had previously identified. Interviewee C stated that *technology* was relevant in discussing the pandemic as organisations had to make use of it to deal with the pandemic. Interviewee D stated that stakeholders make use of technology *day-in-and-day-out*, and that when placed in a situation such as the pandemic's lockdown, stakeholders had to rely heavily on *technology* and, in turn, organisations had to ensure that they kept up with it, as a trend.

5.4.3.2 How the Covid-19 pandemic affected the NWU

When probed on how the Covid-19 pandemic had affected the NWU, three interviewees provided insight into the challenges that the pandemic brought for the university. One interviewee, however, did not, and only stated that the university had managed the pandemic well.

Interviewee B stated that the higher education sector (HES), and therefore the NWU, was particularly affected by the pandemic in terms of having to *"move toward online offerings and... staff having to work remotely to continue to offer services"*. Interviewee D concurred with this opinion stating that as a contact university, the NWU was challenged in managing stakeholder relations, as stakeholders, in particular students and parents, felt that they were paying for a contact service, but not receiving a contact service: *"...the expectation was that we are selling a*

contact service, but they weren't getting a contact service, and that created a lot of frustration because we were trying to adapt, and we were not necessarily in a situation that we had any control over...". On this note, interviewees C and D felt that the NWU adopted a communication strategy aimed at providing stakeholders with fast, effective, and relevant information during this fast changing and uncertain time.

Three interviewees felt that the need to assist stakeholders was a challenge that was brought about by the pandemic. Interviewee D stated that the pandemic highlighted the *"inequality in South Africa"*. The university was faced with having to ensure that students and staff were able to continue to receive and provide the services of the university by providing *laptops* and *data* to these stakeholders. In addition, he stated that *"75% of the student population in South Africa has access to the internet through their mobile phones"*, which meant that the university had to adapt in terms of content to ensure its content was acceptably received on this platform and not only on *a computer* or *a laptop*. Interviewee C also alluded to this by referring to the *resources* of the university. He stated that he felt the NWU had fared well in managing the pandemic in terms of this as the NWU manages its resources effectively, and when faced with the pandemic, were able to pull the resources together to ensure that staff and students could sufficiently continue with their duties and studies. He added that when compared to other universities, the NWU was one of the first universities that were able to remedy this situation. Interviewee D also stated that because the university had certain *systems* in place, it was able act swiftly. In addition, interviewee B brought up *community engagement*, stating that the university had to find ways to assist stakeholders in any way possible.

Another challenge identified because of the pandemic was that it put the university's *"digital channels under pressure much more than ever"*, which caused issues in communicating with stakeholders and staff feeling *overwhelmed*. As a final challenge, one interviewee suggested that the pandemic had created a challenge that will far outlive it, namely the type of stakeholder that it has created for the university: *"...in a way it has created a particular type of student as well as staff... they are a different creature in terms of expectations for the university, so the university will have to ensure that the digital offerings that are there are at an optimal level..."*.

While three of the four interviewees identified how the pandemic negatively affected the NWU, one interviewee also alluded to the silver lining in terms of how the university would be able to handle challenging trends such as this in the future. Interviewee D stated that *"...a lot of people*

now understand how agile we [the university] now have to be to be relevant and stay relevant in the market", suggesting that this is something the university has taken note of.

From the above discussion, it is clear that NWU CRM management were aware that the pandemic had held challenges for the university. Furthermore, how they felt the pandemic had affected the university concurred well with that discussed in the literature study, referring specifically to the pandemic's effect on the NWU (refer to section 2.3.2.8). Moreover, NWU CRM management were able to identify, and shed light on, additional challenges that the NWU was faced with due to the pandemic as compared to what was identified in the literature study.

The following section continues the discussion on trends affecting corporate reputation with the second trend identified by the study, namely the 4th industrial revolution.

5.4.4 The 4th industrial revolution

In terms of measuring the 4th industrial revolution, interviewees were asked how they understood the trend (refer to question 6-b in Table 4.5) and how they thought the trend had affected the NWU (refer to question 7 in Table 4.5). The results of these questions are discussed in the proceeding sections.

5.4.4.1 Understanding of the 4th industrial revolution

All interviewees presented a sufficient understanding of what the 4th industrial revolution is compared to what the study had previously discussed it to be (refer to section 2.3.2.2). Two interviewees touched on *technology* as being an attribute of the 4th industrial revolution, with interviewee B referring specifically to *processes* and *"...the developments where robotics, digital offerings, intentional experiences for customers and clients are at the forefront"*, and interviewee C referring to the 4th industrial revolution as the fast tracking of *technology* with regard to *implementation of digital strategies*. Interviewee B also indicated that the 4th industrial revolution was, however, about more than just technology, stating that it is a *technology-based* process that is *"just an enhanced way that services can be offered"*.

Two interviewees stated that the 4th industrial revolution had resulted in challenges for organisations and their stakeholders, in particular employees. Interviewee C stated that the 4th industrial revolution had placed *"digital channels under pressure"*, and again, stated that this places employees under pressure as he had in his discussion pertaining to the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviewee A suggested that there may be people who do see the trend as negative,

but regardless of those views, the 4th industrial revolution is here to stay and therefore needs to be taken note of by organisations: *“That is with us whether anybody likes it or not. In some people, it does create fear in the sense of ‘I am going to be redundant, what I am currently doing is not necessarily going to be needed from me as an individual?’”*

5.4.4.2 How the 4th industrial revolution affected the NWU

When probed about how the 4th industrial revolution had affected the NWU, all four interviewees alluded to the fact that the trend had created challenges for the NWU, although only two interviewees alluded to the 4th industrial revolution resulting in challenges to organisations in the previous section. One interviewee (interviewee A) did not provide much comment on the topic particularly within the context of the NWU, but rather suggested that the NWU, and all other organisations, need to take it into consideration, even though it comes with challenges, stating that, *“I think it is something that we should embrace. We should all work towards digitising stuff and moving forward, but once again, it is change management and not everybody adapts to that the same way”*. Two interviewees felt the NWU was not on par with what it should be when considering the 4th industrial revolution, with interviewee B stating that, *“we are still lagging behind in that space”* and interviewee C that, *“we still have a lot to talk about”*. Both these interviewees explained why they were of this opinion. Interviewee B stated that the university’s stakeholders were characterised by the 4th industrial revolution and that, although the university has worked at assessing this trend, it required a greater understanding: *“The type of students that we are serving today, they are playing in the space of 4IR (the 4th industrial revolution) and block chains... some of the interventions that the university introduced are just but elements of the 4IR aspects”*. Interviewee C stated that an effective implementation of a strategy to be on par with the trend required *“a lot of resources”* and *“a lot of training”*. While interviewee D indicated that the trend had, again, placed pressure on the university’s *digital channels*, he emphasised that it had also brought with it an *opportunity* *“to put in much more touch points with our stakeholders and to think creatively on how we interact through those touch points to actually create an intentional experience. Whereas in the past, it was solely for communication purposes, people now expect a certain experience when they interact with your digital channels”*.

In conclusion, the interviewees’ understanding of how the 4th industrial revolution has affected the NWU concurs with that which was discussed earlier in the study (cf. section 2.3.2.8). The following section continues the discussion on trends affecting corporate reputation with the third trend identified by the study namely, virtual organisations.

5.4.5 Virtual organisations

In terms of measuring virtual organisation, interviewees were asked how they understood the trend (refer to question 6-c in Table 4.5) and how they thought the trend had affected the NWU (refer to question 7 in Table 4.5). The results of these questions are analysed in the proceeding sections.

5.4.5.1 Understanding of virtual organisations

While only one interviewee provided a definition of the trend, stating that, “...*you don’t have belong to a particular space. You can service your clients from anywhere as long as they can access you*”, the remaining three interviewees did indicate some knowledge of what a virtual organisation was. However, these interviewees all linked virtual organisations to the Covid-19 pandemic, referring to the influences of *technology*, and the *digital* and *online* services of organisations, as well as the fact that so many organisations had to have their staff *work-from-home* during the pandemic for an extended period. Two interviewees were of the opinion that virtual organisations existed largely because of the pandemic, with interviewee A stating, “*It [the pandemic] is the reason why they [virtual organisations] are the norm, because business had to continue and that is the way it was conducted, and now it seems as though people do not want to move back to where we were*” and interviewee C stating, “*But with Covid 19, we learned that we can still do business, even if you can’t meet one another*”. Interviewee D also indicated the effect of Covid-19 on the establishment of virtual organisations when considering the opinions of employees. He stated that the pandemic led to employees wondering why they needed to return to work physically when they had managed to work from home effectively for two years. In addition, the interviewee stated that if virtual organisations are established and managed correctly, he could understand that the need for the physical workplace to be filled with employees could be reduced: “*...I don’t think... that the issue is letting staff work from home or not. The question is how do you offer the same kind of service that the customer expects from you while people can possibly work from different places? I think that’s where the virtual organisation and those capabilities will play a big role*”.

While virtual organisations have existed before the pandemic, it seems the opinions of half of NWU CRM management are that they exist because of the pandemic, indicating a less sufficient understanding of the trend. However, earlier, this study found the trend to be relatively new and, as such, not having a well-known explanation in terms of theory and practice, although some literature on the topic is available (refer to section 2.3.2.3).

5.4.5.2 How virtual organisations affected the NWU

When probed as to how virtual organisations had affected the NWU, all interviewees suggested, to some degree, that the NWU had characteristics of a virtual organisation. Again, this was attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic by all four interviewees. Interviewee A particularly felt that the university had become a virtual organisation as a direct result of the pandemic, and that even after work-from-home restrictions had been lifted, the university continued to function as a virtual organisation to a large extent as many staff continued to follow virtual, or online, routes when it came to doing business: *“Staff prefer to attend meetings from the comfort of their own office or from behind their desk at home, or wherever, to conduct business. So, it seems as though people are struggling to move back to, you know, physically being in the presence of one another.”* Interviewee B stated that the NWU showed characteristics of being a virtual organisation as well, but again attributed this to staff working from home during the pandemic. He did, however, state that an organisation that shifts from being a contact organisation to a virtual organisation, may experience a shift in its *culture*. He emphasised the importance for organisations to pay attention to this, stating that this *process* would not be easy to manage: *“... of course it is not a linear process to arrive at a complete virtual organisation, it’s more complicated than what I’m saying...”*. Interviewee C linked the NWU to characteristics of a virtual organisation using the challenges brought about by the pandemic as an example. Here, he referred to the use of university *resources* and the *training* of staff in this space to ensure that the university was able to continue with its core business.

While Interviewee D also alluded to the university having characteristics of a virtual organisation due to the pandemic, using examples such as where the university had implemented *“hybrid open days”* and *“hybrid stakeholder engagements initiatives”*, he was the only interviewee that provided an indication of how the university is further working toward attaining characteristics of a virtual organisation. He stated that the need for this was due to stakeholder expectation and to *stay relevant* in the *market*. This interviewee was also the only interviewee to make mention of the Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes that were offered by the university pre-pandemic, a characteristic that was mentioned within the context of the NWU as a virtual organisation in the literature study (refer to section 2.3.2.8).

In conclusion, the interviewees’ understanding of how the concept of virtual organisations has affected the NWU is sufficient. However, it should be noted that three interviewees focused only on the effect of the pandemic.

The following section continues the discussion on trends affecting corporate reputation with the fourth trend identified by the study, namely digital information.

5.4.6 Digital information

In terms of measuring digital information, interviewees were asked how they understood the trend (refer to question 6-d in Table 4.5) and how they thought the trend had affected the NWU (refer to question 7 in Table 4.5). The results of these questions are discussed in the proceeding sections.

5.4.6.1 Understanding of digital information

When asked about the understanding of the trend, every interviewee presented a different answer. One interviewee stated that he felt he had already alluded to the trend in his discussions of the previous trends referring to *technology*, and *digital* and *online* offerings. All three the remaining interviewees' understanding of digital information was also in line with characteristics of technology. They mentioned terms such as *website*, *paperless offices*, *replacing traditional information*, *voice to data*, *augmented reality* and *automated processes*. In section 2.3.2.4, the study noted that the trend of digital information was closely linked to that of the 4th industrial revolution, and therefore was a technology-based processes.

Two interviewees stated the trend was an important one. Interviewee D stated that “...*it plays a huge role...*”. Interviewee A stated that, “...*you cannot live without it*”, and in addition, felt that the work environment created by the pandemic played a role in the expedition of the trend. While interviewee B felt the trend was nothing new, stating that it had started around the 1990s but suggested that the trend had not yet reached its peak.

In terms of keeping up with this trend, interviewee D placed emphasis on the use of data collected by organisations from stakeholders, explaining that collecting such data allows the organisation to understand where their stakeholders are in their *journey* with the organisation, and, in turn, when organisations understand this, they are able to create effective content for, and interactions with, their stakeholders: “...*any kind of [artificial intelligence] AI, augmented reality, automated processes, needs the data to inform those interactions at the various touch points... you try to adapt your processes... but for that you need to understand the journey...*”.

In section 2.3.2.4, the study not only noted *technology* as a characteristic of this trend. Stakeholder needs, or expectations, and an added competitive advantage for organisations were

also mentioned in the discussion. While two interviewees did make mention of stakeholder needs, none of the interviewees alluded to the competitive advantage that the trend could result in.

5.4.6.2 How digital information affected the NWU

When probed about how the trend of digital information had affected the NWU, two of the interviewees did not provide insight into the question. Their answers were short and only suggested that the NWU is aware of and incorporates the trend.

However, the remaining two interviewees elaborated on the topic, using examples specific to the university. Interviewee B referred to how traditionally-contact lectures had recently been shifted to online platforms that had allowed the NWU to offer its service of teaching-and-learning “*to a diverse group of students in different spaces*”. He also stated that he felt the university was moving in the right direction when it came to this trend, referring to how it was using *block chains*, *coding* and *smart technologies* to move towards understanding, and remaining relevant in terms of, the trend. To discuss how digital information had affected the NWU, interviewee D referred to the process in which the university had begun to make use of a *bot* that was implemented to intuitively answer stakeholder queries on digital platforms, i.e. a type of software that replaced a real person on the other end of the digital platforms to answer basic messages from stakeholders. The interviewee elaborated broadly on the topic, stating that the process was long and required going back to the drawing board, re-evaluating data, and reimplementing the process until it was at a satisfactory level.

While certain aspects of digital information identified in terms of the context of the NWU by the study (refer to section 2.3.2.8) were not mentioned here by some interviewees, half of the interviewees were able to provide sufficient understanding of how the trend had affected the NWU.

The following section continues the discussion on trends affecting corporate reputation with the fifth trend identified by the study namely, social technologies.

5.4.7 Social technologies

In terms of measuring social technologies, interviewees were asked how they understood the trend (refer to question 6-e in Table 4.5) and how they thought the trend had affected the NWU (refer to question 7 in Table 4.5). The results of these questions are discussed in the proceeding sections.

5.4.7.1 Understanding of social technologies

One interviewee requested that the researcher should clarify what she meant by social technologies, to which the researcher referred to the social media platforms discussed in section 2.3.2.5. This interviewee then demonstrated knowledge of the trend stating that it was “*a complete extension of what you [the organisation] are physically doing*” and added that if organisations fail to make use of social technologies, that they would *lag behind*. While two other two interviewees understood the term without requesting clarification, referring to *platforms* such as *Facebook*, *developments* such as *mobile apps* and *chat bots*, and the formation of *online communities*. One interviewee felt that he had already alluded to the trend in his previous discussions.

Although interviewees did not elaborate on defining the trend of social technologies, they did at least present knowledge of what it was. Section 2.3.2.5. presented a more detailed discussion on the challenges and requirements associated with social technologies, and not just a definition thereof. However, as seen in the proceeding section, some interviewees were able to talk to these points when asked about the trend’s effect on the NWU.

5.4.7.2 How social technologies affect the NWU

All interviewees agreed that social technologies were a necessity that should be used by the NWU and indicated that the university does make use of social technologies.

Interviewee A reiterated the importance of the university making use thereof and understanding how different platforms work, stating, “*...you have to make use of it, you have to stay in touch with trends and make sure that you adjust whatever you do according to trends on the specific platforms...*”. Two other interviewees also discussed the latter, bringing the total to three interviewees who mentioned the need for the university to understand how different platforms worked. Interviewee B stated that university comprises various stakeholder groups, and that these groups differentiate from one another in terms of their *age and practices*. In the same breath, he linked these differentials of stakeholder groups to the university’s understanding of what platforms to use and how to use them in terms of *pushing information*. Interviewee D concurred this stating that NWU CRM attempts to use social technologies to “*manage and orchestrate the customer journey in a certain way*”. However, interviewee D was the only interviewee to include challenges that the university faced in terms of social technologies. He identified the main challenge as the establishment of multiple NWU-related accounts on various platforms that are run by students or departments other than CRM. He stated that the *hype* that surrounded social technologies led to

almost every sub-department, faculty and student affiliation of the university wanting to create their own pages. The problem he identified with this was that not everyone understands that such platforms require a purpose and a content strategy, and that more than often, these pages simply become *bulletin boards*. He also stated that, because the individuals running these pages do not necessarily have the knowledge of how social technologies should be managed, it created (1) the need for CRM to monitor, and were necessary intervene, in terms of the content created by these various platforms, and (2) *frustration* from stakeholders who feel that they “*are not necessarily getting what they need from these platforms*”.

In conclusion, most interviewees understood how the university used social technologies and presented knowledge of the importance on how this should be managed, while alluding to the consequences of what could happen if it is not managed correctly. These were points identified by the study in section 2.3.2.8. The interviewees’ understanding of how the NWU is affected by social technology, therefore, concurs with that which is identified by the study.

The following section continues the discussion on trends affecting corporate reputation with the sixth trend identified by the study, namely social media parody accounts.

5.4.8 Social media parody accounts

In terms of measuring social media parody accounts, interviewees were asked how they understood the trend (refer to question 6-f in Table 4.5) and how they thought the trend had affected the NWU (refer to question 7 in Table 4.5). The results of these questions are discussed in the proceeding sections.

5.4.8.1 Understanding social media parody accounts

In most of interviewees’ interviews, the flow of conversation in terms of social technologies had already made mention of the definition of social media parody accounts. The interviewees agreed with the definition as presented by the study, namely social media accounts that have the intention to either mock or create humour or sarcasm around a certain topic. Interviewee B stated that there would always be room for “*laughter, anonymity, and mystery...in every sector*” and therefore defined social media parody accounts as “*the accounts that are there to inject some of that excitement*”. He did, however, add that not all parody accounts are *funny* or *innocent* and that they have the potential to be problematic for an organisation as they “*can push very dangerous information to their audiences*”. Interviewees C and D also added to their discussion on the topic stating that a parody account, while perhaps intending to make a joke, easily becomes the *truth*

in the eyes of stakeholders. Interviewee D also added that these false stories produced by parody accounts, whether intentional or not, could hurt the organisation's reputation, and that once they had been released into *the digital world*, they would always exist.

NWU CRM management's understanding of social media parody accounts concurred with literature (cf. section 2.3.2.6). Their understanding of the trend became even clearer when probed as to how it had affected the NWU, as seen in the following section.

5.4.8.2 How social media parody accounts affect the NWU

While one interviewee's immediate reaction was to laugh aloud at the mention of the trend, another smiled, rolled his eyes, and jokingly exclaimed, "*Kill me now!*" This indicated that NWU CRM management had, to some extent, a sense of frustration when it came to dealing with social media parody accounts within the context of the NWU.

All four interviewees stated that the NWU had been the victim of a *few* parody accounts. In addition, all four interviewees indicated that the NWU CRM department was responsible for handling this issue and mitigating any risks that were associated with each instance. All the interviewees also provided knowledge of the process that is followed when a parody account, which threatens the corporate reputation of the university, is identified. This process is, according to all interviewees, to inform the CRM sub-department for Marketing and Student Recruitment. This department then attempts to identify who the creators of the accounts are and take action to have the accounts removed from platforms. Interviewees C and D, however, stated that this process is not always as easy as it sounds due to "*privacy laws such as POPIA*" that make it difficult for the university to identify the creators. If the creators cannot be identified, it becomes difficult to have the account removed.

All four interviewees presented an understanding of the consequences that the NWU's corporate reputation would face when taking parody accounts into consideration. Interviewee B provided an example of one such account that attempted to *mimic* the NWU and to "*get people to pay for what they perpetrated to be services*" of the university. While interviewee D showed some sympathy towards some accounts, stating that not all of them are meant to be harmful, he remained mindful of the fact, that even so, students and staff should understand that parody accounts affect the corporate reputation of the university, and therefore the reputation of their degrees and professionalism.

Section 2.3.2.8 identified that the university had fallen victim to social media parody accounts and suggested that it was something the NWU should take note of. From the discussion hereabove, the study can conclude that this is an issue that NWU CRM management is aware of and that they act accordingly when faced with the challenge.

The following section ends the discussion on trends affecting corporate reputation through presenting the seventh and final trend identified by the study, namely online reputation management.

5.4.9 Online reputation management

In terms of measuring online reputation management, interviewees were asked how they understood the trend (refer to question 6-g in Table 4.5) and how they thought the trend had affected the NWU (refer to question 7 in Table 4.5). The results of these questions are discussed in the proceeding sections.

5.4.9.1 Understanding online reputation management

All interviewees presented knowledge of what online reputation management was, referring to the *timing* or *how quickly* organisations respond to information about the organisation, either *online* or on *social media platforms*.

Interviewee A hesitated before answering the question, taking time to think about it. He then stated that he would also link this trend's expedition to the Covid-19 pandemic (as he had done with a few previous trends), as the pandemic had resulted in an increase in online activities and interactions. Interviewee C linked the trend to all the previously discussed trends stating that, "*all of these are integrated*". Linking this trend to the aforementioned trends was also identified earlier by the study when discussing the trend within the context of the NWU (refer to section 2.3.2.8).

Interviewee B referred specifically to online reputation management as an organisation's *online appearance* characterised by the *type of information* that the organisation *puts out there*, how this information is *packaged*, whether it is *trustworthy* information, and the extent to which this information creates stakeholder *engagements*. Interviewee D reiterated the need for online reputation management and mentioned that there were various tools available that could assist organisations in managing online reputations such as *market [intelligence quotient] IQ's*, *Falcon* and *Hootsuite*.

5.4.9.2 How online reputation management affected the NWU

When probed as to how the trend had affected the NWU, all four interviewees stated that it had influenced the NWU, but that they felt it had not negatively affected the NWU. Two interviewees stated that although the trend had been managed well by the NWU, it could be better with interviewee A stating, “...*automatically there will always be room for improvement, but I do think that we definitely have made huge strides*”, and interviewee B, “*We’ve been consistent, but I think it is not something that you can say you have achieved, because it’s a journey...*”.

All four interviewees presented knowledge of how the trend was managed at the NWU and stated that the university had certain practices in place to ensure that it was managed correctly. Interviewee C used a hypothetical example of a *burning building* on a campus and stated that in such an instance, the practice would be to inform stakeholders online immediately about what had happened, why it had happened and then keep them up to date on any developments. Interviewee D used the example of having to *screen videos* created by student residences before they were placed on social media to ensure that the content thereof was appropriate. He added that instances such as this were somewhat difficult as the university *encourages* students to *share their stories* with their *communities*, however, on the other hand, the university must take the effect that this may have on its reputation into account.

From the above exposition, it seems that NWU CRM management has a sufficient understanding of what online reputation management is and how it should be implemented within the context of the university.

In summary, none of the interviewees were able to identify all the trends that affect corporate reputation identified in literature, with some not being able to identify any. However, some interviewees did identify a few of these trends by mentioning trends such as *technology*, *digital information/marketing* and *social media*. Although not identifying all the trends, all interviewees presented an understanding of each of the identified trends and how they had affected the NWU, although specific reference to the effect on the university’s corporate reputation was rarely made. One interviewee did not agree that Covid-19 was a trend affecting corporate reputation, but acknowledged its effect on organisational activities, and that organisations worldwide had to manage the pandemic. However, one interviewee added climate change to the list of trends that can affect the NWU’s corporate reputation. As this trend falls within a dimension of RepTrak™, namely citizenship, the study notes that climate change initiatives can be added to the list of trends that affect corporate reputations in all sectors, but specifically in the HES.

This concludes the analysis of trends that affect corporate reputations. The proceeding section aims to measure the next construct identified by the study, namely the elements of corporate reputation.

5.5 The elements of corporate reputation

In section 2.4, the study identified that corporate reputation comprises five key elements, namely corporate identity, corporate image, corporate brand, corporate personality, and corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture.

The aim of this section was to determine what NWU CRM management would identify the key elements of corporate reputation to be and to gain insight into how they understood the five elements identified by the study. To do this, interviewees were asked three questions. The first question first explained to interviewees that, according to literature, corporate reputation comprises various elements, although the elements identified by the study were not yet mentioned. The question was then posed to interviewees: What would they consider to be the elements of corporate reputation (refer to question 8 in Table 4.5)? In the second question, the researcher listed the five elements identified by the study and asked the second question, namely: What each interviewee's understanding of each element was (refer to questions 9-a, -b, -c, -d, and -e). Finally, as a third question, interviewees were asked how they would apply each of these elements to the context of the NWU (refer to questions 10- a, -b, -c, -d, and -e). Interviewees' answers to all three these questions are discussed in proceeding sections.

5.5.1 Identification of the elements of corporate reputation

All interviewees were confident in their answers when asked what they thought the elements of corporate identity were. While two interviewees elaborated broadly in their discussion, two interviewees briefly listed what they thought to be elements.

Two interviewees stated that stakeholder *perceptions* were an element of corporate reputation although literature sees perception not as an element of corporate reputation, but rather part of its definition (refer to section 2.3.1). Two other interviewees stated that the *products* and *services* offered by an organisation were elements of corporate reputation. Again, although not listed as elements of corporate reputation in literature, RepTrak™ and other measuring tools such as the Reputation Quotient list products and services as a dimension of corporate reputation measurement (refer to section 2.6).

Other elements that were named by interviewees were *the degrees* of universities (which could be seen as products and/or services), the *staff* of an organisation, *the well-being of the organisations*, *promises* that the organisations make, *expectations* of stakeholders, and *communication*.

Only one interviewee identified *behaviour* as one of four elements of corporate reputation in his view, although the three remaining interviewees alluded to elements identified by the study. One interviewee stated that *"it is what you put out there"*. Another mentioned the *"characteristics"* of the organisation, and another *"the employability of students"*.

Interviewees A and C also alluded to some guidelines of corporate reputation management here, stating that it was important to always be transparent and upfront in terms of communication with stakeholders. Interviewee D spoke to the challenges that the NWU had recently experienced that may have had an effect on the university's corporate reputation, such as students wanting to return to contact classes despite Covid-19 regulations. Although interviewees C and D provided lengthy discussions when answering this question, the detail relevant to the question was little and has been discussed hereabove.

In conclusion, when comparing the identification of corporate reputation elements discussed in literature to NWU CRM management's identification thereof, their identification did not fare well (cf. section 2.4). However, as the proceeding five sections will show, they did present knowledge of each element identified in literature.

5.5.2 Corporate identity

The first element of corporate reputation, namely corporate identity, is discussed in the following two sections. The first section discusses NWU CRM management's understanding of the term (refer to question 9-a in Table 4-5). The second section discusses their implementation of the term in the context of the NWU (refer to question 10-a in Table 4-5).

5.5.2.1 NWU CRM's understanding of corporate identity

When asked how they would define corporate identity, interviewees each gave a brief understanding of the construct. Their responses are indicated in Table 5-3 hereunder.

Table 5-3: Interviewees' definitions and understanding of corporate identity

Interviewee	Answer
A	<i>"People have to be able to identify if they see, a colour, if they see a logo, they need to know this is the NWU, without NWU standing there".</i>
B	<i>"The look and feel".</i>
C	<i>"... who we are and what elements are we using to identify ourselves... the logos, the colours... the design element... the culture".</i>
D	<i>"...visible features like your logo, your taglines".</i>

Three interviewees alluded to corporate identity in definition when compared to section 2.4.1.1, with interviewee C stating that it was *who* an organisation was and what *elements* the organisation used to *identify* itself. Interviewee B referred to the *look and feel* of an organisation, and interviewee C referred to *visible features*. However, all the interviewees mentioned some of the components of corporate identity as discussed in section 2.4.1.2, including *logos*, *taglines*, *corporate colours* and *culture*.

No interviewees alluded to the structure of corporate identity in their discussion. Two interviewees, however, did mention that the construct was sometimes confused with other elements such as *corporate image* and *corporate brand* as many elements of corporate reputation were *integrated* with one another – a point noted in literature as well (refer to sections 2.4.2.1 and 2.4.3.1).

5.5.2.2 NWU CRM's understanding of corporate identity within the context of the NWU

All interviewees felt that the corporate identity of the NWU encompassed its *logo*, although every interviewee mentioned other components that the others did not. These included the NWU's *tagline* or *expression*, *purple* or *colours*, *language*, *academics*, *mascot*, and *prominent places on campuses*.

Three interviewees also alluded to the fact that, although they only mentioned a few components of the NWU's corporate identity, it consisted of a great deal more. Interviewee A stated that it was, *"everything that allows you to immediately, whatever you see, associate yourself with the NWU"*. Interviewee C stated that it encompassed all elements discussed in the university's *corporate*

manual, and interviewee D stated that it encompassed *everything*, while referring to the corporate brand of the university, as well as being “*who we [the NWU] are and how we make people feel*”.

5.5.3 Corporate image

As with corporate identity, the second element of corporate reputation, namely corporate image is discussed in the following two sections. The first section discusses NWU CRM management’s understanding of the construct (refer to question 9-b in Table 4-5). The second section discusses their implementation of the construct in the context of the NWU (refer to question 10-b in Table 4-5).

5.5.3.1 NWU CRM’s understanding of corporate image

Interviewees’ understanding of the construct in terms of definition, is presented in Table 5-4 hereunder.

Table 5-4: Interviewees’ definitions and understanding of corporate image

Interviewee	Answer
A	<i>“...how you portray the organisation... what is put out there”.</i>
B	<i>“... it can either be how people see the organisation, or the visual elements associated with the organisation”.</i>
C	<i>“...an application of that [corporate identity]”.</i>
D	<i>“...engagement, positive or negative, from our stakeholders...”</i>

Only one interviewee was not able to provide a definition of the construct that concurred with literature. However, it should be noted that in answering the previous question about corporate identity, this interviewee first requested the researcher to list all the elements she had identified. He then stated that his request was because he felt many elements of corporate reputation were *integrated* with one another. He then began his discussion in the previous question by stating that, “*Image would be elements that we use to present us and to make us unique to the external and internal stakeholders*”, after which he continued to discuss corporate identity. However,

section 2.4.2.1 stated that corporate identity was aimed at internal stakeholders, corporate image was aimed at external stakeholders.

Taking the direct answers to this question into account, the remaining three interviewees, however, were able to define corporate image in line with the definition presented in section 2.4.2.1, alluding to the fact that the corporate image was how stakeholders see an organisation. Although one of these interviewees extended his definition suggesting that corporate identity and corporate image were *elements* of one another, similarly, one interviewee stated that the corporate image was the *application* of corporate identity. However, this interviewee later stated that image was *about communication*. Two interviewees made a specific referral to image being linked to the views of *people* or *stakeholders*.

In the literature study, the structure and measurement of corporate image were found to be key points of discussion when considering the element (refer to sections 2.4.2.2 and 2.4.2.3). Only one interviewee referred to the structure of corporate image in his discussion, stating that a corporate image should be the *desired image*. Section 2.4.2.2 discussed how a corporate image could be either desired or actual, but that the ideal would be to have stakeholders see the organisation as the organisation wanted themselves to be seen, i.e. it should be desired. None of the other interviewees made mention of these points.

5.5.3.2 NWU CRM's understanding of corporate image within the context of the NWU

When probed as to how they would apply the construct to the context of the NWU, only two interviewees provided a clear indication of their application. Interviewee A, particularly, provided the university's desired image stating, "*That we are a professional institution that is delivering on our promises and whatever we tell, is what you get once you are with us*". Interviewee B, although providing an application, stated that the corporate image of the NWU was "*the logo, the colour and the symbols, but also the people, especially eminent people, associated with the brand*".

Interviewee C provided insight into the challenges the university faced when managing its image, however. Here, he stated that although the university worked toward portraying a desired image, that stakeholders such as *students*, "*tend to do their own thing... they tend to not comply*". He also added that simply looking good as a university was *not enough* and emphasised the need to actively implement the university's *desired image*. This, according to him, required the *training students and staff*.

The third element of corporate reputation identified by the study, namely corporate brand, is discussed in the following section.

5.5.4 Corporate brand

Corporate brand is discussed in the following two sections. Again, the first section discusses NWU CRM management's understanding of the construct (refer to question 9-c in Table 4-5), while the second section discusses their implementation of the element in the context of the NWU (refer to question 10-c in Table 4-5).

5.5.4.1 NWU CRM's understanding of corporate brand

In terms of defining a corporate brand, all four interviewees provided a discussion on the topic that concurred very well with that which was discussed in the literature study (see 2.4.3.1). Snippets from their holistic discussion are presented in Table 5-5 hereunder, referring to their understanding of the element.

Table 5-5: Interviewees' definitions and understanding of corporate brand

Interviewee	Answer
A	<i>"...the experience of an institution that somebody has..."</i>
B	<i>"...those visual elements plus how the organisation does its business".</i>
C	<i>"The brand is what we stand for. But the brand is not just limited to these elements (identity and image), the brand also includes the experiences that people have when they engage with us..."</i>
D	<i>"...brand is just the representation of the identity, and it is not just a logo or a tagline. It is literally how people interact with your institution, how you make them feel".</i>

As seen in Table 5-5, all interviewees stated that the corporate brand was related to the *experiences* or *feelings* of stakeholders. In addition, three interviewees mentioned that the corporate brand encompassed all the visual elements of an organisation, plus these experiences or feelings. These definitions concur well with what is discussed in literature. In section 2.4.3.1, the literature study discussed corporate brand as being the sum of all the visual elements of an

organisation in addition to the bond the organisation has with its stakeholders, how credible and reliable an organisation is, as well as organisational aspects such as *value*, *culture* and *ethos*.

Interviewee A added that the corporate brand was affected by “*service delivery and front-line staff*”, as these played a direct role in stakeholder experiences with an organisation. Interviewee B referred to the corporate brand as *the reputation* of an organisation, again referring to stakeholder experiences with an organisation. Interviewee C stated, as he had before, that the elements of corporate reputation were integrated with one another, specifically referring to the elements of corporate identity and corporate image as the *building blocks* of corporate brand. While interviewee D placed emphasis on the fact that corporate brand was often mis-defined as being only visual or tangible elements: “... *people unfortunately link it to what the logo is or how it looks... merchandising, is also seen as brand. But I mean that’s one small element of it... sponsorships, but again one small element*”.

While the measurement of corporate brand was identified as a key point in discussing the element in literature (refer to section 2.4.2.3), no interviewees alluded to this. However, one interviewee alluded to the importance of managing the element, stating that *brand management* was *critical* and achieved through *brand campaigns* and *communication* from an organisation’s *leader*”.

5.5.4.2 NWU CRM’s understanding of corporate brand within the context of the NWU

When asked how interviewees would apply their definition of corporate brand to the context of the NWU, all interviewees presented sufficient answers. Interviewee A stated that he felt the NWU’s brand was strong, referring to specific attributes of the university: “*I think our brand is that we are delivering well rounded graduates. Our offerings are of a very high quality. We have got very good academics, and we are an institution which is managed in a very sound manner*”. Interviewee B also alluded to attributes of the university in his discussion, stating, “*It is those two that I have alluded to [corporate identity and image], as well as now introducing the services and offerings of the university, and how it offers them, in comparison with others...*”. Interviewee D stated that, in application, the NWU’s corporate brand was what stakeholders thought, believed, and experienced about the university. With this, he also referred to attributes of the university in his discussion stating that the NWU’s brand was “*the unique selling points that the university has been associated with*”, later identifying these “*selling points*” as “*student experience... being academically excellent... being values driven... creating relevant graduates and having a social impact*”. He added that those selling points were identified through stakeholder *feedback* regarding how they had experienced the university, suggesting that he too acknowledged the

importance of corporate brand management as his colleague had in the previous section. This colleague, namely interviewee C, referred to the NWU's corporate brand in application as being *"a caring university"* that used *"different ways to display this"*.

While three interviewees concluded their discussions with that presented above, one interviewee brought up another point: that the NWU faced some challenges when considering the element of corporate brand. Here interviewee D stated, *"... the problem that you have with the corporate brand in the day and age that we live in, is that people want to put down their own stamp"*. He then used an example within the context of the NWU to explain what he meant, which was that faculties at the NWU, for example, wanted to create their own brand, but they did not understand that they had to still exist within the holistic NWU brand. He also alluded to the re-branding activities that the NWU had gone through throughout its existence, a key topic discussed in Chapters 1 (refer to section 1.1.3 and 1.1.4) and 3 (refer to section 3.3.1 and 3.3.2.1.2). Here, he acknowledged that many NWU stakeholders had negatively responded to the 2017 rebrand brought about by the move to a unitary model, and the restructuring and alignment processes. However, he indicated that rebranding activities such as this were not new to the NWU and felt that the brand of the NWU was about more than just its visual elements: *"...what they (stakeholders) forgot was that the university's brand has changed, I think, 5 or 6 times over the last 150 years. It's not a new thing – if you look at any kind of logo or whatever, it's just a visual representation of the time that we're in. But what brand actually is, is the experiences and the interactions that I have with the company"*. The various changes to the NWU's logo were also discussed in Chapter 3 (refer to section 3.3.1). The researcher saw this as an opportunity to ask a follow-up question to interviewee D, which was not posed to the other interviewees. Here, interviewee D was asked why he thought stakeholders had responded negatively toward the 2017 rebrand and not the previous rebranding activities of the university. Interviewee D stated that he felt the reactions were aimed more toward the *"strategic direction of the university"* and not the actual change in logo or colours. He added that when it came to the university's corporate brand, however, he felt that even though some stakeholders reacted negatively, it was a good thing because at least they reacted. He suggested that these reactions indicated a strong bond between the university and its stakeholders, and that was what a corporate brand aimed to do.

The following section discusses the fourth element of corporate reputation as identified by this study, namely corporate personality.

5.5.5 Corporate personality

While using the same recipe as with the discussion of the previous elements of corporate reputation, the fourth element, namely corporate personality is discussed in the following two sections. Again, the first section discusses NWU CRM management's understanding of the construct (refer to question 9-d in Table 4-5), while the second section discusses their implementation of the construct in the context of the NWU (refer to question 10-d in Table 4-5).

5.5.5.1 NWU CRM's understanding of corporate personality

When asked how they would define corporate personality, most interviewees did not seem to have a clear, definite understanding thereof. Rather, aspects such as *perception*, *culture*, *ethics*, *values* and *ambition* were expressed by interviewees. Table 5-6 hereunder shows how these aspects were worked into interviewees' definitions of corporate personality.

Table 5-6: Interviewees' definitions and understanding of corporate personality

Interviewee	Answer
A	"...how you are perceived by your audience... being out there, being a nice place to be".
B	"How the organisation liaises, or links, with the outside world... the culture of the organisation".
C	"...this links to our values... ethic of care...".
D	"...try to be more ambitious... typically your values driven, those kind of things...".

Although no interviewee provided a clear definition of corporate personality, section 2.4.4.1 showed that a definition does exist, and defined the element as being the sum of the organisation's *characteristics*, referring specifically to characteristics such as "*sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and innovation*". The aspects that interviewees did mention, although not completely in line with literature, could find a place within some of these characteristics. *Ambition*, for example, could fit in with *innovation*, while *culture* and *values* or *ethics* could fit in with *sincerity*. Interviewee A alluded to *characteristics* in his broader discussion referring to *personality traits* in a comparison: "*Like a person would have certain personality traits, the same would apply for an institution – what are you associated with, being a lively place, those*

kind of things". Interviewee B alluded to another characteristic later in his discussion as well, stating that the corporate personality of an organisation included a combination of aspects, such as "*how it's staff behaves*" and "*how the organisation interacts with its stakeholders*".

Three interviewees stated that when considering corporate personality, it was the extent to which an organisation put their money where their mouths are, in a sense. Interviewee B used an example of an organisation that takes strong consideration of *social justice* and explained that it should "*not only be about the money*", but rather about whether the organisation was "*doing what is right*". Similarly, interviewee C stated that organisations should "*intensify the living of it*". While interviewee D used the NWU as an example stating that if the university said it believed in *social justice*, that it "*should create a space*" for that to happen.

Moreover, in its literature study, this study identified the measurement of corporate personality to be a key point when discussing the element (refer to section 2.4.4.2). However, none of the interviewees mentioned measurement thereof in their responses.

5.5.5.2 NWU CRM's understanding of corporate personality within the context of the NWU

Although interviewees' definitions of corporate personality did not concur with the literature study (cf. 2.4.4.1), interviewees were able to apply their definitions somewhat to the context of the NWU. When asked to do so, interviewees referred to aspects of the university such as its *student life*, *ethic of care*, *social justice*, *safety*" and *values*.

Two interviewees mentioned how the university implemented it through activities and stated that these activities were *managed*. Interviewee B used examples where he stated that the university strived to attain certain accomplishments and then, hypothetically, asked if stakeholders felt that the university had attained these accomplishments: "*...the values that it has adopted, does it practice those? ... inclusiveness and so on... does it demonstrate those?*" Interviewee C also used an example stating that the university's department of *People and Culture* (human resources) was to implement a campaign to bring awareness among staff to "*the ethic of care and inclusivity*" that the university strived toward. He also posed a hypothetical question alluding to the university's personality: "*...how do we live it, not only management, but as a university?*" Similarly, interviewee D applied his definition to the context of the NWU stating that the university was striving toward becoming *more ambitious* and that it took its *stakeholders' personalities* into account when managing them.

One interviewee also alluded to two challenges the NWU faced in terms of its corporate personality. Firstly, he stated that before the shift to a unitary model, the NWU consisted of separate *campus personalities* that played a role in determining the institutional personality. This was noted by the study on various occasions as well as a point that may have had an influence on the university's corporate reputation (refer to sections 1.1.3, 1.1.4 and 3.3). Secondly, the interviewee wondered whether staff members of the university demonstrated the university's personality in their own activities, stating that it was important for them to do so, as their representation of the university contributed greatly to how other stakeholders perceived it: *"...but the problem is, do staff members necessarily understand that? I've seen a lot of people react to that, and then not necessarily living that same institutional personality..."*.

The following section discusses the fifth and final element of corporate reputation as identified by this study, namely corporate behaviour, ethics and culture.

5.5.6 Corporate behaviour, ethics and culture

As with each of the previous four elements, the first section discusses NWU CRM management's understanding of the corporate behaviour, ethics and culture (refer to question 9-e in Table 4-5), while the second section discusses their implementation of the construct within the context of the NWU (refer to question 10-e in Table 4-5).

5.5.6.1 NWU CRM's understanding of corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture

When asked about their understanding of corporate behaviour, ethics and culture, three interviewees hesitated and stated that they had already alluded to this element in their previous discussions, although two of these interviewees added to their discussion by applying it to the context of the NWU, which is presented in the following section. The remaining of these interviewees did not apply his understanding to the NWU. In terms of this question, only one interviewee answered the question without hesitation. Parts of the interviewee's responses are recorded in Table 5-7 hereunder.

Table 5-7: Interviewees' definitions and understanding of corporate behaviour, ethics and culture

Interviewee	Answer
A	<i>"...any company should behave in an ethical manner. And those ethics should form part of their culture".</i>
B	<i>"...how we do business, the processes that you deploy..."</i>
C	<i>"I think I've touched on that (in the previous questions)".</i>
D	<i>"...ethics is at the least a broad statement".</i>

Interviewee A's understanding of the element was to break it up into three parts, namely (1) behaviour, (2) ethics, and (3) culture. This same process was used in the literature study to discuss the element (refer to sections 2.4.5.1, 2.4.5.2, and 2.4.5.3). Although the interviewee did not define each part of the element, he indicated that they were closely linked in the sense that one affects the other, as seen in his quote in Table 5-7 hereabove. He also stated that the element was *very important*. Interviewee D stated that the way in which the element was managed had changed as compared to the past: *"...we're past the point where strategy documents say that this is our institutional culture or say that this is the ethics that we believe in. It's almost the community that creates that shared belief, or shared ethics, that shared culture. And it's how brands basically take that and amplify the positive characteristics and make it their own"*. Both these interviewees also indicated that the element should be shown in the organisation's actions, with interviewee A stating, *"... the way that they do things – that automatically tells me that ethics is part of their culture"* and interviewee D stating that organisations should show the element rather than say it, because an organisation's idea of what it should be, is not necessarily *"the way that communities or stakeholders are interacting with the world anyway"*.

In the literature study presented in Chapter 2 earlier, measurement of the element was identified as key point when discussing it (refer to section 2.4.5.4). However, no interviewees mentioned this.

5.5.6.2 NWU CRM's understanding of corporate behaviour, ethics and culture within the context of the NWU

When asked how they would apply their understanding of the element to the NWU within context, three interviewees provided sufficient answers. One interviewee, as previously mentioned in section 5.5.6.1, stated that he had already alluded to this.

One of the three interviewees that answered the question felt the NWU had done well when considering the element: *"I want to believe that people do see us as a place that is dealing with things in an ethical manner... I honestly do want to believe that people do think that we are a caring institution, and it comes back to our ethic of care, that is the way that we deal with people"*. He supported his answer by stating that he was not aware of any *major issues* that affected the university in terms of the element, and that when issues did arise, this did not occur often. Remaining on the topic of ethics specifically, one interviewee mentioned that the ethics of the university had remained stable. While he, and other interviewee, found that in terms of *culture*, the university had had to deal with a few challenges. One of these interviewees mentioned that the culture of South Africa had an influence on the university's culture, while the other stated that university had a *diverse culture* and that *sub-cultures* existed *within the university*. This was due to the university's multiple *locations*, *area of practice* and *service offerings*. He continued to explain this as a challenge stating that although these *sub-cultures* existed, the university still had to find a way to create an *over-arching culture*. This was a point noted by the study as well (refer to sections 1.1.3 and 3.3).

In summary, the interviewees were not able to identify the elements of corporate reputation except for one interviewee who mentioned *behaviour*. Again however, as with the discussion of the trends, interviewees presented knowledge of what most of the identified elements were and could apply their knowledge to the context of the NWU. Some interviewees confused corporate identity with corporate image, while some also confused both corporate identity and corporate image with corporate brand. In Chapter 2, the study found that literature identified this as a challenge, indicating that these terms were often confused with one another (refer to sections 2.4.2.1 and 2.4.3.1). However, some interviewees indicated that these three elements were closely linked to one another and that this resulted in confusion among them. Two interviewees elaborated on how the corporate brand was separated from the element of corporate identity, which concurred well with the literature study (cf. section 2.4.3.1). Although interviewees' overall understanding of the

elements fared well, they struggled to discuss the elements of corporate personality and corporate behaviour, ethics and culture, in terms of definition.

Once the deliberations of the elements of corporate reputation were concluded, the researcher presented questions to interviewees pertaining to the fourth construct identified by the study. This construct was that of stakeholder relations and is reported in the following section.

5.6 Stakeholder relations

Throughout Chapter 2, it was noted that literature placed emphasis on stakeholder relations and how it pertained to corporate reputations as well as the management and measurement thereof (refer to sections 2.3.1, 2.5.1 and 2.6). Moreover, the very definition of corporate reputation provided by the study noted that it had to do with how stakeholders perceived an organisation based on the past and future interactions with the organisation (refer to section 2.3.1.1). In addition, this study identified that the perceptions of NWU stakeholders of the university, specifically staff, may have been affected due to the changes that the university had gone through over the past decade (refer to section 1.1.4). Significant emphasis was therefore placed on the construct during the semi-structured interviews with NWU CRM management. With this, interviewees were asked three questions, namely (1) who they would identify as being the stakeholders of the university, (2) of these stakeholders, who were the most important stakeholders of the NWU, and (3) how the university managed stakeholder relations. All interviewees presented sufficient knowledge of each of these topics. Each of these questions are discussed in separate sections as presented hereafter.

5.6.1 The stakeholders of the NWU

When asked who they thought the stakeholders of the NWU were, all four interviewees answered the question well. Interviewee B stated that to understand who the stakeholders of the university were, it was necessary to first define what stakeholders were. He then defined stakeholders as *“someone, or some groups, that are affected by the university’s conduct, behaviour or interventions, and when they do certain things, the university can suffer or is also affected”*. This interviewee therefore made a link between the importance of stakeholder relations when considering corporate reputation and the management thereof as discussed in literature (refer to section 2.5.1), while the other interviewees did not.

All four interviewees particularly mentioned the following four stakeholder groups: *students, staff, alumni* and *government*. Three interviewees mentioned the *communities* in which the NWU

functioned in terms of the locations that the university's campuses were positioned, while one interviewee mentioned the *broader public*. Three interviewees also referenced *regulatory* or *professional bodies*. Two interviewees stated that the *parents* of students were stakeholders of the university, three that *funders* and/or *donors* were stakeholders, two mentioned *contractors* or *suppliers*, and two also included *the Department of Higher Education and Training*. Individually, three of the interviewees also mentioned stakeholders, which other interviewees did not. These included: *the media*, *the council of the university*, *[the University Management Committee] UMC*, *[Sector Education and Training Authorities] SETAs*, *employers*, *banks*, *audit firms*, *schools* and *"the peers or the other institutions that we [the NWU] interact with"*.

In addition, two interviewees stated that when talking about the broader stakeholder groups of the university, it was important to note that most of these groups could be *segmented* into smaller stakeholder groups. Both interviewees C and D stated that when looking at students, for example, the group could be broken down into smaller groups such as *prospective students*, *current students*, *first-years*, *senior students* and *postgraduate students*. Interviewee C provided another example referring to the smaller groups of *staff* as being *support staff* and *academic staff*. Interviewee C also discussed the importance of stakeholder management here quite broadly. While most of his discussion on this topic is discussed further in section 5.6.3 that follows, the study notes the importance of him segmenting larger groups here. He stated that larger stakeholder groups had to be segmented because the smaller groups within them had, at times, *different needs*, and that the university had to take these needs into account when *managing* and *communicating* with their stakeholders.

In summary, when comparing the stakeholders identified by NWU CRM management to the various stakeholders identified in sections 1.1.2 and 3.2.2, the interviewees collectively mentioned all stakeholders of the university with some providing extra, segmented groups to the discussion.

5.6.2 The most important stakeholders of the NWU

After interviewees had identified the stakeholders of the NWU, the researcher probed further into the topic, asking who, of these identified stakeholders, they thought were the most important stakeholders of the university. Interviewee B laughed when asked the question and stated that the question was *controversial*, suggesting that he would not rank stakeholders in terms of importance if he did not have to. Similarly, interviewee C stated the university was *"quite a complex organisation"* when it came to stakeholder identification and indicated that different stakeholders played different *critical* roles within the university.

All interviewees indicated that the *staff*, *students* and *alumni* of the university were its most important stakeholders. Interviewee A was particularly confident when answering the question, stating, “*It’s internal*”, and then continued to further rank the level of importance with staff and students competing for first and alumni being the second most important group. Interviewee D added the *Department of Higher Education and Training* here, while interviewees B and C added *donors* to the list of most important stakeholders.

The topic of stakeholder relations was further investigated when the researcher posed a third question to interviewees. This is presented in the following section.

5.6.3 Stakeholder management at the NWU

To conclude the discussion of stakeholder relations, interviewees were asked how the NWU managed it. All interviewees presented sufficient knowledge of how this was done.

Interviewee A placed emphasis on communication with stakeholders stating that the university managed them by “*keeping them informed*” and “*empowering them with information*”. Here, the researcher saw an opportunity to ask a follow-up question that was not posed to the remaining three interviewees. The researcher enquired how this information was communicated to each stakeholder group, referring specifically to the platforms the university used to communicate with each. Interviewee A answered that different platforms were used for different stakeholder groups and that these platforms were identified as a direct result of the *feedback* the university had received from stakeholders. He presented the researcher with examples stating that when communicating with staff specifically, the NWU used “*the intranet, the Daily Comms, e-mails to specific staff*”, “*personal engagements with staff especially from management’s side*”, *SMSs* and “*publications, like Eish!*”. In terms of students, he stated the university used *eFundi*, *SMSs* and *social media*. In addition, he stated that staff did not regard *social media* as a platform that they wanted to use to be communicated with. Similarly, interviewee C also mentioned the use of different platforms for different stakeholders stating, “*...we use different platforms, from websites to annual reports...that are relevant to them*”.

Three interviewees also stated that management of stakeholder relations had a lot to do with *engaging* with stakeholders and then taking the *feedback* acquired from these engagements into consideration when drafting a *strategy* for stakeholder relations. Interviewee C stated that the university first identifies who its stakeholders are “*and then who is responsible for communicating with them*”. He provided examples where he indicated that the *Office of the Vice-Chancellor* was,

for instance, responsible for *“engaging and communicating”* with *donors and government*. He added to how the university managed stakeholder relations stating, *“I think once we have engaged with them, the one point that I want to add there, is the issue of evaluating or monitoring how we engage with them. So, feedback is very critical”*. Interviewees B and D, as previously stated, also placed emphasis on engagements and feedback. Interviewee B stated that the university had various *protocols* that it used for different stakeholder groups because *“their needs are different”*. He added that it was important for the university to *“listen to their [stakeholders] concerns and obviously try to introduce measures that can meet those needs or expectations”*. Interviewee D answered in the same line referring to how the university had established *personalised relationships* with stakeholders and that communication to each group was *tailor made*. He added that the university took the *holistic needs* of the different stakeholder groups into consideration and then continuously *monitored and evaluated* these needs. The university then used the *feedback* it received from this process to identify *“integrated marketing plans or communications plans”* to personalise communications to the various stakeholder groups.

In summary, NWU CRM management was able to sufficiently identify all stakeholders of the university as well as rank them in levels of importance, although two interviewees felt that all stakeholders were important to the university. All interviewees had the same idea of how stakeholder relations were managed at the university and each interviewee’s understanding thereof was in line with what was identified by the holistic group. In addition, the knowledge that the interviewees presented on the topic was in-depth and more than sufficient (cf. sections 2.3.1 and 2.5.2)

Once the interviewees had provided insight into stakeholder relations, the discussion of each of the interviews shifted to the fifth construct identified by the study. This was corporate reputation management and is discussed in the proceeding section.

5.7 Corporate reputation management

In section 2.5, the study noted that corporate reputations should be managed. In this discussion, the study divided corporate reputation management into three sections, namely (1) the basic principles of corporate reputation management that provided an understanding of the construct, (2) the guidelines thereof, and (3) how it related to risk management and crisis communication. Although not discussed as separate sections, the study noted the importance of two additional points when discussing the construct, namely responsibility, and how corporate reputation management aided in attaining strategic goals. From this, questions 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 were

developed (refer to Table 4-5). With five points and five questions, the study aimed to measure each of these points with one question each. The proceeding sections discuss the interviewees' answers, with each point presented as a section.

5.7.1 Understanding corporate reputation management

Throughout Chapter 2, emphasis was placed on the importance of managing corporate reputations. Specifically, section 2.5.1 provided a general discussion on corporate reputation management, considering key points when discussing the topic. The first question in terms of corporate reputation management posed to interviewees therefore aimed to determine how interviewees understood the construct. Interviewees were asked to provide their understanding of the construct. Three interviewees chose to explain the construct within the context of the NWU, while one alluded to his understanding in a more theoretical manner.

Three interviewees stated that corporate reputation management referred to a *strategy* or *processes* that organisations develop to ensure that the organisation's corporate reputation is perceived among stakeholders as the organisation would like it to be. Interviewee B stated that, to him, corporate reputation management was *"putting systems and processes in place to make sure that the organisation's reputation remains intact and making sure that you are not ridged in terms of responding to the issues that are happening around you"*. Interviewee D answered within the context of the NWU and stated, *"We have identified a certain direction that the university wants to go in, and the short answer is, this is our current reputation, this is the identified current strategy and where we want to be at. Doing gap analysis and then managing the reputation to be at a point where we want to be... as an institution"*. Interviewee C also answered within the context of how the university manages corporate reputation: *"We identify our communication objectives. We identify who we want to talk to. We identify the message, and then we identify the platforms. And then to say feedback is very important because we need to know what they are thinking about us, what is their experience, what are their perceptions? ... we use that data to inform and improve."* While these interviewees provided an indication of how it happened, interviewee A placed emphasis on the need for corporate reputation management. He also stated that it should be done *proactively*. When considering issues that may affect corporate reputations, interviewee A indicated that it referred to the need for honest and transparent communication. He also added that when an organisation's corporate reputation was good, it made the management thereof easier as stakeholders who positively perceived an organisation would stand up for the organisation.

From the above discussion, interviewees understood that corporate reputation management entailed the creation and implementation of processes and or strategies, stakeholder relations, truthful and transparent communication and that it should be measured to be managed, all points raised in section 2.5.1. The interviewees' understanding of the construct was therefore noted as sufficient, especially when taking their answers within the context of the NWU into consideration. In addition, it seemed as though all interviewees had the same understanding of how the NWU approached corporate reputation management.

Two additional points raised in section 2.5.1 were that organisations should employ specialist communication staff to manage corporate reputations and that it entailed managing the elements of corporate reputation. None of the interviewees alluded to these two points. In terms of the latter, interviewees showed an understanding of the elements of corporate reputation both in theory and context earlier in their interviews. However, they did not link the influences of the elements to effects on corporate reputation (refer to section 5.5 holistically). In terms of the former, while interviewees did not allude to the point of responsibility here, the next question asked them to elaborate on exactly that.

5.7.2 Taking responsibility for corporate reputation management

Section 2.5.1 found that the management of organisations should be involved in corporate reputation management, and that in addition, organisations should employ specialised staff who deal with corporate communication issues such as corporate reputation. However, earlier the study also found that stakeholders have an impact on the corporate reputations of organisations, suggesting that they too share some of the responsibility (refer to section 2.3.1). With this, the second question to measure corporate reputation management was developed. Here interviewees were asked who they thought should be responsible for managing corporate reputations.

Without hesitation, all interviewees stated that *everyone* who formed part of the organisation was responsible for corporate reputation management. Two interviewees provided examples of why they thought it was necessary for *everyone* to take responsibility thereof. Interviewee A stated that many times, stakeholders' perceptions are influenced by what they see and hear from others. He explained that if an NWU staff member for example, were to create a negative image of the university in their friends' minds, for example, these friends would then have a negative perception of the university because people trust what their friends say to be true. Interviewee D used the

example of content placed on various student associations' social media platforms as being able to influence the NWU's corporate reputation.

Three interviewees referred to the management of an organisation having a hand in corporate reputation management. Interviewees A and B referenced the *[Vice-Chancellor] VC*, although they again stated that the VC was not solely responsible for it, while interviewee C referenced *top management*, also again while alluding to the need for everyone to do their part: “...*from the top management to a cleaner*”.

All four interviewees also stated that organisations should have dedicated *departments* that *guide* and *facilitate* corporate reputation management. Although not being solely responsible for it, the interviewees indicated that departments such as the NWU CRM were responsible for *monitoring* corporate reputations and again *guiding* the organisation in terms of acting when it was needed. Interviewee C stated, “*We are accountable, CRM, for developing policies, developing practices... in fact we are facilitating...*”. Interviewee B stated, “*That is why the university has different divisions... to manage specific things, so I'll say by a large, the Corporate Relations and Marketing are the custodians of the processes, the frameworks and monitoring, evaluating what works, what doesn't work*”. Similarly, interviewee C stated, “...*we as CRM, have to offer guidance to make sure that people understand the direction that we are going in*”, while interviewee A alluded to the role that his department played in corporate reputation management stating, “*I cannot do it alone*”, and then continued to explain why everyone had to take responsibility for it.

From the above discussion, it seems that all the members of NWU CRM management understand who should take responsibility for corporate reputation in the same way. This understanding also concurs with what is presented in literature as discussed in the beginning of this section. The third point measured in terms of corporate reputation management is examined next.

5.7.3 The role of corporate reputation management in the attainment of strategic goals

Section 2.5.1 also identified that an organisation's corporate reputation management played a crucial role in the attainment of its strategic goals. Interviewees were therefore asked how they thought corporate reputation management aided in attaining such goals.

With this, all four interviewees acknowledged that corporate reputation and adequate management thereof were necessary for organisations to attain such goals. Interviewees A and C specifically stated its importance with interviewee A stating, “*It is important*”, and interviewee C,

“Very, very critical”. Furthermore, all four interviewees felt that corporate reputation management assisted in attaining strategic goals in the sense that an organisation’s corporate reputation determined to what extent *stakeholders* bought into the organisation. Interviewee B stated, *“the corporate goals or objectives are about achieving the organisation’s strategy and plans... and in many cases those goals are talking to the stakeholders – the people who will be working with the organisation.”* Similarly, interviewee C stated, *“...any institution has a strategy, and you want to be at that strategy to get buy in from your stakeholders... that actually has an influence on you getting where you want to be”*.

In addition, all interviewees stated that how an organisation’s corporate reputation was perceived (being either good or bad) had an effect on attaining strategic goals, or objectives. Two interviewees spoke to this in a broader sense, while one of these interviewees and the remaining two interviewees alluded to it using the context of the NWU as an example. With regard to the former, Interviewee B stated, *“...if the corporate reputation is bad you may struggle to achieve any of the strategic goals because there is lack trust in the reputation, or in that brand...”* and interviewee C stated, *“you need to have the reputation that they [stakeholders] want to associate with, and if you don’t have that reputation, you have to actively work toward getting that reputation”*. In terms of the latter, interviewees stated that attracting quality students and staff was an objective of the university. They then continued to explain that if the NWU had a good corporate reputation, it would aid in attaining this goal, while if it had a bad reputation, it would make it difficult for the NWU to attain this goal.

It is evident that all members of NWU CRM management felt that corporate reputation management played a crucial role in the attainment of not only an organisation’s strategical goals in the broader sense, but within the context of the NWU as well.

The fourth question posed to interviewees regarding corporate reputation management is discussed in the proceeding section.

5.7.4 Guidelines to corporate reputation management

Although stakeholder relation management is critical within the practice of corporate reputation management, corporate reputation management consists of more than just that. Literature presents various basic principles on the topic, but also provides a detailed framework of the guidelines that should be followed when implementing processes and activities (refer to section 2.5.4.2). Although literature makes specific reference to the model of **comprehensive reputation**

management, none of the interviewees presented knowledge of models or theories such as this. However, when taking the interviewees' broader discussions into account, it is evident that, collectively, the interviewees had some understanding of how corporate reputations should be managed.

Section 2.5.4.2 showed that comprehensive reputation management consisted of **seven activities**. The answers provided by interviewees can be placed within these activities. No one interviewee alluded to all these activities, but as mentioned earlier, most of the activities were noted in their collective responses.

In terms of **activity 1**, three interviewees' understanding concurred with literature as they felt that an organisation should know what the objective of its corporate reputation management was and develop a plan in accordance with this. Interviewee A stated, *"...make sure that you are very hands on in the institution to allow you to identify the gaps and the possible problems"*, interviewee B stated, *"...first and foremost people must know what the corporate reputation or brand management issues are within the organisation"*, and interviewee D stated, *"...it would depend on the strategy that you want to follow"*.

In terms of **activity 2**, all four interviewees' understanding concurred adequately with literature as all mentioned the need to understand stakeholder perceptions. However, no interviewees alluded to specific activities such as a **reputation audit**.

In terms of **activity 3**, three interviewees noted that organisations should *identify* the direction that they wanted to go in, and then act accordingly. Here Interviewee A, for example, stated, *"Once you have those [problems] identified, you would be able to address them"*, while interviewee D inverted this stating, *"We should identify what the positives are, we should amplify that"*.

In terms of **activity 4**, no interviewees stated that a **corporate reputation management plan** had to be created, although two interviewees made specific reference to the development and/or use of *manuals, policies and strategies*.

In terms of **activity 5**, two interviewees noted that it was necessary for an organisation to communicate to all staff what their roles were in the corporate reputation management process. Here, interviewee B stated, *"...everyone within the organisation needs to appreciate the importance of the corporate reputation..."*, and interviewee D stated, *"... making sure that each and every staff member understands what they are required to do"*. Interviewee C, however,

alluded to this stating that departments of corporate relations and marketing were *responsible* for *facilitating* corporate reputation management, but that as he had stated earlier, *everyone* needed to play their part.

In terms of **activity 6**, two interviewees emphasised the need to *follow up* on how stakeholders perceived the organisation. Interviewee D made specific mention of the use of **gap analysis** and interviewee A stated that it was necessary to *constantly measure* these perceptions.

Finally, in terms of **activity 7**, two interviewees alluded to taking the feedback received from stakeholders into further consideration. Interviewee A stated, “*Based on that, you start the whole process again*”, and that corporate reputation management was a *constant process* that had to be *maintained*, while interviewee D used the NWU as an example, stating that the university should then “*provide the relevant stakeholder group with the feedback on what the university’s standpoint is*”.

From the above discussion, it seems as though NWU CRM management collectively have an idea of how to go about corporate reputation management. However, where interviewees seemed to be on the same page in issues such as who was responsible for it and how it aided in attaining strategic goals (refer to sections 5.7.2 and 5.7.3), they seemed to not be on the same page when it came to implementing corporate reputation management. Therefore, whether the NWU has a specific plan for corporate reputation management or not, is unclear.

The following section reports on the fifth and final question posed to interviewees in terms of corporate reputation management.

5.7.5 Linking corporate reputation management to crisis communication and reputational risk management

Section 2.5.3 linked corporate reputation management to risk management and crisis communication in the sense that when organisations are faced with risks or find themselves in a crisis, these situations could affect its corporate reputation negatively.

All interviewees showed an understanding of the link between corporate reputation management, crisis communication and reputational risk management that concurred well with literature (cf. section 2.5.3). Interviewee A made specific reference **to not push ideas onto stakeholders** as well as **knowing when to react and how to react to challenges** or risks, based on an **assessment** thereof. Interviewee C stated that all organisations will be faced with risks or crises

at one point or another and that they should be *active* in managing such circumstances by developing ***crisis communication plans***. Similarly, interviewee D stated that organisations should ***identify risks*** and then *manage* them accordingly. Interviewee B linked crisis communication to corporate reputation management, stating that organisations needed to manage one, to be able to manage the other: “... *you introduce crisis communication because you are concerned with the organisation’s reputation, because otherwise then there is no point in having crisis communication. You cannot have one if you are not concerned about the other*”.

In terms of how risk was assessed, a key point of discussion in section 2.5.3, three interviewees presented adequate knowledge thereof referring to the use of *plans, tools, strategies* and a *risk register*. **ERM systems** specifically were, however, not mentioned.

In summary, when considering NWU CRM management’s understanding of corporate reputation management, the interviewees had a sufficient understanding of the construct. Their basic understanding thereof fared very well, with additional key points being raised during their interviews compared to literature. In terms of who should be responsible for corporate reputation management, all interviewees again presented adequate knowledge when compared to literature and, in addition, all interviewees seemed to be on the same page. The same was applicable when considering interviewees’ understanding of how corporate reputation management aided in the attainment of strategic goals. Interviewees also present sufficient knowledge of how corporate reputation management linked to crisis communication and risk management. However, the one point that interviewees struggled with was that of the guidelines of corporate reputation management. Here, their collective understanding concurred somewhat with literature, but individually the interviewees did not fare well. The answer as to whether the NWU therefore had a **comprehensive reputation management** plan in place, was unclear.

Throughout their interviews, most, if not all interviewees alluded to the measurement of corporate reputation. This was also a construct identified by the study. As such, it is discussed in the following section.

5.8 Corporate reputation measurement

Corporate reputation measurement was noted as an important point of discussion when considering corporate reputation in theory (refer to section 2.6). Measurement was therefore identified as a construct by this study. In terms of corporate reputation measurement, interviewees were asked a total of nine questions. The first question asked interviewees what their

understanding of corporate reputation measurement was (refer to question 19 in Table 4-5). The second question asked interviewees how often they thought corporate reputations should be measured (refer to question 20 in Table 4-5). The third to ninth questions aimed to measure NWU CRM management's perceptions of the NWU's corporate reputation in terms of the seven dimensions of RepTrak™, with each dimension as a question (refer to questions 21 to 27 in Table 4-5). Each of these questions is discussed in the sections that follow hereunder.

5.8.1 NWU CRM's understanding of corporate reputation measurement

In section 2.6, the study noted that, in literature, the measurement of corporate reputation had a lot to do with **stakeholder perceptions**. Most of the interviewees' understanding of measurement concurred with this as they referred to the *perceptions* and *engagement* of, and *feedback* from stakeholders.

However, section 2.6 also indicated that measurement was about more than just looking at how stakeholders perceived organisations. It was found that measurement was how organisations physically went about implementing the use of various **tools** that provided them with insight to these perceptions, and then linked the results of these activities back to corporate reputation management. Three interviewees discussed the use of measurement tools when considering corporate reputation referring to *tools* specifically, *assessments*, a *[mean percentage score] MPS*, a *brand audit* and *association and consideration*. However, none of the interviewees listed tools mentioned in section 2.6, including the Rotterdam Organisational Test (RIOT), the corporate personality scale, the Reputation Quotient (RQ) or RepTrak™. What was noted though, was that in section 2.6 discussed the need for organisations to choose which tools they wanted to use carefully as not every available tool measured all aspects of an organisation's corporate reputation or could be used in measuring all stakeholder groups' perceptions. Interviewee C discussed this matter stating, "...*you need to identify what is important to you, and these tools also must speak to the objectives that you wanted to achieve. Because if they are not aligned, then it's useless*". Interviewee D also alluded to the matter stating that organisations should decide *which data* they deemed to be *relevant* when considering corporate reputation measurement.

In terms of the **importance** of corporate reputation measurement, one interviewee made mention of this. Interviewee B stated that he felt it was important to measure corporate reputation because it allowed an organisation to determine how it fared against its competitors. Interviewee A alluded to its importance stating that corporate reputation measurement was to be *constantly monitored*.

From the discussion above, NWU CRM management had an adequate understanding of corporate reputation measurement, although some interviewees' understanding thereof fared better than others.

5.8.2 The frequency at which corporate reputations should be measured

While interviewee A previously stated that corporate reputation measurement needed to be *constantly monitored* (refer to section 5.8.1), each interviewee was asked how often they thought corporate reputations should be measured. This interviewee reiterated that it needed to *constantly* happen through organisations "*keeping their ears on the ground*", even if this was done *informally*. Interviewee D concurred with this opinion stating that corporate reputation measurement was a "*day-in-and-day-out process*" that had to take place "*the whole time, every day, 24 hours a day*". However, both these interviewees, and the remaining two interviewees, indicated that *formal* measurement, or measurements at a *corporate level* should also take place. While one interviewee did not mention how often he thought formal measurements should take place, two interviewees stated that it should be done every two to three years. The remaining interviewees felt that it should be done *at least per quarter*. However, section 2.6.2 stated that corporate reputations should be assessed annually.

Interviewees C and D stated that although corporate reputation as a whole should be measured at certain intervals, organisations had certain activities or *projects* that they implemented that had an effect on corporate reputations. They stated that these *projects* should each be measured individually after implementation as well. Interviewee C stated, "*It depends on the project. Some projects you need to measure it immediately...*", while interviewee D used the example of the NWU's *Registration and Orientation (R&O)* programme, stating that the university measured the performance of the programme throughout its implementation.

Furthermore, a concern was noted by the researcher in one of the interviews where one interviewee stated that organisations "*should pick their time right*" when conducting formal measurements. He suggested that formal measurement should not be done when the organisation was being influenced by matters that may affect its corporate reputation negatively, as the corporate reputation would then be measured as having negative attributes. This contradicts the need for corporate reputation management as the point of measurement is to identify how the organisation is perceived, and then to act accordingly in terms of its management.

From the above discussion, it seems that while interviewees shared some neutral ground on the topic, the collective group did not quite agree on the matter completely.

The final set of questions pertaining to corporate reputation measurement pertained to RepTrak™. These discussions are presented in the following section.

5.8.3 The dimensions of RepTrak™

In section 2.6.1, this study stated that RepTrak™ was the measurement instrument that would be used by this study. RepTrak™ was primarily used to develop an online survey that was available for all staff at the NWU to answer. This was the quantitative approach by the study and the holistic findings thereof are presented in the next chapter. While all the interviewees in the qualitative approach indicated that they had filled in the survey, the study included the seven dimensions of RepTrak™ here as well.

With this, interviewees were asked what their overall perception of each dimension was, specifically within the context of the NWU (refer to questions 21 to 27 in Table 4.5). The seven dimensions of RepTrak™ were identified as products and services, workplace, innovation, governance, citizenship, leadership, and performance (refer to section 2.6.1). Each of these dimensions is discussed in the proceeding sections.

5.8.3.1 Products and services

When asked what their overall perceptions of the NWU's products and services were, all interviewees presented a positive view referring to the products and services as being either *good*, *very good* or *the best in the country* when compared to other universities.

One interviewee was particularly confident in his answer stating that, from what he had seen in terms of *stakeholder feedback*, the university had fared very well. Similarly, another interviewee referred to how the university placed in *external rankings*, indicating that it competed well, while another stated that the NWU offered *quality education*. Two interviewees mentioned that the NWU was leading in the sector when it came to programmes such as *forensic accounting*, *engineering*, *pharmacy* and *animal health*.

Furthermore, one interviewee stated that the NWU took feedback from employers seriously. He stated that the university presented its programmes in a manner that was "*in line with market needs*" to ensure that its graduates were able to get jobs on completion of their studies.

While all the interviewees mentioned how well the university fared in terms of product offerings, none of the interviewees referenced the services of the university specifically.

5.8.3.2 Workplace

When asked what their overall perceptions of the NWU's workplace were, two interviewees felt positive, with one interviewee simply stating that it was *impressive* and the other that it was *very good*. The former of these interviewees elaborated on why he felt it was positive, linking it to his own experience. He stated that he had "*never had to come to an office that (he) did not want to be in*". He also stated that he worked with *nice people* and that the *buildings* and *gardens* of the university were *properly maintained*. He did, however, state that people's perceptions of the dimension would be based on how they *experienced it*. Similarly, the remaining two interviewees remained on the fence. Both these interviewees stated that this dimension would be experienced differently by different people and did not specifically provide their personal perceptions. Instead, these interviewees indicated that the dimension was influenced by other factors such as how *line managers* managed departments, *the sub-cultures* that existed within the university *across campuses*, and *the changes* that the university had gone through *over the past few years*. Both these interviewees also stated that they thought measuring the dimension would conclude *mixed responses* with some "*people being very positive*" and some "*people being very negative*".

5.8.3.3 Innovation

When interviewees were asked what their overall perception of the NWU's innovation was, all interviewees stated that the dimension was average. One interviewee stated that it was simply *moderate*, and another ranked the dimension as a 4 on a *scale of 1 to 5*, and added that the university was doing *okay*. Another interviewee stated that the dimension was problematic, not just for the NWU, but for universities *worldwide*. He explained that the NWU had *innovative practices*, but felt that it was *lacking in certain areas*, although again he stated that on a global level "*universities need to adapt much quicker to their environment*". While the remaining interviewee also stated that the NWU's innovation was average, he provided an explanation for why he thought the university did not measure better. He felt that while the NWU had been *doing a lot* in terms of innovation, that the departments that were "*responsible for putting it out there*" were "*not necessarily informed about it*".

5.8.3.4 Governance

When asked what their overall perception of the NWU's governance was, the dimension fared as being the most positively perceived dimension. Interviewees used terms such as *exceptionally well*, *very impressive*, *excellent* and *very good* to describe the dimension.

Two interviewees elaborated on why they felt so strongly about the dimension. One interviewee stated that the university had received many *awards* and alluded other tangible outcomes that resulted from "*the checks and balances that are built into the system*". The remaining interviewee used his personal experience as an example, stating that he *attended every council meeting* and therefore knew that management had a *critical eye* on all institutional activities that ensured that they were implemented *in the right way*.

5.8.3.5 Citizenship

In section 2.6.1, this study noted that the dimension of citizenship pertained to how ethical an organisation was and referred to its corporate social responsibilities. When interviewees were asked what their overall perception of the dimension was, the researcher therefore stated this.

With this, the interviewees had mixed feelings about the dimension. Two interviewees stated that the NWU *could do more*, while one interviewee stated that on a scale of 1 to 5, he would rate the dimension as a 4 suggesting that there was room for improvement as indicated by his colleagues. One of the former two interviewees stated that the dimension *required further work*. In line with this, the other of the two interviewees stated that although the NWU was an institution that had good *ethics and morals*, he felt that the individuals who constitute the NWU had an influence on how the university was perceived in this dimension, as the university was *a duplication of society*.

The remaining interviewee, however, felt that the NWU's citizenship was *very good*, especially in comparison to *other institutions in the country*. The interviewee stated that his perception may be because of his long ties with the university, referring specifically to his time as a student at the NWU. Here, he stated that as a student, he formed part of the university's *Student [Reach Out and Give] RAG Community Service*. From his experience, he noted that this service had done a *lot of good* since its inception. He also stated that he felt the dimension measured so well because students themselves were given "*the opportunity to run that organisation*" on their own.

From the above discussion, the interviewees' overall perceptions of the NWU's citizenship varied from being good, to average, to requiring attention and action.

5.8.3.6 Leadership

As with citizenship, the dimension of leadership was accompanied by a specific definition in the literature study (refer to section 2.6.1). Here, the dimension was defined as referring specifically to the top management position of organisations, being the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). When interviewees were asked what their overall perceptions of the NWU's leadership was, the researcher therefore again presented a definition of the dimension and indicated that, in terms of the NWU, the dimension would refer specifically to the university's VC. It should also be noted that in the last year of the study when these interviews were conducted, the NWU had three individuals in this position. Firstly, Prof Dan Kgwadi had been the VC for an extended period and was the VC when this study was started. By the end of 2021, Prof Kgwadi resigned to take the position of VC at another institution. Prof Linda Du Plessis, a Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) of the NWU on its Vanderbijlpark Campus, then began acting in the VC position for a few months. The position was then advertised, and by June 2022, Dr Bizmark Tyobeka, a former council member of the NWU, had taken the position as the new VC at the NWU. This was a varying factor in the interviews. While Dr Tyobeka's appointment had been announced in May 2022 when the first interviewee's interview was done, he had not yet physically taken over the position. Prof Du Plessis was therefore still acting at the time of interviewee A's interview. Dr Tyobeka, however, had taken over the position in June 2022 by the time the remaining three interviewees' interviews took place. While two interviewees did not allude to this variant stating that the dimension was *doing very well or good*, the remaining two interviewees acknowledged the effect that the variant may have had when measuring the dimension. One of these interviewees stated that it was a *"difficult question to ask"* at the time, while the other interviewee mentioned all the previously mentioned VCs, as well as Dr Theuns Eloff (Prof Kgwadi's predecessor). However, both these interviewees stated that although the VC position had been filled by different candidates, that the university fared well in terms of leadership. One interviewee stated that the NWU was a *well-respected* institution and that its *leadership* took *"charge in executing the (university's) strategy"*. The other interviewee stated that each of the VCs had done a good job and that he had no reason to believe that the incoming VC would not.

In addition, one interviewee stated that the leadership of an organisation had a *big influence on the reputation* of it.

From the above discussion, it is clear that in terms of NWU CRM managements' perceptions, the NWU had always had good leadership and that this was expected to continue in the future.

5.8.3.7 Performance

While this dimension is referred to as *performance*, the literature discussion showed that the dimension focused on the financial performance of an organisation (refer to section 2.6.1). To prevent confusion and take relevant information away from the interviews, the researcher therefore phrased it as such when asking what the interviewees' overall perception of it was.

The interviewees' responses varied slightly with one interviewee stating that it was *stable*, two that it was *doing well* and *good* and the last that it was *very good*.

One interviewee stated that the evidence of this positive perception was tangible in the sense that it could be seen when the university was placed in certain situations such as *Covid*. Here, he stated that although many families had fallen on hard times, the university was able to continue its business as usual even if *a lot of students* were not able to *pay* their fees. Similarly, another interviewee stated that because the university was managed well, its financial performance was also sufficiently managed. Here, he complimented the university's *executive director of Finance* as having a "*very close hand on how things are being done*". He also stated that the university's *council* kept a close eye on its finances and that they *immediately took action* when it was needed. He also alluded to tangible results through providing insight to the *clean reports from the (university's) external auditors*.

In summary, when considering corporate reputation measurement as a construct measured by the semi-structured interviews, NWU CRM management had an average understanding thereof. They understood what the construct was, although some interviewees showed more knowledge of the construct than others. The interviewees also varied in opinion regarding how often corporate reputations should be measured and while some interviewees identified that the construct consisted of the use of *tools* or *assessments*, none of the interviewees mentioned any tools presented in literature. Considering RepTrak™ within the context of the NWU, interviewees' perceptions continued to vary regarding the dimension of citizenship; while some thought it was good, others did not agree. Interviewees remained divided when considering the workplace, as two interviewees felt positively toward it and two felt that it was a dimension that may not fare well with all NWU staff. The dimensions of products and services, governance, leadership, and performance fared well in the collective group, while innovation was determined to be a dimension that NWU needed to improve upon.

With this, the discussions on corporate reputation measurement concluded in the interviews. The next construct identified by the study was the advantages that a strong corporate reputation could provide for organisations. As such, this construct was also incorporated into the interviews. The advantages of a strong corporate reputation are therefore discussed in the proceeding section.

5.9 The advantages of a strong corporate reputation

The literature review in Chapter 2 identified that a strong corporate reputation was advantageous for an organisation. With this, many such advantages were identified (refer to section 2.7). These advantages included, but were not limited to, stable revenues for organisations' financial performances, an enhanced competitive advantage, the organisation's products, and services being perceived as high quality, brand loyalty, assistance in effective stakeholder relations, the enhanced ability to attract paramount staff, a decrease in the likelihood of crisis and risks that affect the organisation, and the creation of a positively perceived workplace. The construct of advantages was therefore deemed to be an important construct to be measured by this study.

With this, interviewees were asked what advantages they thought a strong corporate reputation would result in for organisations (refer to question 28 in Table 4-5). Only one interviewee felt that corporate reputation was specifically important when it came to yielding the benefits thereof, stating that if an organisation did not have a strong reputation, that it would *not survive*. However, all four interviewees presented knowledge that strong corporate reputations would yield benefits for an organisation through listing advantages. Two interviewees (A and B) stated that within the context of the NWU, a strong corporate reputation would "*attract high performing students*". One of these interviewees elaborated on the importance of this stating that if the university, specifically, was unable to attract students, that it may as well *close down* as this stakeholder group formed part of the university's core business. The two other interviewees (C and D) stated that strong corporate reputations aided in *achieving the strategic goals* of an organisation.

In addition, interviewees B and D alluded to other advantages that a strong corporate reputation may result in. Interviewee B listed *better partnerships* and an increase in *investments, donors* and *collaborations*, while interviewee D stated that *buy-in from stakeholders* would increase and that this would result in these stakeholders becoming *brand ambassadors*.

While interviewees mentioned that a strong corporate reputation would assist in achieving strategic goals, and mentioned advantages such as a better financial performance, brand loyalty and advantages related to stakeholder relations, the remaining advantages discussed in section

2.7 were not mentioned by interviewees. It was surprising that the advantage of a better perception of the workplace was not mentioned by the interviewees as this was a dimension of corporate reputation that half the interviewees stated would possibly be negatively perceived by stakeholders of the NWU (refer to section 5.8.3.2).

Sections 5.3 to 5.9 hereabove discussed all the constructs of corporate reputation identified in Chapter 2. However, this study also placed emphasis on the HES of South Africa due to the NWU's past and current circumstances (refer to Chapter 3). Moreover, in its problem statement, the study stated that achieving a strong, or stronger, corporate reputation may just be the upper hand that the university needed when taking its past and current situations into consideration (refer to section 1.1.4). The study therefore also probed into how interviewees felt the NWU fared within this sector. With this, the last question to the interview was posed to interviewees. The findings thereof are discussed in the proceeding section.

5.10 The NWU within the South African HES

To end off the interviews, interviewees were asked how they felt about the NWU's corporate reputation in terms of how it fared against that of its competitors (refer to question 29 in Table 4-5).

The overall perception of how the NWU fared against its competitors was positive. Interviewees stated that the university *fared quite/very well*, that it performed *really good* in this regard, and that it was *“at the top in terms of products...stability...governance... and leadership”*. Interviewee C stated that it fared *“better compared to other universities”*.

Interviewee B stated that when considering the NWU's *“history, location and journey it has had to travel”*, he felt that the NWU competed well in the sector. Similarly, interviewee D stated that within South Africa's HES, the NWU was measured against universities that *haven't been through mergers* and that had *existed longer*, suggesting that these factors influenced how the NWU fared within the sector. Interviewees A and C also stated that the HES consisted of *26 universities* and that *rankings* placed the NWU in *the top seven* of these universities. In addition, Interviewee A stated that the NWU enjoyed a surplus of applications annually and that these applications came from all over the country, and many even from *Namibia*. He argued that if students were willing to attend a university so far from home, that the NWU must be *their first choice*.

Although interviewee D stated that the NWU fared well in the sector, he was the only interviewee that felt the university could do better in this regard, stating: *“I think the awareness [of the NWU]*

is there and I think that's also what the focus was on in the past few years when we changed the brand and those sort of things, but it's now making sure that the buy decision increases. But that will come through consistency. As I said, it's not bad, but it's not necessarily where we would like to be measured".

To conclude this chapter, the next section provides a summative discussion of the results obtained by the qualitative approach of the study that aimed to determine what the NWU's current approach to corporate reputation management was.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the NWU's current approach to corporate reputation management by conducting four semi-structured interviews with NWU CRM management. The findings of the chapter aimed to answer the study's second specific research question, namely:

What is the North-West University's approach to the university's current corporate reputation management? (Refer to section 1.2.2).

The chapter began by providing a biographical profile of the four NWU CRM management members. Thereafter, the chapter was divided into sections that measured the constructs identified by the literature study, namely the basic understanding of corporate reputation, trends affecting corporate reputation, its elements, stakeholder relations, its management, its measurement, its advantages, and the university's competitive advantage within the sector that it functioned. Each of these sections were also divided into sub-sections, depending on how many questions pertained to each construct. From these discussions, the chapter found that NWU CRM management had a sufficient understanding of corporate reputation and of the management and measurement thereof, although some points were identified as requiring a better understanding.

In terms of the first construct identified by the study, namely a basic understanding of what corporate reputation was, the collective group's understanding was sufficient. Particularly, interviewees presented an understanding that corporate reputation had to do with how stakeholders perceived an organisation and that these perceptions could affect the organisation at hand.

The second construct pertained to trends that affected corporate reputations. Interviewees struggled with this question, as none of the interviewees were able to identify all the trends that were identified in the literature study. However, the interviewees alluded to some of these trends,

mentioning terms such as technology, digital marketing, and social media. Interviewees were provided with a list of the seven trends that the study identified thereafter. They were then asked what their understanding of each trend was, and how they thought the trend had affected the NWU specifically. Regarding the former and the latter, the interviewees shared a sufficient understanding of each, although one interviewee argued that Covid-19 was not a trend in his opinion. Moreover, the findings identified an eighth trend that can affect corporate reputation, specifically within a university setting, namely climate change initiatives.

The third construct was that of the elements of corporate reputation. With this, interviewees were first asked what they would identify as being the elements of corporate reputation. Most of the interviewees were not able to name any elements identified in literature except for one interviewee who stated that behaviour was an element of corporate reputation. However, when provided with a list of the elements identified in literature, the interviewees' overall understanding thereof was fair. Interviewees adequately described most of the elements and how they could be implemented within the context of the NWU. With some of the elements, some interviewees were not able to provide an adequate understanding as they, for example, confused corporate identity, corporate image, and corporate brand with one another. However, the confusion can be understood, as some interviewees and literature stated that these three elements were closely linked to one another. Particularly, in terms of the corporate brand, two interviewees separated the element from the others by elaborating on what the element was constituted of. Interviewees also struggled to discuss the element of corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture as each interviewee focused more on only values when discussing the element.

The fourth construct and section pertained to stakeholder relations. Here, interviewees showed a very good understanding. The interviewees were able to identify all stakeholders of the NWU. While two interviewees felt that all stakeholders were important to the university, when asked to rank stakeholder groups in terms of importance, the interviewees seemed to be on the same page.

Interviewees presented a sufficient understanding of corporate reputation management, which was the fifth section in this discussion. In terms of their basic understanding, all interviewees showed an expert level of its definition in theory. All interviewees were on the same page when it came to who was responsible for corporate reputation management, how it aided in achieving strategic goals and how it related to risk management and crisis communication. However, a point of concern in this discussion was that interviewees showed no knowledge of comprehensive

reputation management. Although they showed an understanding of the guidelines that should be followed in corporate reputation management collectively, no one interviewee showed sufficient knowledge on an individual level. The study therefore raised concern in terms of whether the NWU had a set plan or strategy in place that was used to manage its corporate reputation.

The sixth section of the discussion focused on corporate reputation measurement; a construct that was concluded to be average in terms of the interviewees' understanding thereof. While collectively the group showed to have sufficient knowledge of corporate reputation measurement, some interviewees had a good understanding while others showed a basic understanding thereof. Interviewees were not able to mention any of the measurement tools identified in literature, although they did present knowledge that measurement instruments or tools existed, and some interviewees alluded to other tools or assessments. The study identified two concerns in NWU CRM management's approach to corporate reputation measurement specifically. The first was that the interviewees were divided in terms of how often corporate reputation measurement should take place, and that no interviewee's opinions concurred with that of literature. The second was that one interviewee stated that corporate reputation could be perceived as either positive or negative and that there was a variety of factors that influenced these perceptions into being either positive or negative at any given time. The concern here was that the interviewee stated that because of this, the organisation should therefore choose the time when corporate reputations were measured wisely, suggesting that it should not be done when factors that may negatively impact the results were present. The study concluded that in terms of measurement, this contradicted the need for it as well as the need for follow-up action to be taken when corporate reputations were in danger.

When the instrument of RepTrak™ was brought into the discussion, interviewees were asked how they would rate each of the dimensions thereof, considering the context of the NWU. Interviewees had varying opinions of these dimensions. While all interviewees felt that the products and services, governance, performance, and leadership of the NWU were well perceived, they remained divided on the dimensions of workplace and citizenship. In these two dimensions, half the group perceived each as good, while the other half thought that improvement was needed. Innovation was deemed as lacking by all the interviewees and the study therefore determined that this, as well as the dimensions on which interviewees were divided, required attention by the NWU.

The seventh discussion pertained to the advantages that a strong corporate reputation could result in for organisations. Here interviewees showed a well-rounded understanding thereof, with all interviewees agreeing that it made it easier for organisations to achieve strategic goals set by an organisation in question. Although not all the advantages that were listed in literature were mentioned by interviewees, the collective group was able to provide a sufficient list. One concern was identified here, however. This was that, while half of the interviewees felt that the NWU's workplace could be negatively perceived by many of its employees earlier in their interviews, neither of these interviewees mentioned that a strong corporate reputation could assist in improving this dimension.

The eighth and final section of the discussion focused on how the NWU fared when compared to its competitors within the HES of South Africa. All the interviewees believed the NWU was doing well, especially when considering that the university was compared to institutions that had existed for longer and had not had to go through some of the challenges that the NWU had, such as a merger, the shift to a unitary model, a restructuring process, an alignment process and a rebrand. The interviewees alluded to tangible evidence such as rankings to support their opinions.

In summary, as a collective group, the interviewees showed a sufficient understanding of corporate reputation, its management, and its measurement collectively. At this stage, whether the opinions of NWU CRM management concurred with that of the rest of the NWU's staff, is yet to be determined. To determine how the NWU's staff perceived the NWU's corporate reputation was also a specific research question posed by the study. As such, a quantitative approach was followed using RepTrak™. The findings thereof are discussed in the proceeding section, namely *Chapter 6: Stakeholder's perceptions of the NWU: Empirical findings*.

CHAPTER 6: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF THE NWU'S CORPORATE REPUTATION: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

The findings of the semi-structured interviews conducted with the North-West University's (NWU) Corporate Relations and Marketing's (CRM) management were presented in the previous chapter. This qualitative method was conducted to determine what the NWU's current approach was to corporate reputation management. The findings thereof concluded that NWU CRM management had a sufficient understanding of corporate reputation and the management and measurement thereof, although a few points of concern were raised. At the end of the chapter, the study stated that an additional approach was also followed. This was a quantitative approach. This approach used RepTrak™ to measure how NWU staff perceived the NWU's corporate reputation. It therefore focused on answering the third specific research question posed by the study:

What are the perceptions of NWU staff regarding the university's current corporate reputation management according to the RepTrak™ measurement instrument?

In applying RepTrak™, the study used the themes, dimensions and attributes of the instrument to create an online survey hosted on Google Forms (refer to section 4.4.1). The study had to be approved by the NWU Gatekeeper – a process at the university that must be followed when research is intended to be conducted with any staff or students of the NWU. With this, the Gatekeeper approved the study on the condition that the researcher was not allowed to access any member of staff's personal details. This was due to the university's responsibility to adhere to the POPI Act. The NWU Gatekeeper requested that the researcher work through the NWU's Corporate Communications department, specifically through its internal communications practitioner. It was the request of the Gatekeeper that the internal communications practitioner distribute the survey link to staff. However, as a rule within the department, the practitioner does not send the link to each staff member individually as many such studies are requested to go through her office. Rather, she places the link on the NWU *Daily Comms* (a mass email that is sent to staff daily, or every second day, which includes information and notifications that staff should take note of). The link was placed in the NWU *Daily Comms* with a request for staff to fill in the survey for a period of two consecutive months. A total of 6 594 staff members were consequently targeted, according to the NWU staff list for April and May 2022 that she received

from the university's department of People and Culture. However, the practitioner indicated that only around 200 staff members read the *Daily Comms* on any given day. In addition, it should be noted that not all staff members who read the publication necessarily click on every link, and take part in every request. The study remained open for these two months, and by 31 May 2022, the researcher closed the form for any further participation. A total of 242 responses were provided to the study. As the number of responses is small in comparison to that of the total staff of the NWU, the researcher requested the advice of the NWU Statistical Consultation Services (SCS). The consultant who assisted in processing the statistical data obtained from the survey, stated that the survey's results would then be based on a sample of the NWU's staff and that it was not completely explanatory of the entire stakeholder group's perceptions. This is an important point that should be taken note of. However, although the study was only based on a sample of the NWU staff population, the research supervisor indicated that for a master's degree, a sample study was sufficient, and the findings of the survey could therefore be used for the study. This was also confirmed by NWU SCS as previously mentioned.

This chapter provides the descriptive and explanatory statistics of the variables that constituted the survey. The chapter is furthermore divided into various sections. The first section presents the demographic data of the respondents. The second section presents the findings of RepTrak™ regarding how the respondents perceived the corporate reputation of the NWU. This section also includes general remarks made by the sample in the survey about their perceptions. The third section discusses the validity of the instrument, while the fourth discusses its reliability. The fifth section evaluates what the effects of demographic variables or RepTrak™ were. Finally, the sixth sections provides a conclusion to the chapter.

The proceeding section begins these discussions, starting with the demographic information of the respondents.

6.2 Demographic information of respondents

Section A of the of the survey requested respondents to answer six questions pertaining to their demographic information. These included their age, gender, language, what type of staff member they were, which NWU campus they worked on and how long they had been employed by the NWU (refer to questions 1 to 6 in Annexure F). The following sections present each of these findings in the six sub-sections that follow. Each section is associated with a variable, the number or frequency of respondents and the percentage (%) of respondents.

The following section provides the statistics of respondents' age.

6.2.1.1 Frequency table: Age

Question 1 of the section A of the survey (refer to Annexure F) requested respondents to indicate which age group they formed part of. The question provided respondents with ten groups to choose from. The first group started at 18, and the last group was 66 years and above.

Table 6-1: Respondents' age profile

Question 1: Please indicate your age by choosing one of the designated groupings		
Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
18-25 years old	0	0
26-30 years old	18	7.5
31-35 years old	35	14.6
36-40 years old	50	20.9
41-45 years old	30	12.6
46-50 years old	25	10.5
51-55 years old	35	14.6
56-60 years old	23	9.6
61-65 years old	20	8.4
66 + years old	3	1.3
Total	n=242	100 n=50 (20.9%)

As seen in Table 6-1 hereabove, the largest age group that constituted the respondents was between the ages of 36 and 40 years old, which represented 20.9% of the total sample. The age groups of 31 to 35 years and 51 to 55 years were tied for the second largest groups regarding the sample's ages, contributing 14.6%. The third (41-45 years), fourth (46-50 years), fifth (56-60 years), sixth (61-65 years) and seventh (26-30 years) groups were closely aligned in terms of how they contributed to the sample at 12.6%, 10.5%, 9.6%, 8.4% and 7.5%, respectively. These groups were evenly distributed. The eighth (66 + years) constituted as the smallest group of the sample, while the 18 to 25 years group did not feature in the sample at all, with a 0% influence.

The following section presents the gender of the sample.

6.2.1.2 Frequency table: Gender

When it came to determining the gender of the respondents, the study broadened the options that respondents had to choose from to six groups, instead of the general "male" and "female" options. This was because the NWU portrayed itself to be an inclusive institution that strived to show an

ethic of care. The LGBTQIA+ community has also generated more attention in the 21st century's society. The options that respondents could identify as were therefore male, female, gender fluid and agender. The last two options were where they preferred not to identify as any gender, and an option to identify as another gender that was not listed. This option was named "other", and respondents could indicate what gender they identified as by filling in a text field.

Table 6-2: Respondents' genders

Question 2: Please indicate your gender by choosing one of the following options		
Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Male	95	39.7
Female	142	59.4
Gender fluid	0	0
Agender	0	0
Prefer not to say	1	0.4
Other	1	0.4
Missing	3	1.24
Total	n=242	100 n=142 (59.4%)

From Table 6-2 hereabove, the study notes that there was a considerable difference in the genders of respondents that constituted the sample. The gender most respondents identified as being was female, where n=142 respondents chose this option, constituting 59.4% of the sample. The second largest sample was male, with n=95 respondents, constituting 39.7% of the sample. Only n=1 respondent indicated that they preferred not to identify with a gender, constituting 0.4% of the sample. In addition, only n=1 respondent stated that they identified as "other", indicating their gender as demi-fem. The respondent briefly explained that this was a "non-binary gender" that "leaned towards female". Demi-fem therefore constituted to 0.4% of the sample's gender.

The following section presents the language of the sample.

6.2.1.3 Frequency table: Language

In question 3, respondents were asked to indicate their home language from four predetermined groups, or by choosing a fifth answer for other. The four languages that were options were English, Afrikaans, Setswana, and Sesotho. These languages were used as options as these are the four official languages of the NWU. When the sample was converted to statistical data, the options were divided into three groups, namely Afrikaans, English, and African.

Table 6-3: Respondents' home languages

Question 3: Please indicate your home language by choosing one of the following options		
Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
English	47	19.42
Afrikaans	150	61.98
African	41	16.94
Missing	4	1.65
Total	n=242	100 n=150 (61.98%)

Table 6-3 hereabove presents the extent to which each language contributed to the sample. The languages differentiated from one another quite a bit. Afrikaans was the highest constituting language with 61.98%. English was the second largest group constituting 19.42% of the sample. African languages constituted to 16.94% of the sample. A missing variable of n=4 was identified, which constituted 1.65% of the data. As South Africa has 11 official languages, and the university also has foreigners employed in its services, the missing variable is not suggested to be any specific language(s).

6.2.1.4 Frequency table: Type of staff member

Question 4 of the survey asked respondents to indicate what type of staff member they were. The NWU differentiates in terms of its staff members by dividing the stakeholder group into two smaller groups, namely support staff and academic staff.

Table 6-4: Type of staff member that respondents were

Question 4: Type of staff member – Please select one of the following options		
Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Support staff	121	50
Academic staff	121	50
Total	N=242	100 n=121 (50%)

From Table 6-4 hereabove, we can see that an equal number of academic staff and support staff constituted to the sample, with each making up 50% thereof.

The following section presents the campus as a workplace of the sample.

6.2.1.5 Frequency table: Campus

Question 5 of the survey asked respondents to indicate on which of the three campuses they worked. As the NWU has campuses in Potchefstroom, Mahikeng and Vanderbijlpark, these were options that respondents could choose from.

Table 6-5: Campus

Question 5: Campus – Please select the campus you work on:		
Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Potchefstroom	173	71.49
Vanderbijlpark	40	16.53
Mahikeng	29	11.98
Total	n=242	100 n=173 (71.49%)

The sample differed in terms of the campuses that respondents worked on. From Table 6-5 hereabove, we see that the Potchefstroom Campus constituted a large percentage of the sample, with 71.49%. The Vanderbijlpark and Mahikeng Campuses were more closely aligned, but constituted a lot less of the sample than the Potchefstroom Campus with 16.53% and 11.98%, respectively. It should be noted, however, that the Potchefstroom Campus, is the largest campus of the three NWU campuses and has more staff compared to the Vanderbijlpark and Mahikeng Campuses (refer to section 3.3.1). This could explain why the Potchefstroom Campus contributed to such a large percentage of the sample. Moreover, the survey was sent to all NWU staff over all three campuses at the same time. Therefore, the distribution method of the survey did not have an effect on the differentiated sample in terms of campus.

The follow section presents the duration of NWU employment of the sample.

6.2.1.6 Frequency table: Duration of employment

Question 6 of the survey was the last question that pertained to the demographic profile of the sample. Here, respondents were asked to indicate how long they had been employed at the NWU. Respondents were given five grouping options to choose from. These included the following groups: 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 21+ years.

Table 6-6: Duration of employment

Question 6: Employment range – How long have you worked at the NWU? Please select one of the options		
Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
1-5 years	57	23.55
6-10 years	58	23.97
11-15 years	56	23.14
16-20 years	28	11.57
21+ years	41	16.94
Missing	2	0.83
Total	n=242	100 n=58 (23.79%)

From Table 6-6 hereabove, we note that the groupings of the duration that respondents had been employed at the NWU were closely aligned. Most of the sample had worked at the NWU for six to 10 years, with this group constituting 23.97% of the sample. The groups of one to five years and 11 to 15 years were almost even, differentiating with less than 1% compared to the leading group. The group of 21+ years followed, with 16.94%, and 16 to 20 years constituted 11.57%.

In summary, the respondents differed in terms of their age vastly. No respondents were under the age of 26. In terms of gender, the sample was largely constituted by females, while males constituted almost 20% less of the sample. A small percentage of the sample did not identify as being either female or male. In terms of their home languages, the sample showed that the respondents again differentiated vastly from one another. Here, the majority of the sample consisted of Afrikaans-speaking respondents, and while English and African languages were almost equal, and only a very small percentage of the sample (1.65%) indicated a different language. In terms of the type of staff members, the sample was equal in terms of academic and support staff. In terms of which campus most of the sample's respondents worked on, the Potchefstroom Campus contributed to the sample's constitution with almost 72% of respondents indicating that they worked on this campus. The Mahikeng and Vanderbijlpark Campuses made up the rest of the sample and were closely aligned with one another. The differentiation in campuses and languages can be linked to one another, as the majority of Potchefstroom-based NWU employees are predominately Afrikaans speaking. Therefore, the larger campus sample and the larger language sample go hand in hand with this. Finally, in terms of how long respondents had been employed at the NWU, three groupings were closely aligned with a less than 1% differentiation. The majority of the sample therefore worked at the university for between

one and 15 years, although the remaining, almost 30%, of the sample had worked at the university for 16 to 21+ years.

Once respondents had completed section A of the survey, they were presented with section B. Section B was designed using RepTrak™ and the findings thereof are discussed in the proceeding chapter.

6.3 RepTrak™ results

The year was 2000, and at the turn of the new century, a need in both theory and practice was identified for a measurement instrument for corporate reputation. With this, the RQ was developed. In 2005, the Reputation Institute evaluated the RQ instrument and built on to it, developing the RepTrak™ Pulse (refer to section 2.6.1). This instrument is based on four themes (trust, feeling, admire and respect) and seven dimensions, namely (1) products and services, (2) workplace (3) innovation, (4) governance, (5) citizenship, (6) leadership, and (7) performance (refer to section 2.6.1). Each dimension was also divided into three to four attributes each. Each of these themes, dimensions and attributes were investigated by the survey to determine what the respondents' overall perception of the NWU's corporate reputation was.

To accomplish this, respondents were presented with a list of 27 statements that they were asked to rate on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree, 2 being disagree, 3 being neutral, 4 being agree and 5 being strongly agree. These findings are presented as descriptive statistics in the proceeding sections derived from the Google Forms results. These descriptive statistics can be seen in the tables within these sections. Each table provides the statement that respondents were asked to rate, the percentage of the sample that chose each rating for each of the RepTrak™ statements (attributes). However, the first four statements of section B were not attributes of RepTrak™; rather, these were the general statements pertaining to the four themes of RepTrak™. The descriptive statistics generated from the sample's responses of these themes are presented in the proceeding section, after which the dimensions of RepTrak™ follow.

6.3.1 RepTrak™ themes

The four themes of RepTrak™ were previously identified as (1) trust, (2) feeling, (3) admiration and (4) esteem. Each of these themes are measured with a statement pertaining to the NWU with an overall perception of the theme in mind (refer to questions 7, 8, 9, and 10 in section B of Annexure F).

Table 6-7: RepTrak™ themes

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
7. The North-West University (NWU) is an institution that I trust.	4.6%	13.4%	33.1%	35.1%	13.8%
8. The North-West University (NWU) is an institution that I have a good feeling about.	2.1%	13.8%	27.2%	41%	15.9%
9. The North-West University (NWU) is an institution that I admire and respect.	2.5%	13.8%	26.4%	38.5%	18.8%
10. The North-West University (NWU) has a good overall reputation.	1.7%	10%	29.7%	41.4%	18.2%

From Table 6-7 hereabove, it is evident that the themes of RepTrak™ within the context of the NWU measured well, as the majority of the sample felt that they agreed with each of the statements.

The first theme measured in question 7 was trust. 35.1% of the sample stated that they agreed that the NWU was institution that they trusted. However, a similar amount of the sample (33.1%) remained neutral on the subject, thereby not agreeing or disagreeing with the statement. Although a large part of the sample remained neutral, the majority of respondents leaned more towards agreeing with the statement than the number that leaned towards disagreeing with it. Only 18% of the sample indicated that their trust in the NWU was below average, while 48.9% (just shy of half of the sample) felt that their trust in the NWU was above average. However, in contrast, this theme had the most respondents who rate it as strongly disagree when compared to the remaining three themes.

The second theme, measured in question 8, was feeling. Again, the majority of the sample agreed that they had a good feeling about the NWU, with 41% of the sample rating the statement as

agree. The difference between those who strongly agreed with the statement and those who remained neutral on the topic was 11.3%, while 15.9% of respondents had a below average feeling about the university. More than half of the sample felt that they had a good feeling about the NWU with a collective 56.9% indicating a rating of above average.

The third theme, measured in question 9, was admiration. Here, the sample again indicated that in majority, they agreed that the NWU was an institution that they admired and respected. The highest rating was again to agree with the statement at 38.5%. 26.4% of the sample remained neutral on the topic, while 16.8% rated the statement as being below average. 57.3% of the sample indicated the statement to be above average, collectively. This theme was also the theme with which the most respondents strongly agreed, with 18.8%.

The fourth and final theme, measured by question 10, was esteem. In this question, respondents were asked to rate their overall perception of the NWU's corporate reputation. Again, this theme fared similarly to the previous themes, with the majority indicating that they agreed with the statement at 41.4%. A fair number of respondents again indicated a neutral feeling toward the statement, with 29.7%. Collectively, only 11.7% rated the statement as being below average, while 59.6% indicated an above average rating.

The NWU therefore measured well in terms of how the sample of staff members trusted, admired, and respected the university, as well as in terms of how they perceived the university. No concerns in the overall themes were noted in terms of the statistics.

After respondents were asked to rate each theme of RepTrak™, section B of the survey continued to present respondents with statements that rated how each dimension of the instrument measured. These dimensions are discussed in the proceeding section.

6.3.2 RepTrak™ dimensions

As previously stated, RepTrak™ is divided into seven sections, namely products and services, innovation, workplace, governance, citizenship, leadership, and performance (refer to section 6.3). Each of these dimensions was furthermore divided into 23 attributes, with each dimension consisting of three to four attributes. Each dimension is discussed in terms of its attributes and, thereafter, how each dimension was perceived by the sample as a result of the collective perceptions of each attribute, is provided.

This section begins with the first dimension, namely products and services.

6.3.2.1 Products and services

The products and services dimension of RepTrak™ comprised four attributes. These attributes asked respondents to rate the extent to which they felt the NWU's products and services were of high quality, value for money, met consumer needs and whether they felt that NWU stood behind its products and services (refer to questions 11, 12, 13 and 14 in Annexure F).

Table 6-8: Products and services

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
11. The North-West University (NWU) offers high quality products and services.	1.7%	6.3%	19.7%	50.6%	21.8%
12. The North-West University's (NWU's) products and services are of high value for money.	2.5%	7.5%	23%	43.9%	23%
13. The North-West University (NWU) stands behind its products and services.	2.1%	7.5%	19.2%	47.7%	23.4%
14. The North-West University (NWU) meets the needs of its customers.	5.9%	11.7%	29.3%	40.2%	13%

From Table 6-8 hereabove, we see that the majority of the sample agreed with each attribute. For each, this ranged between just above 40 and 50%. Around 20% of the sample strongly agreed with each attribute, except for meeting the needs of customers, which was indicated by 13% of the sample. Between 19 and 30% of the sample remained neutral on each attribute and between 6 and 12% approximately did not agree with each. Each attribute only showed a strongly disagree of under 6%. More specifically, each attribute can be discussed individually. However, as it is clear from Table 6-8 that each attribute was positively perceived by the sample, it is not necessary to go into too much detail. Therefore, only differentiation percentages between the positive and negative perceptions are discussed for each attribute.

In terms of the first attribute, we note that a collective 72.4% of the sample felt that the NWU provided high quality products and services (50.6% = agree and 21.8% = strongly agree) and only

8% felt that it did not (6.35% = disagree and 1.7% = strongly disagree). The differentiation between the positive and negative perceptions of the attribute is therefore high at 64.4%, in favour of the positive. The attribute therefore measures well.

The second attribute asked respondents if they felt that the NWU's products and services were of high value for money. Here a collective positive percentage of 66.9% was recorded (43.9% = agree and 23% = strongly agree), while 10% of the sample had a negative perception (7.5% = disagree and 2.5% = strongly disagree). The differentiation of these perceptions is therefore in favour of the positive at 56.9%. This attribute therefore also measures well.

The third attribute asked respondents if they felt that the NWU stood behind its products and services. Again, the collective percentage of positive perceptions far outweighed the negative, as 71.1% of the sample thought that it did (47.7% = agree and 23.4% = disagree) and 9.6% felt that it did not (7.5% = disagree and 2.1% = strongly disagree). The differentiation is therefore highly in favour of the positive at 61.5%. The attribute therefore measures well.

In the dimension's fourth and final attribute, respondents were asked whether they felt that the NWU met the needs of its customers. Once again, the collective positive of 53.2% (40.2% = agree and 13% = strongly agree) outweighed the collective negative of 17.6% (11.7% = disagree and 5.9% = strongly disagree) with a differentiation of 35.6%. The attribute therefore also measures well.

As each attribute measured well in terms of the sample's perceptions and no concerns were identified in the statistics, the dimension of products and services is therefore concluded to measure well. This dimension's measurement of perception obtained from the sample is therefore ideal when evaluating the NWU's corporate reputation. It should also be noted that this dimension was the highest positively perceived of the seven dimensions by the sample as this chapter will proceed to show.

The second dimension, namely innovation, is discussed in the proceeding section.

6.3.2.2 Innovation

RepTrak™'s dimension of innovation comprised three attributes that asked respondents whether they perceive the NWU to be innovative institution that was generally the first to go to market with new products and that adapted to change quickly (refer to questions 15, 16 and 17 in Annexure F).

Table 6-9: Innovation

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
15. The North-West University (NWU) is innovative.	3.8%	13.8%	28.5%	36.8%	17.2%
16. The North-West University (NWU) is generally the first institution to go to market with new products (qualifications) and services.	12.6%	27.2%	40.6%	15.1%	4.6%
17. The North-West University (NWU) adapts quickly to change.	11.8%	27.2%	22.6%	27.2%	11.3%

From Table 6-9 hereabove, we see that the dimension of innovation was perceived as more or less average. Most respondents agreed with only one of the three statements, while the remaining two were neutral or divided. More specifically, this deduction can be discussed separately in terms of each attribute.

When asked whether respondents thought that the NWU was innovative, the attribute measured just above average, with most of the sample agreeing that the NWU was an innovative institution at 36.8%. However, the second largest part of the sample remained neutral on the topic at 28.5%. 17.2% of the sample strongly agreed that the NWU was innovative, while a similar percentage disagreed at 13.8%. Only a small percentage of the sample (3.8%) strongly disagreed with the attribute. Therefore, 54% of the sample had a positive perception of the attribute, while 17.6% had a negative perception. The positive and negative perceptions therefore differentiated in favour of the positive at 36.4%. This attribute then measured well, although the remaining two attributes did not.

In terms of how the sample felt about the NWU being the first to go to market with new products and services, most of the sample remained neutral at 40.6%. The remaining respondents leaned more toward disagreeing and strongly disagreeing with the sample at 39.8% collectively (27.2% = disagree and 12.6% = strongly disagree). Only 19.7% of the sample leaned more toward

agreeing with the attribute, with 15.1% agreeing and only 4.6% strongly agreeing. The differentiation between the positive and negative perceptions therefore calculates in favour of the negative at 20.1%. While a relative percentage is noted in terms of differentiation, we must note that the majority of the sample remained neutral on the topic. This attribute is therefore concluded to be just below average in terms of the sample's perceptions.

The third attribute measured the extent to which the sample felt that the NWU quickly adapted to change. Here we note that the sample was divided with 27.2% agreeing and another 27.2% disagreeing. Similarly, 11.3% of the sample strongly agreed with the attribute and 11.8% strongly disagreed with it. The collective differential percentage is therefore slightly in favour of the negative at 3.5%. The second largest part of the sample remained neutral at 22.6%. This attribute is therefore concluded to be average in terms of the sample's perceptions.

With one attribute measuring well, one below average, and one divided at almost a 50/50 ratio, the overall dimension of innovation is therefore concluded to be average, but requiring attention in terms of the sample's perceptions. Although average does not equal bad, it should be noted that the ideal would be to have the dimension's measurement lean toward a more positive perception.

The third dimension, workplace, is discussed in the proceeding section.

6.3.2.3 Workplace

RepTrak™'s dimension of workplace comprised three attributes. Specifically, these attributes asked respondents whether they felt that the NWU rewarded its employees fairly, demonstrated concern for its employees' wellbeing, and offered equal opportunities for its employees (refer to questions 18, 19 and 20 in Annexure F).

Table 6-10: Workplace

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
18. The North-West University (NWU) rewards its employees fairly.	29.3%	28%	25.9%	10%	6.7%
19. The North-West University (NWU) demonstrates concern for the well-being of its employees.	15.1%	21.8%	21.8%	25.9%	15.5%
20. The North-West University (NWU) offers equal opportunities to its employees.	27.2%	23.4%	24.7%	15.9%	8.8%

The dimension of workplace within the context of the NWU seemed to have the lowest ranking in terms of the sample's perceptions. In this dimension, we see for the first and only time that most of the sample leaned towards strongly disagreeing with two of the attributes. As the dimension consists of only three attributes, the sample's inclination toward strongly disagreeing with two of them demonstrates concern for the dimension. This is especially true in the instance of the first attribute of rewarding employees fairly. Here we see that most of the sample strongly disagreed with the attribute at 29.3%, while another 28% disagreed with the attribute and 25.9% of the sample remained neutral on the topic. Collectively then, a staggering 57.3% – more than half – of the sample had a negative perception of the attribute. The 29.3% in terms of strongly disagreeing was also noted to be the attribute that had the highest strong disagreement rate of all 23 attributes. Only a total of 16.7% of the sample had a positive perception of the attribute with 10% agreeing and 6.7% strongly agreeing. In terms of differentiation, the results are therefore in favour of the negative at 40.6%. This attribute therefore does not measure well.

The second attribute of the dimension aimed to measure the perceptions of the sample in terms of how the NWU demonstrated a concern for the wellbeing of its employees. In contrast with the other two attributes of this dimension, this attribute fared quite well with most of the sample agreeing that the NWU did indeed demonstrate a concern for employee well-being at 25.9%,

while a further 15.5% of the sample strongly agreed. Collectively, 41.4% of the sample therefore leaned more toward having a positive perception of the attribute. An ample percentage of the sample remained neutral on the topic at 21.8%, and similarly, a collective negative perception of 36.9% was recorded with 21.8% disagreeing that the NWU showed concern for employee wellbeing and 15.1% strongly disagreeing. The differentiation between the positive and negative perceptions is, however, in favour of the positive at 19.6%. This attribute therefore measures well, although it could be improved upon.

The third attribute of the dimension related to opportunities in the workplace. Here, respondents were asked whether they felt that the NWU offered equal opportunities to employees. Again, we note that as with the first attribute, the overall perception of this attribute was negative with a little more than half of the sample ranking the attribute at a level of strongly disagree (27.2%) and disagree (23.4%). Only 24.7% of the collective sample had a positive perception of the attribute (15.9% = agree and 8.8% = strongly agree), while another 24.7% remained neutral. The differentiation in percentage between positive and negative perceptions is therefore in favour of the negative at 25.9%. This dimension therefore does not measure well.

As two attributes of the dimension measured poorly and another as well, but needing attention, it can be concluded that the dimension of workplace within the context of the NWU does not fare well and is therefore a dimension of concern when taking the NWU's corporate reputation into account.

The fourth dimension of RepTrak™ was governance. This dimension is discussed in the proceeding section.

6.3.2.4 Governance

Governance also comprised three attributes. These attributes included how open and transparent the NWU's communication was, how ethically the university behaved, and how fair it was in the way it conducted business (refer to questions 21, 22 and 23 in Annexure F).

Table 6-11: Governance

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
21. The North-West University (NWU) is open and transparent in all communication.	18.8%	25.5%	25.5%	20.5%	9.6%
22. The North-West University (NWU) behaves ethically.	9.2%	18.4%	33.9%	25.5%	13%
23. The North-West University (NWU) is fair in the way it does business.	5.9%	19.2%	33.1%	31.4%	10.5%

As indicated in Table 6-11 hereabove, the dimension of governance of the NWU measured as average. Most of the sample remained neutral on each of the dimension's attributes. In terms of the first attribute where respondents were asked whether they perceived the NWU to be open and transparent in all communication, 25.5% of the sample remained neutral and another 25.5% disagreed that the NWU distributed open and transparent communication. A further 18.8 % of the sample strongly disagreed, bringing the collective negative perception of the sample to 44.3%. A collective 35.1% of the sample had a positive perception in terms of this attribute, as 20.5% agreed and 9.6% strongly agreed. The difference between the positive and negative perceptions of the sample was therefore less than 10%, although it was in favour of the negative. This, coupled with most of the sample remaining equal on neutral and disagreeing, indicates an average to below average rating for the attribute.

The second attribute in terms of governance asked respondents whether they felt that NWU behaved ethically. Again, we see that the majority remained neutral on the topic at 33.9%. However, in contrast with the previous attribute, this attribute leaned more towards a positive perception when considering the remaining sample perception. At 38.5% collectively, 25.5% agreed that the NWU behaved ethically and 13% strongly agreed. 27.6% of the sample did not believe that the NWU behaved ethically, as 18.4% of the sample disagreed and 9.2% strongly

disagreed. The difference between the positive and negative perceptions in this sample therefore varied with more than 10% in favour of the positive. However, it is important to note that the majority remained neutral. The attribute therefore measures as average, with a slightly stronger inclination toward a positive perception. In the previous chapter that discussed the semi-structured interviews with NWU CRM management, we noted that the NWU prides itself on being an ethical institution (refer to sections 5.5.6 and 5.8.3). As ethical behaviour is important to the NWU, an average rating of this attribute should be cause for concern for the NWU.

The last attribute of the dimension asked respondents whether they felt that the NWU was fair in the way it did business. Again, we note that the majority remained neutral on the topic at 33.1%. However, a collective percentage of 41.9% of the sample showed a positive perception of the attribute as 31.4% agreed that the NWU conducted fair business and 10.5% strongly agreed. A differentiation of 16.8% between the collective positive and negative perceptions was noted in favour of the positive, as 25.1% of the sample leaned toward a negative perception of the attribute (19.2% = disagree and 5.9% = strongly disagree). Therefore, although primarily average, this attribute did show a higher positive perception than negative perception from the sample and is therefore concluded to be average with a stronger inclination toward good, than bad.

While all three attributes of governance measured as average, two showed an inclination toward a more positive perception than negative, and one an inclination to a more negative perception than positive. The overall dimension of workplace is therefore concluded to be average, although a slightly stronger inclination toward a positive perception is seen as compared to negative perceptions. Again, however, the ideal would be to conclude the dimension as having an overall positive perception when evaluating the NWU's corporate reputation. This, coupled with the fact that the attribute of ethical behaviour should ideally measure higher specifically within the context of the NWU, calls for the need to re-evaluate the overall dimension.

The fifth dimension of RepTrak™ is discussed in the following section.

6.3.2.5 Citizenship

Citizenship was the fifth dimension measured by RepTrak™. This dimension also comprised three attributes, which measured whether the NWU acted responsibly to protect the environment, supported good causes, and had a positive influence on society (refer to questions 24, 25 and 26 in Annexure F).

Table 6-12: Citizenship

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
24. The North-West University (NWU) acts responsibly to protect the environment.	5%	11.7%	33.5%	32.6%	17.2%
25. The North-West University (NWU) supports good causes.	1.7%	5.4%	33.9%	41%	18%
26. The North-West University (NWU) has a positive influence on society.	2.9%	4.2%	33.9%	40.6%	18.4%

Overall, the dimension of citizenship measured well in terms of the sample's perceptions as seen in Table 6-12 hereabove. While the first attribute (whether the NWU acts responsibly to protect the environment) recorded a majority neutral perception from the sample at 33.5%, the positive perception of the remaining sample far outweighed the negative perception. A collective percentage of 49.8% had a positive perception of the attribute (32.6% = agree and 17.2% = strongly agree) and a collective percentage of 16.7% had a negative perception of the attribute (11.7% = disagree and 5% = strongly disagree). The difference between the positive and negative perceptions for this attribute is therefore 33.1%, in favour of positive perceptions. However, taking into consideration that the majority remained neutral, the attributed is consequently measured as average, although it has a stronger inclination toward positive perceptions than negative perceptions.

The second attribute asked respondents whether they felt that the NWU supported good causes. This attribute measured well as 41% (the majority) of the sample agreed that the NWU did indeed support good causes. A further 18% of the sample strongly agreed with the attribute, bringing the positive perception of the sample to a collective 59%. Only a small percentage of the sample did not believe that the NWU supported good causes at 7.1% collectively (5.4% = disagree and 1.7% = strongly disagree). It should be noted, however, that a large sum of the sample remained neutral

on the topic at 33.9%, although the overall positive perceptions of the sample far outweighed the negative perceptions with a difference of 51.9%. This attribute therefore measures very well. Similarly, the third and final attribute of the dimension also measured well, while recording the same relationship as the previous attribute. Here, respondents were asked whether they felt that the NWU had a positive influence on society. Again, most of the sample agreed that the NWU did indeed have a positive influence on society with 40.6% agreeing. A further 18.4% of the sample strongly agreed with the attribute, recording a sum of 59% of positive perceptions. Again 33.9% of the sample remained neutral on the topic, and only a small percentage did not agree that the NWU had a positive influence on society with a sum of again only 7.1% (4.2% = disagree and 2.9% = strongly disagree). The difference between the positive and negative perceptions of the attribute was once again 51.9%, in favour of positive perceptions and this attribute therefore also measures well.

As all three attributes of the citizenship dimension showed the sample as having a much stronger inclination toward a positive perception of each, the overall dimension can therefore be said to be positively perceived by the sample. This is ideal when taking the NWU's corporate reputation into consideration.

The sixth dimension of RepTrak™ was identified as leadership. This dimension is discussed in the proceeding section.

6.3.2.6 Leadership

While five of the seven dimensions comprised three attributes, leadership comprised four (as was the case in terms of products and services). These four attributes of leadership focused on how organised the NWU was, whether it had an appealing leader, whether it had excellent managers, and whether it had a clear vision for its future (refer to questions 27, 28, 29 and 30 in Annexure F).

Table 6-13: Leadership

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
27. The North-West University (NWU) is a well-organised institution.	9.2%	17.2%	27.6%	31.8%	14.2%
28. The North-West University's (NWU) has an appealing leader.	14.6%	16.3%	38.5%	18%	12.6%
29. The North-West University (NWU) has excellent managers.	8.8%	23%	36.8%	23.8%	7.5%
30. The North-West University's (NWU) has a clear vision for the university's future.	5.4%	13%	31%	37.2%	13.4%

In terms of leadership, the overall perception of most of the sample was divided between being average and positive as seen in Table 6-13 hereabove. Here we see that two attributes had a majority rating of neutral (average), while the other two a majority rating of agree (positive). To determine whether the overall perception was average, average with an inclination towards positive, or positive, each attribute had to be individually evaluated as in the previously discussed dimensions.

The first attribute asked respondents whether they felt that the NWU was a well-organised institution. Here, the study recorded that most of the sample agreed that the NWU was a well-organised institution with 31.8% of the sample choosing to agree with the attribute. A further 14.2% of the sample strongly agreed with the attribute, indicating that a collective 46% of the sample did indeed think that the NWU was well organised. A smaller part of the sample remained neutral at 27.6%, and similarly, 26.4% of the sample did not agree that the NWU was well organised (17.2% = disagree and 9.2% = strongly disagree). Although the difference between the positive and negative perceptions of the sample is 19.6%, it is in favour of positive perceptions.

This, coupled with the majority agreeing with the attribute, provides an overall positive perception of the attribute. The attribute therefore measures well.

The second attribute asked whether respondents felt that the NWU had an appealing leader. It should be noted that during the study, the NWU had changed its leadership four times (refer to section 5.8.3.6). At the time of the survey, there was some uncertainty regarding leadership as Prof Linda Du Plessis had been acting in the VC position for some time, and Dr Tyobeka's takeover of the position had been announced although he did not start in the position until after the survey's submissions had closed. This may have affected the perceptions of the dimension. It could also account for the overall neutral perception of the attribute as the majority chose to remain neutral on the topic at 38.5%. When looking at the collective percentages of the positive and negative perceptions of the attribute, the sample was almost equally divided. A collective 30.6% of the sample felt that the NWU had an appealing leader (18% = agree and 12.6% = disagree) and 30.9% felt that it did not (16.3% = disagree and 14.6% = strongly disagree). While the negative perceptions are more than the positive perceptions, it is only indicated by a 0.3% difference. Taking the variables that may have influenced the attribute into account as well as the small 0.3% differentiation, the study consequently concludes that the attribute measures as average and is not inclined towards more positive or negative perceptions of the sample.

The third attribute of the dimension asked respondents whether they felt that the NWU had excellent managers. As with the previous attribute, most of the sample remained neutral on the topic at 36.8% and was equally divided in terms of positive vs. negative perceptions. A sum of 31.3% of the sample perceived the NWU to have excellent managers (23.8% = agree and 7.5% = strongly agree) and 31.8% did not (23% = disagree and 8.8% = strongly disagree). This calculates to a mere 0.5% differentiation between positive and negative perceptions, although more in favour of negative. With the majority remaining neutral, and a less than 1% differentiation between negative and positive perceptions, the attribute is therefore measured as average.

As with the first attribute of leadership, the fourth and final attribute measured positively in majority. Here we see that 37.2% of the sample agreed that the NWU had a clear vision for its future. A further 13.4% strongly agreed. Collectively, the positive perception of the attribute therefore calculates to 50.6% of the sample. However, a large part of the sample remained neutral on the topic at 31%, but only a collective 18.4% of negative perceptions were recorded (13% = disagree and 5.4% = strongly disagree). Furthermore, the differentiation percentage between positive and negative perceptions is calculated to be 32.2%, which, when coupled with the

majority agreeing with the attribute, provides adequate evidence that the sample perceived the NWU to have excellent managers. The attribute therefore fares well.

As two of the four attributes of leadership measured as average, and the other two showed a positive perception, the overall evaluation of the dimension measured as average to good.

The final dimension of RepTrak™, namely performance, is discussed in the following section.

6.3.2.7 Performance

While the dimension's name does not specifically refer to financial performance, the literature study provided a discussion that indicated that the dimension does, in fact, refer to the financial performance of an organisation (refer to section 2.6.1). This is also seen in the presentation of the dimension's three attributes, as two of the three attributes refer specifically to finances. Regarding the survey, these three attributes asked the sample whether they thought the NWU was financially profitable, produced better financial results than expected and had strong prospects for future growth (refer to questions 31, 32 and 33 in Annexure F).

Table 6-14: Performance

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
31. The North-west University (NWU) is financially profitable.	3.3%	7.9%	34.7%	36.4%	17.6%
32. The North-West University (NWU) produces better financial results than expected.	3.8%	10%	43.5%	32.6%	10%
33. The North-West University (NWU) shows strong prospects for growth.	2.9%	10.9%	31.8%	37.2%	17.2%

As with the previous dimension of leadership, we note that the majority of the sample either remained neutral or presented a positive perception of each attribute pertaining to the dimension

of performance. Specifically, in Table 6-14 hereabove, we see that the sample had a positive perception of two attributes of performance and one neutral perception. Each attribute is therefore discussed individually again.

The first attribute asked respondents whether they thought that the NWU was financially profitable. Here, a majority of 36.4% agreed with the attribute, although a similar percentage of 34.7% remained neutral. However, a further 17.6% indicated that they strongly agreed that the NWU was financially profitable, presenting a collective 54% – more than half – of the sample feeling that the NWU was in fact a financially profitable institution. A much smaller percentage of the sample indicated that they did not think the NWU was financially profitable, at a collective 11.2% (7.9% = disagree and 3.3% = strongly disagree). The differentiation between positive and negative perceptions was quite large at 42.8% in favour of the positive. The measurement of the attribute therefore provides sufficient evidence that the sample felt that the NWU was indeed financially profitable.

The second attribute asked respondents whether they felt that the NWU produced better financial results than expected. Here, the majority remained neutral at 43.5%. However, the positive perceptions of this attribute outweighed the negative as a collective 42.6% felt that the NWU produced better financial results than expected (32.6% = agree and 10% = strongly agree) and 13.8% did not (10% = disagree and 3.8% = strongly disagree). This calculates to a differentiation of 28.8%. Therefore, although most of the sample remained neutral, there is adequate evidence to conclude that the attribute measures as average, but with a stronger inclination to positive than negative perceptions.

The third and final attribute of the dimension asked respondents whether they felt that the NWU had strong prospects for future growth. With this, the majority indicated that they agreed that the NWU did at 37.2%. As with the first attribute of the dimension, a similar percentage of the sample remained neutral on the topic at 31.8%, but a further positive perception was indicated as 17.2% of the sample strongly agreed with the attribute. This brought the collective positive perceptions to 54.4%, while the collective negative perceptions calculated to 13.8% (10.9% = disagree and 2.9% = agree). The differentiation between the positive and negative perceptions is therefore in favour of positive with 40.6%. This attribute therefore measures well.

As two of the attributes of performance measured well, and one measured as average with an inclination to well, the overall dimension can therefore be concluded to measure as well.

While the formal RepTrak™ instrument ends with measuring each attribute in theory, the study extended the survey by providing a platform for respondents to provide general remarks about the NWU should they wish to do so. The results thereof are discussed in the following section.

6.3.3 General remarks obtained from the survey

To gain deeper insight into NWU staff member's perceptions of the university's corporate reputation, once the RepTrak™ instrument had been concluded, the survey asked respondents whether there was anything that they would like to add or elaborate on regarding any of the previously asked questions (refer to question 34 in Annexure F). A text field without a character limitation was available in the survey for respondents who wished to answer this question. This allowed respondents to speak as freely as they wished. While every other question of the survey was set up to be "*required*" (i.e. respondents had to answer each question to submit the survey), this question was not.

A total of 76 respondents answered the question. However, 14 of these answers did not provide general remarks to be used in the study as they were a compilation of responses such as "*none*", "*Nothing/I have nothing to add*", and "*n/a*". In addition, one of these 14 respondents asked that the findings of the study be "*conveyed to the council, senate and stakeholders*". One respondent stated that they felt the "*questions were too broad and vague*". Another indicated that they thought "*individual interviews with respondents would have been beneficial to the study*". Similarly, another respondent suggested that the survey should have included the variable of "*which income stream employees*" worked as "*these streams have different operating mechanisms that could have a great influence on the results of the questions asked*". One respondent stated that their "*answers were based on [their] own experience*" and similarly, another stated that "*for a lot of these [they] did not know, so [they] just chose 3 [neutral]*". While the respondents' answers that indicated they had nothing to add are not necessary to address, for the purpose of the study, this section briefly addresses the other responses hereabove in appreciation of the respondents who took part in the survey. These concerns are addressed in the proceeding section, after which the remaining general remarks are discussed.

6.3.3.1 Addressing the concerns of respondents

The concerns raised by respondents hereabove can be addressed as follows.

Firstly, in terms of the *study's finding's being conveyed to council, senate and stakeholders*, the researcher had agreed to share the findings of thereof with NWU CRM management after

publication when permission was gained from the department to undertake the study. This agreement stands and was again discussed in the undertaking of the semi-structured interviews. In addition, as a master's degree published under the NWU, the published study will be available on the NWU's repository.

Secondly, in terms of *the questions being too broad and vague*, the study defends the survey's content as being a direct implementation of the formal RepTrak™ instrument applied to the NWU's context. This instrument has been evaluated in literature and has shown sufficient results when applied to large organisations worldwide (refer to section 2.6.1).

Thirdly, in terms of *individual interviews with respondents*, the population of the NWU is too large to conduct separate interviews with every NWU staff member, and even every respondent in the sample for a master's study. Therefore, the survey was part of a mixed-method approach that constituted the quantitative method of the study. The study also conducted four semi-structured interviews with NWU CRM management as part of its qualitative approach.

Fourthly, in terms of the issue raised of including *which income stream employees are paid from*, the study notes the significance of the variable, but unfortunately could not add it as the survey had already been open for some time once the respondent provided the insight. The study does, however, compare other demographic variables to respondents answers later in this chapter (refer to section 6.6).

Finally, in terms of the respondents who indicated their *answers were based on personal experience or that they were unsure*, the study notes that by no means is the researcher able to link their comments to their other answers.

A total of 64 additional responses can therefore be further discussed in this section. The proceeding section uses these 64 remaining responses to broaden the discussion on how NWU staff perceived the university's corporate reputation.

6.3.3.2 General remarks regarding the NWU's corporate reputation by respondents

While 64 responses in total were made by the respondents, it should be noted that many respondents touched on multiple aspects when answering this question. Each response was therefore read and appropriately divided into separate comments that were then placed into each of the seven dimensions of RepTrak™. In total, the study then had 79 comments to work with when addressing the general remarks of the sample. Each dimension was discussed by the

collective sample, although no one respondent discussed all the dimensions. In addition, some dimensions gained more traction than others. The dimension of workplace received the most traction, with 28 comments found to fit into it. Leadership followed, with 20 comments, and governance came in at a close third with 16 comments. Citizenship, performance, products and services and innovation received less attention as citizen received five comments, performance received four, and products and services and innovation received three comments each. In addition, positive comments were few and far between and it seemed as though respondents used this question as an opportunity to raise their concerns as employees of the NWU. It was interesting to see that while innovation was one of the poorer perceived dimensions in terms of statistics, respondents did not provide much commentary on the dimension.

As the dimensions have been discussed in a specific order throughout this study, this same sequence will be used here. Therefore, firstly, when considering the dimension of products and services, one of the few positive comments recorded from the question was based on this dimension. Here one of the respondents indicated that they had *“trust in the quality of the qualifications and courses the institution offers”* and added that their perception may be as a direct result of they themselves being *“part of producing those products”*. However, the remaining two respondents stated that the university did not employ paramount academic staff, and that this caused the products of the university to suffer. One respondent added that they felt the university’s management was more preoccupied with *“making their image seem polished”* and *“making sure that all transformation requirements are met”*. According to this respondent, this tarnished the *“quality of the education”* that the NWU provided. The respondent stated that this resulted in the employment of staff who were *“not the best qualified and most experienced”* applicants when compared to other applicants.

Secondly, in terms of innovation, all the comments that pertained to the dimension showed a perception that the NWU was expected to do more. One respondent felt that *“university rankings”* proved that the NWU required work in this dimension and that the university *“preferred to follow trends in the [Higher Education Sector] HES rather than being a pioneer”* in the sector. Similarly, another respondent felt that the NWU’s *“initiative and innovation”* was *“supressed”* by *“bureaucracy”*. The third respondent stated that in terms of *“adapting to change”* the NWU had lacked in this department when considering Covid-19 vaccinations. Here the respondent felt that the university had been highly influenced by the *“conservative minority”* and therefore did not promote vaccination enough, which to them showed *“no regard to the health risks”* of stakeholders who were pro-vaccination.

Thirdly, when considering workplace, the respondents presented the most feedback here in comparison to the other dimensions. One positive comment was recorded here with a respondent describing their colleagues as *“friendly and generally co-operative”*. However, some concerns were raised by individual respondents. These concerns included staff feeling *“overworked”*, unhappiness regarding recently changed *“conditions of employment”* as well as issues pertaining to *“employment rules and practices”*, and the need to *“improve administration systems”*. One respondent indicated that they felt their work had resulted in anxiety and insomnia and that their wellbeing was therefore not being looked after. Two respondents felt that the NWU *“marginalised”* staff with *“emotional and physical disabilities”*, stating that the university could do more to ensure the wellbeing and comfort of these staff members on its campuses. While a small percentage of the sample outlined concerns such as these, two major concerns were raised by most of the sample. These concerns were identified as, (1) discrimination between support and academic staff and staff across campuses, and (2) poor remuneration. In terms of the former, ten comments were recorded. Three of these respondents indicated that the remuneration of staff was different based on the campus staff worked on. The remaining comments stated that when compared to academic staff, support staff felt underappreciated. These comments included concerns such as unequal pay, that there was no room for promotion for support staff, that support staff were not given the same opportunities or benefits as academic staff, and that although many support staff had postgraduate qualifications, this was not taken into consideration or applauded by management, but that management consistently applauded academic staff on their achievements. In terms of remuneration, 13 respondents stated that the NWU did not offer fair remuneration packages to its staff when compared with other universities in South Africa. Here respondents made comments such as *“other universities pay higher salaries for the same positions and provide higher COLA agreements”*, that the NWU had a *“high staff turnover”* due to *“inadequate remuneration”*, and that *“salaries”* at the NWU were *“the worst in the sector”*. Other respondents stated that the NWU should *“review [its] medical aid contributions”* for staff and that staff were generally *“overworked and underpaid”*. As workplace measured low in terms of the statistical data as well as received significant backlash from respondents here, it is clear the sample had a negative perception of the dimension.

Fourthly, the dimension of governance also received significant backlash from respondents. Most of the concerns raised in terms of governance were that respondents felt that the NWU did not communicate openly and transparently. Respondents made comments such as, *“...it feels as if management do not hear the 'voices' of it staff. Strong 'top-down' management strategy at NWU”*, *“I feel the organization always works with a hidden agenda when it comes to staff issues and*

concerns”, “...the institution functions with a 'who you know' principle...”, and “things are happening at managerial level that management tries to cover up”. This was an attribute that also measured poorly in terms of the statistical data (refer to section 6.2.3.4). Some respondents also questioned how ethical the university was with comments such as, “the NWU has acted unfairly and unethically with regard to its dealings with employees”, “NWU does not care about the wellbeing of its employees and shows it in unfair and non-transparent remuneration practices”, and “...the same can be said about individuals who represent the university that behaves ethically. However, there are many that do not behave ethically”. Section 6.3.2.4 showed that the attribute of ethical behaviour fared average in terms of the statistical data. However, it showed a stronger inclination to an overall positive perception, while the commentary on the topic shows the opposite. Other concerns were also raised by individual respondents such as the competency and transparency of the university’s department for People and Culture, the need for employees to be more involved in decisions that affect them, that the university had “poor corporate communication”, and that the “unitary model was not working”. The issue of transformation was also brought up by three respondents. While two of these respondents felt that the university “was not doing enough”, another felt that it “was overrated”.

The fifth dimension of citizenship measured well with regard to the commentary it received. All the respondents who commented on the dimension indicated that they felt the NWU fared well in this regard, but that some improvement was required. Respondents made comments such as, “I think the NWU acts responsibly toward the environment, but at the same time there are few clearly visible efforts (in the past there were campaigns to save water, not to litter, etc.) The effort could be much greater”, and “NWU does has green initiatives, but still fails to implement being truly environmentally friendly, especially in the catering environment, where mountains of plastic (bottles, packets) and polystyrene is at the order of the day”. The comments that pertained to this dimension also compared well with the statistical data of the dimension (cf. section 6.3.2.5).

In the sixth dimension of leadership, we see that respondents did indeed feel that the attribute pertaining to the NWU having a strong and appealing leader was difficult to answer at the time of the study, as predicted in section 6.3.2.6. Here, respondents provided feedback such as: “the new VC has not yet been in service long enough to determine if he is a strong leader”, “prospects for 'future growth' is strongly aligned to leadership which has now changed – we do not know what may be happening in the short term. Unfortunately, this institution does not have a history of long-term planning as its leadership is always trying to propitiate the government first and then take its actions forward in terms of the survival of the organization as a key stakeholder in its local

society...”, “some questions were not easy to answer such as the one on the VC because we only have an acting who has not been there for long. There is an incoming and there is controversy surrounding his employment so much that we have received a few emails to explain his hiring”, and “the question about the VC is difficult to answer because we currently have an excellent Acting VC, but we know nothing about the newly appointed VC who will take over in June 2022”. One respondent also stated that they were “very disappointed that prof Linda Du Plessis was not appointed as VC and principal”. Some respondents also grouped the leadership of the NWU as the university management and with this, felt that the management of the NWU was inadequate and did not attend to the needs of the staff. Respondents provided comments such as: “[a comment made by a Deputy Vice-Chancellor] indicates weak leadership and confirms that leadership has no idea what is going on at ground level”, “the executive management of this university treats staff like pawns in a game”, and “top management have no idea of caring and fostering an ethic of care, but they keep on preaching it”. Respondents also raised concerns about the managers at the NWU. While two respondents stated that there are good and bad managers, and that one could not have an overall perception of all managers, other respondents were not of the same opinion. These respondents felt that the managers at the NWU were “bullies”, that they practised “favouritism and nepotism”, that they were “never available for assistance” and that they practised a “micro-management” style that did not yield positive results. Other respondents touched on the organisation of the NWU, stating that the university “was not well organised” as management pushed decisions on staff and caused staff to feel overwhelmed in terms of their workload.

When considering the seventh and final dimension, namely performance, respondents provided negative comments here as well. This was surprising as the statistical data of the dimension showed it to be one of dimensions that measured the best (refer to section 6.3.2.7). However, almost all the comments related to a previously raised concern: remuneration for staff. Respondents felt that the NWU performed well in terms finances and therefore could not understand why increasing employee remuneration was an issue. With this, comments arose such as: “there never seems to be any money to appoint enough people, ensure enough infrastructure, etc. Yet I read in the media that we are rated amongst the best”. One respondent felt that “academic staff were ‘taxed’ in a way that discourages the additional work involved in obtaining funding”. While another respondent felt that the NWU would be able to perform better financially by reducing the intake of “NSFAS” dependent “students”.

In summary, three of the seven dimensions of RepTrak™ fared quite well, one fared as average to good, was average to needing some attention, and the remaining two fared poorly. Specifically, the dimensions that measured good were products and services, citizenship, and performance. In these dimensions, no concerns were raised from interpreting the statistical data, although some concern was raised in the comment section. Here, respondents felt that although the NWU produced high quality products and services, the university needed to employ more competent academic staff to better the quality thereof. The statistical data and comments pertaining to citizenship compared well with one another. Here respondents felt that the NWU was doing well in the dimension, but that it did require some attention. This was also true for the dimension of performance, although the comments did link the NWU's good financial performance to the poor remuneration they felt was offered to staff. Leadership was the dimension that fared as average to good, while governance was the dimension that fared average but needing some attention. In terms of leadership, the attributes pertaining to the NWU having an appealing leader and excellent managers made the difference between ranking the dimension as average to good and good. However, we noted that there were variables in terms of the appealing leader that may have influenced the sample's perceptions. This was noted in both the statistical data and commentary. The comment section also raised concerns in terms of managers at the NWU. Considering governance, all three the dimensions' attributes measured as average, except for that of transparent communication, which had an equal majority of neutral and disagree. This dimension also showed a high inclination towards negative perceptions of the sample and therefore made the difference between being measured as average and average to requiring attention. The statistical data and commentary compared well in this regard. The dimensions that fared poorly were innovation and workplace. In terms of innovation, the three attributes each measured on a different scale statistically. While the majority of the sample felt that the NWU was an innovative institution, the sample remained neutral on whether the university was the first to go to market with new products and services and remained divided on how quickly the university adapted to change. However, although divided on the latter, the sample showed a higher inclination toward a negative perception than a positive perception, as did the commentary. In terms of workplace, the sample strongly disagreed that the NWU rewarded its employees fairly and that the university offered equal opportunities to employees. While the majority of the sample felt that the NWU demonstrated a concern for the wellbeing of employees, over 30% of the sample did not. The comment section also provided sufficient evidence that the sample negatively perceived the dimension. Here, two further concerns were raised by the majority, namely discrimination between

support and academic staff as well as staff across campuses, and poor remuneration offered by the NWU.

The proceeding sections discussed the validity of RepTrak™.

6.4 Validity of RepTrak™

To determine the validity of the RepTrak™ model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. The CFA included the use of AMOS statistical software to access the model's seven dimensions and 23 attributes. The theoretical measurement model is presented in Figure 6-1 hereunder.

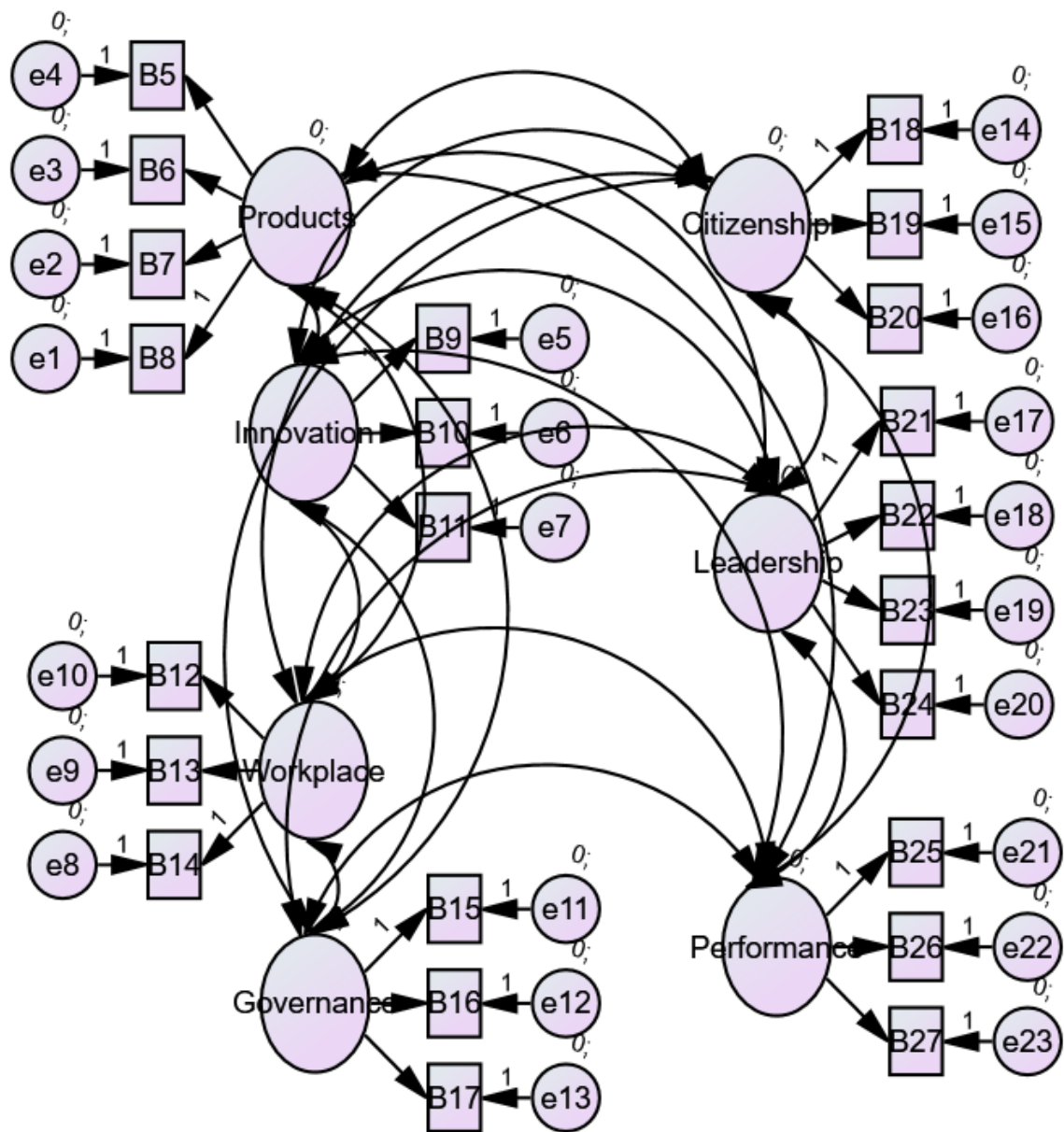


Figure 6-1: Theoretical measurement model of CFA for RepTrak™

As this model was received from the NWU SCS, this model was generated by using the statical software of the consultant. On advice of the consultant, the model should not be changed. Rather, it is advised that the additional data obtained from the CFA should be applied to the model in further discussions. How well this data fits into the model should also be a point of discussion.

From Figure 6-1, we see that all the dimensions and attributes of RepTrak™ fitted well within the constructs that they aimed to measure. The figure shows a general standardised regression estimate of approximately 1. This is suitable for the study as the ideal is to have the standardised regression estimates above 0.3, but as close to 1 as possible. The closer the score is to 1, the stronger the relationships with constructs are. Although the standardised regression estimates were all indeed very close to 1, Figure 6-1 does not provide the exact scores. However, the exact scores for each attribute are recorded in Table 6-15 hereunder.

Table 6-15: Standardised regression estimates of the RepTrak™ instrument.

Attribute	Dimension	P-value	Standardised regression estimate
The North-West University (NWU) meets the needs of its stakeholders	Products and services (PS)	*	0.75
The North- West University (NWU) stands behind its products (qualifications) and services.	Products and services (PS)	*	0.80
The North-West University's (NWU's) products and services are of high value for money.	Products and services (PS)	*	0.87
The North-West University (NWU) offers high quality products (qualifications) and services.	Products and services (PS)	*	0.90
The North-West University (NWU) is an innovative institution.	Innovation (I)	*	0.84
The North-West University is generally the first to go to market with new products and services.	Innovation (I)	*	0.77
The North-West University (NWU) adapts quickly to change.	Innovation (I)	*	0.77
The North-West University (NWU) offers equal opportunities to its employees.	Workplace (W)	*	0.74
The North-West University (NWU) demonstrates concern for the well-being of its employees.	Workplace (W)	*	0.79
The North-West University (NWU) rewards its employees fairly.	Workplace (W)	*	0.82

The North-West University (NWU) is open and transparent in all communication.	Governance (G)	*	0.87
The North-West University (NWU) behaves ethically.	Governance (G)	*	0.91
The North-West University (NWU) is fair in the way it does business.	Governance (G)	*	0.86
The North-West University acts responsible to protect the environment.	Citizenship (C)	*	0.72
The North-West University (NWU) supports good causes.	Citizenship (C)	*	0.84
The North-West University (NWU) has a positive influence on society.	Citizenship (C)	*	0.83
The North-West University (NWU) is a well-organised institution.	Leadership (L)	*	0.79
The North-West University's (NWU) has a strong and appealing leader.	Leadership (L)	*	0.72
The North-West University's (NWU) has excellent managers	Leadership (L)	*	0.75
The North-West University's (NWU) has a clear vision for the university's future.	Leadership (L)	*	0.82
The North-West University (NWU) is financially profitable.	Performance (P)	*	0.79
The North-West University (NWU) produces better financial results than expected.	Performance (P)	*	0.80
The North-West University (NWU) shows strong prospects for growth.	Performance (P)	*	0.87

**All p-values were smaller than 0.001*

As seen in Table 6-15 hereabove, each attribute's standardised regression estimate was far above 0.3 and very close to 1, with the lowest score recorded at 0.72 and the highest at 0.91. For products and services, the standardised regression estimates for each attribute ranged between 0.75 and 0.90. For innovation, the scores ranged between 0.77 and 0.84. For workplace, the scores ranged between 0.74 and 0.82. For governance, the scores ranged between 0.86 and

0.91. For citizenship, the scores ranged between 0.72 and 0.84. For leadership, the scores ranged between 0.72 and 0.82, and finally, for performance, the scores ranged between 0.79 and 0.87. This provides sufficient evidence that the dimensions and attributes fitted well within the constructs that they aimed to measure. In addition, table 6-15 notes that the dimensions each displayed a *p-value* which was smaller than 0.001. Such small *p-values* also indicate that the dimensions and attributes fitted well within the measurable constructs.

The discussion pertaining to the CFA can be taken further to determine how well the dimensions correlated with one another. From Table 6-16 below, the recorded correlation scores between dimensions show that the dimensions are sufficiently relevant to one another. Table 6-16 makes use of abbreviations to indicate each dimension. These abbreviations are therefore presented before Table 6-16 is, and are as follows:

- PS = Products and services
- I = Innovation
- W = Workplace
- G = Governance
- C = Citizenship
- L = Leadership
- P = Performance

Table 6-16: Correlations for the RepTrak™ dimensions

Dimensions	P-value	Estimate
PS <--> I	*	0,86
PS <--> W	*	0,59
PS <--> G	*	0,69
PS <--> C	*	0,75
PS <--> L	*	0,80
P <--> PS	*	0,68
I <--> W	*	0,72
I <--> G	*	0,80
I <--> C	*	0,80
I <--> L	*	0,89
P <--> I	*	0,74

W <--> G	*	0,83
P <--> W	*	0,53
W <--> L	*	0,75
W <--> C	*	0,66
G <--> C	*	0,80
G <--> L	*	0,81
P <--> G	*	0,66
C <--> L	*	0,82
P <--> C	*	0,75
P <--> L	*	0,81

**All p-values were smaller than 0.001*

The lowest correlation value was recorded as 0.53, while the highest was 0.89. The strongest correlations were between products and services and innovation, products and services and leadership, innovation and governance, innovation and citizenship, innovation and leadership, workplace and governance, governance and citizenship, governance and leadership, citizenship and leadership, and performance and leadership. These correlations were recorded at 0.80 and above. The moderate correlations that were recorded between 0.72 and 0.75 were products and services and citizenship, innovation and workplace, performance and innovation, workplace and leadership, and performance and citizenship. The lower correlations were products and services and workplace, products and services and governance, performance and products and services, performance and workplace, workplace and citizenship, and performance and governance, with scores between 0.53 and 0.68. Although the correlations range from high, to moderate to lower, the correlations can still be seen as statistically significant. In addition, table 6-16 indicates that every correlation exhibited a p-value of less than 0.001. These correlations therefore indicate that each of the dimensions are connected to every other dimension. The measurement could then most probably have made use of less attributes/dimensions. However, RepTrak™ was used as it is presented in literature to this study, except for minor adjustments to some attributes' wording and the inclusion of a comment section. In addition, as the correlations ranged from high to lower, it is advisable to make use of the instrument in its entirety.

From the above discussions and with the guidance of NWU SCS, the theoretical measurement model of CFA for RepTrak™ can be modified to include all, and the exact, standardised regression estimates as well as the correlation scores. This simplified model is presented in Figure 6-2 hereunder and is the author's own interpretation.

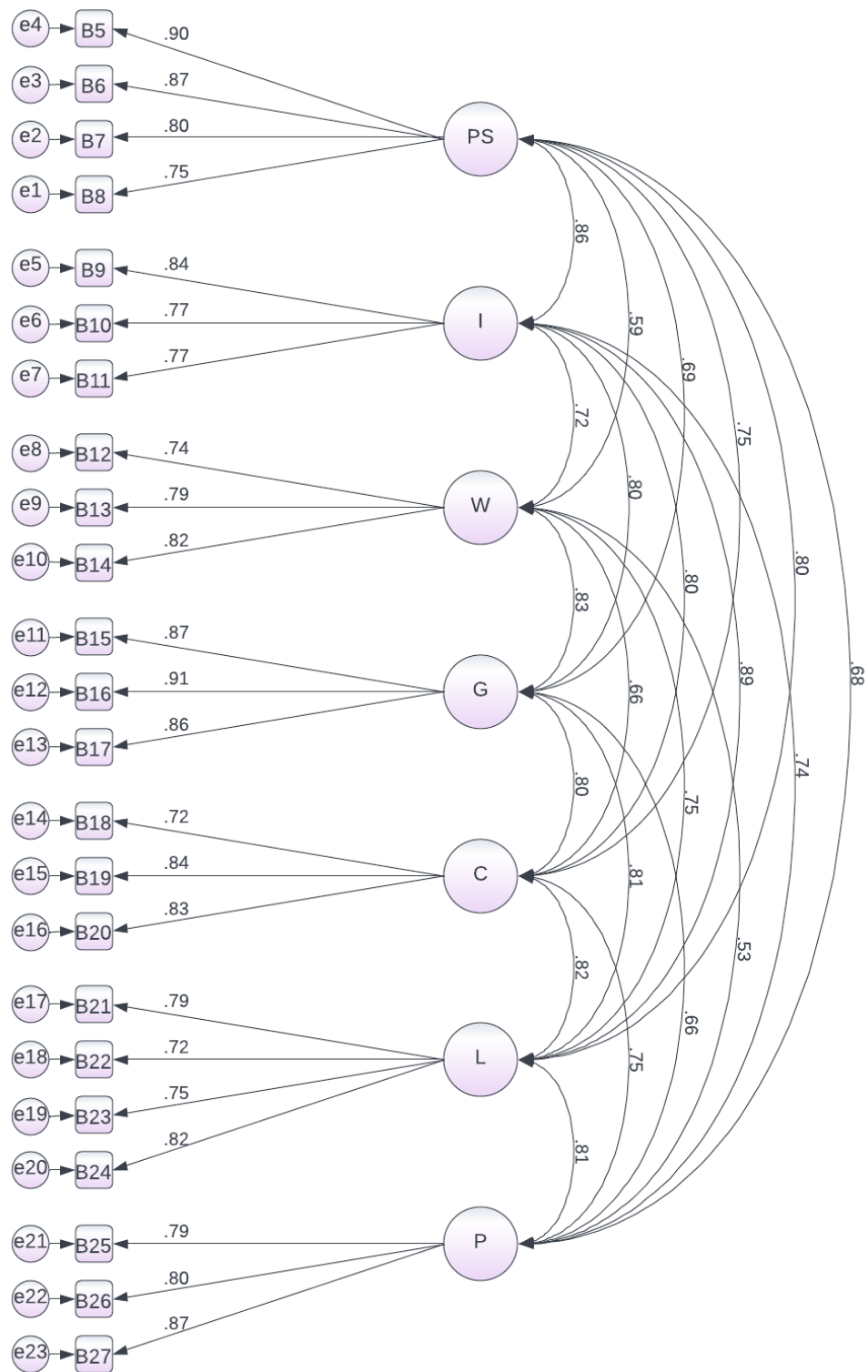


Figure 6-2: Researcher's interpretation of the theoretical measurement model of CFA for RepTrak™

To conclude the discussion on the validity of the RepTrak™ model, a goodness of fit was also conducted. In Table 6-17 hereunder, a summary of the model fit is provided.

Table 6-17: Goodness of fit for the measurement model of RepTrak™

Minimum Sample of Discrepancy divided by Degrees of Freedom (CMIN/DF)	Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) LO 90	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) HI 90
1.972	0.952	0.064	0.054	0.073

The chi-square test is used in statistics to determine how well a data-set, which comprises various variables, fits the theoretical model that the data is based on. However, the chi-square test has gained a reputation of being an “overly strict model of fit” by some literature and is therefore divided by the Degrees of Freedom (Mueller & Hancock, 2010:109; Bryant & Satorra, 2012:373). To be deemed acceptable, the final ratio can be as high as 3, 4 or 5, but it is preferred to have the ratio of 2. With a Minimum Discrepancy Function by Degrees of Freedom divided (CMIN/DF) of 1.972, the score for the absolute fit is very close to 2, and therefore the model fits extremely well. However, Mueller and Hancock (2010:379) state that researchers should present at least three fit indices to adequately determine validity. In addition to the absolute fit obtained by the chi-square test, the study also presents results from incremental as well as non-centrality indices. In terms of the latter, the model again has an excellent fit as it recorded a comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.952, and the CFI should ideally be greater than 0.9 (Normalini *et al.*, 2019:507). Regarding the non-centrality measures, we note the presence of the Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA) in Table 6-17. The RMSEA is essentially an error, and therefore it is the ideal the score should be as small as possible, i.e. the closer it is to 0, the better the score. Literature differs in terms of what the maximum score should be for the RMSEA to be deemed acceptable. Some are of the opinion that it should be smaller than 0.06, some say smaller than 0.08, and some say if the score is smaller than 0.1, it is deemed acceptable (Blunch, 2012:116). At 0.064, with a lower 90% confidence limit of 0.054 and higher 90% confidence limit of 0.073, the RMSEA of this model is also an excellent fit.

In conclusion, the above discussion provides sufficient evidence that the data obtained from the survey fits well into the theoretical model, and therefore it can be confirmed that there is validity for RepTrak™ as used by this study. With this, the study therefore contributes to literature by proving that RepTrak™ can be used within a South African context, as well as within a university context such as the NWU.

The following section discusses the reliability of the measurement model.

6.5 Reliability of RepTrak™

All n=242 surveys submitted by the sample were deemed to be reliable and no surveys were therefore excluded. To test the reliability of the study, Cronbach's alpha was used. When utilised, Cronbach's alpha will provide a value between 0 and 1. The closer the value is to 1, the more reliable the model is deemed to be. However, according to Mueller and Hancock (2010:381), Cronbach's alpha should produce a value of 0.70 or higher to be acceptable refer to section 4.4.2.3.2). In Table 6-18 hereunder, the reliability of RepTrak™ and its variables (themes and dimensions) are presented.

Table 6-18: Reliability of the RepTrak™ dimensions

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
RepTrak™_Trust	n/a	1	5	3.41	1.03
RepTrak™_Feeling	n/a	1	5	3.56	0.98
RepTrak™_Admire	n/a	1	5	3.58	1.02
RepTrak™_Respect	n/a	1	5	3.63	0.93
Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
RepTrak™_Products and Services	0.89	1.00	5.00	3.72	0.84
RepTrak™_Innovation	0.83	1.00	5.00	3.07	0.95
RepTrak™_Workplace	0.82	1.00	5.00	2.67	1.09
RepTrak™_Governance	0.91	1.00	5.00	3.05	1.06
RepTrak™_Citizenship	0.83	1.00	5.00	3.61	0.83
RepTrak™_Leadership	0.85	1.00	5.00	3.16	0.94
RepTrak™_Performance	0.86	1.00	5.00	3.49	0.86
Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
RepTrak™_Total	0.92	1.00	5.00	3.25	0.79

From Table 6-17, we see that the themes of the RepTrak™ do not have Cronbach's alpha values. This is because each theme comprised only one statement in the survey. However, the dimensions comprised three to four statements each and therefore have a value for Cronbach's alpha. All seven dimensions presented high values of Cronbach's Alpha, as all were between 0.82 and 0.91. This implies a high reliability.

The theme that fared the best was **respect**, with a mean of 3.63, while **trust** was perceived as the lowest ranking theme with a mean of 3.41. The dimension that recorded the highest mean value was **products and services** at 3.72. In terms of the samples' responses as discussed in section 6.3.2.1, we noted that the sample agreed with each attribute of the dimension in majority. The conclusion of section 6.3 also indicated that, in comparison with the other dimensions, products and services was one of the best dimensions perceived by the sample, if not the best. The dimension that recorded the lowest mean value was **workplace**, at 2.67. This was a dimension that presented concerns in section 6.3. Other dimensions such as **governance** and **innovation** also had lower means at 3.05 and 3.07, respectively. These dimensions also presented concerns in section 6.3. Moreover, the means of each remaining dimension (**citizenship, performance, and leadership**) were all above 3 and below 4, which signifies that each dimension was perceived as average, although performance was on the border of average and good. This also proves for a reliable measurement model as each dimension shows sufficient levels of reliability.

To determine the overall score of RepTrak™ when applied to a specific context, a score of 0 to 100 must be provided. If the score is between 0 and 39, the corporate reputation is poor, between 40 and 59 is considered weak, between 60 and 69 is considered average, between 70 and 79 is considered strong, and above 80 is considered excellent (refer to section 2.6.1). As the survey in this study was based on a five-point Likert scale, and the mean for the total RepTrak™ was recorded at 3.25 in Table 6-17, the total reputation score out of 100 for the NWU can be determined by calculating what percentage 3.25 of 5 is. This calculation provides an answer of 65%. With a score of **65/100**, the NWU therefore rates as having an *average* corporate reputation. This suggests that there is considerable room for the NWU to improve its corporate reputation in terms of staff member perspectives.

In section 6.2, the demographic profile of the sample was presented. The following section uses this information to evaluate the effect thereof on the variables of RepTrak™.

6.6 Evaluation of the demographic variables on RepTrak™

The effects of the demographic variables on RepTrak™ were explored through the utilisation of nonparametric correlations, independent T-tests and one-way ANOVAs. The proceeding sections present the findings of each, beginning with the nonparametric correlations.

6.6.1 Nonparametric correlations: Age and duration of employment

The variables that were measured using nonparametric correlations were the age and duration of employment of the sample. Nonparametric correlations were used here as these variables had order in terms of their groupings. Table 6-19 hereunder presents the data of these correlations.

Table 6-19: Nonparametric correlations: age and duration of employment

Variables		Age	Duration of employment
Trust	Correlation coefficient	0.04	0.03
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.56	0.62
	N	242.00	241.00
Admire	Correlation coefficient	-0.04	-0.02
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.52	0.76
	N	242.00	241.00
Respect	Correlation coefficient	0.01	-0.01
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.90	0.92
	N	242.00	241.00
Esteem	Correlation coefficient	-0.02	0.00
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.74	0.97
	N	242.00	241.00
Products and services	Correlation coefficient	0,00	0,00
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,96	0,94
	N	242,00	241,00
Innovation	Correlation coefficient	-0,01	-0,04
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,93	0,54
	N	242,00	241,00
Workplace	Correlation coefficient	0,00	-0,08
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,98	0,19
	N	242,00	241,00
Governance	Correlation coefficient	-0,10	-0,07
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,14	0,26
	N	242,00	241,00
Citizenship	Correlation coefficient	-0,09	-0,12
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,18	0,05
	N	242,00	241,00
Leadership	Correlation coefficient	-0,11	-0,12
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,10	0,05
	N	242,00	241,00
Performance	Correlation coefficient	-0,05	-0,05
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,45	0,40
	N	242,00	241,00
RepTrak™_Total	Correlation coefficient	-0,05	-0,08
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,40	0,22
	N	242,00	241,00

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As a footnote, Table 6-19 indicates that values marked with an * would provide an indication that these correlations were statistically significant on the variables of RepTrak™. From the data provided in Table 6-19, no correlation is marked by the symbol. Therefore, the age and duration of employment of the respondents did not have an effect on the themes or dimensions of RepTrak™.

The proceeding section discusses the effect of the samples' gender and staff type on RepTrak™.

6.6.2 Independent T-tests: Gender and staff type

While respondents were presented with six options when indicating their gender in the survey, two of these options were not chosen by any respondents, and another two received only one response each (refer to section 6.2.1.2). Therefore, the gender of the sample was profiled using the two remaining options that received much higher responses, namely male and female. With two variables, this demographic factor's effect on RepTrak™ was therefore evaluated using an independent T-test. Similarly, the type of staff member is another demographic factor that had two options, namely academic or support staff. This factor was therefore also evaluated using an independent T-test. However, before the data is presented, it is important to note that although *p*-values are indicated in the T-tests, these values are not the most important data in terms of this study. Rather, we must consider the effect sizes as the sample comprised available and willing respondents. The sample therefore does not equal the population of the NWU, and this data, therefore cannot be used to generalise the population – we can only discuss the results in terms of the sample. Therefore, while *p*-values are present, it is only for the purpose of completeness, and the effect sizes are used for interpretation purposes.

Table 6-20: Independent T-test: Gender

Variables		N	Mean	Std. deviation	p-value	Effect size
Trust	Male	95	3,38	1,05	0.63	0.06
	Female	144	3,44	1,02		
Admire	Male	95	3,54	0,97	0.72	0.05
	Female	144	3,58	1,00		
Respect	Male	95	3,55	1,08	0.60	0.07
	Female	144	3,62	0,99		
Esteem	Male	95	3,53	0,97	0.13	0.20
	Female	144	3,72	0,91		
Products and services	Male	95	3,73	0,83	0.88	0.02
	Female	144	3,72	0,86		
Innovation	Male	95	2,97	0,93	0.13	0.19
	Female	144	3,16	0,98		
Workplace	Male	95	2,63	1,12	0.66	0.06
	Female	144	2,69	1,08		
Governance	Male	95	3,10	1,05	0.66	0.06
	Female	144	3,04	1,08		
Citizenship	Male	95	3,63	0,80	0.77	0.04
	Female	144	3,60	0,86		
Leadership	Male	95	3,08	1,00	0.26	0.15
	Female	144	3,22	0,91		
Performance	Male	95	3,54	0,91	0.51	0.09
	Female	144	3,47	0,83		
RepTrak™_Total	Male	95	3,24	0,78	0.77	0.04
	Female	144	3,27	0,81		

Small *p*-values indicate a difference between groups. *P*-values of around 1 are considered large, and in terms of Table 6-20, the *p*-values indicate that there was no effect on the variables when considering the gender profile of the population. However, as previously stated, the *p*-values are indicated solely for the purpose of being as thorough as possible, but the *p*-values cannot be used for interpretation as the sample of the study is not equal to the population of the NWU. In terms of interpretation, effect sizes must be discussed.

When considering the effect sizes, a value of 0.8 would indicate a large effect on the variables, a value of 0.5 would have a medium effect, and a value of 0.2 would have a small effect. Considering this, we note that the biggest effect is 0.2 (products and services). The second largest is 0.15 (leadership) and all other effect sizes are as small as 0.02 to 0.09. This indicates that there

was no difference between the male and female respondents in the sample and that the sample's gender profile did not have an effect on the variables of RepTrak™.

Table 6-21 hereunder presents the data of the second independent T-test conducted on the type of staff members found in the sample.

Table 6-21: Independent T-test: type of staff member

Variables		N	Mean	Std. deviation	p-value	Effect size
Trust	Academic staff	121	3,32	1,02	0.17	0.18
	Support staff	121	3,50	1,04		
Admire	Academic staff	121	3,50	0,98	0.32	0.13
	Support staff	121	3,62	0,99		
Respect	Academic staff	121	3,49	1,01	0.14	0.19
	Support staff	121	3,68	1,03		
Esteem	Academic staff	121	3,53	0,91	0.10	0.21
	Support staff	121	3,73	0,96		
Products and services	Academic staff	121	3,69	0,76	0.51	0.08
	Support staff	121	3,76	0,92		
Innovation	Academic staff	121	2,97	0,92	0.07	0.23
	Support staff	121	3,19	0,98		
Workplace	Academic staff	121	2,79	1,06	0.11	0.20
	Support staff	121	2,56	1,12		
Governance	Academic staff	121	3,04	1,05	0.81	0.03
	Support staff	121	3,07	1,08		
Citizenship	Academic staff	121	3,56	0,79	0.28	0.14
	Support staff	121	3,67	0,88		
Leadership	Academic staff	121	3,02	0,94	0.01	0.31
	Support staff	121	3,31	0,92		
Performance	Academic staff	121	3,38	0,80	0.03	0.27
	Support staff	121	3,61	0,90		
RepTrak™_Total	Academic staff	121	3,21	0,76	0.22	0.13
	Support staff	121	3,31	0,82		

In Table 6-21, the small *p*-values once again indicate that there was no effect on the variables when considering the gender profile of the population. Again, however, the *p*-values are only indicated for completeness and cannot be used for interpretation as the sample of the study is not equal to the population of the NWU. In terms of interpretation, the effect sizes are discussed as follows. If 0.8 is large, 0.5 is medium and 0.2 is small, it can be deduced that the type of staff member profile of the sample also did not have an effect on the variables of RepTrak™. The

largest value present is that of 0.27 (performance), followed by 0.23 (innovation) and 0.21 (the theme of esteem). All other effect size values are smaller than 0.2, and governance even as small as 0.03.

The following section evaluates the remaining two demographic factors of the sample and the effect that they had on RepTrak™.

6.6.3 One-way ANOVAs: Language and campus

To evaluate the effect of the factors of the demographic profile that had three or more options, one-way ANOVAs were conducted. These demographic factors were the home language of respondents and the campus that respondents worked on. Each demographic factor's effect was evaluated separately. Therefore, two one-way ANOVAs are presented in this section, with the first evaluating language in Table 6-22 hereunder.

Table 6-22: One-way ANOVA: Analysis of variance for the respondents' home language and RepTrak™

Variables		N	Mean	Std. deviation	p-value	Effect sizes	
						Afrikaans with	English with
Trust	Afrikaans	150	3,32	1,04	0.09		
	English	47	3,45	1,04		0,12	
	African	41	3,71	0,96		0,37	0,25
	Total	238	3,41	1,03			
Admire	Afrikaans	150	3,49	0,96	0.51		
	English	47	3,60	1,08		0,10	
	African	41	3,68	0,96		0,20	0,08
	Total	238	3,55	0,98			
Respect (feeling)	Afrikaans	150	3,48	1,02	0.06		
	English	47	3,60	1,04		0,11	
	African	41	3,90	1,00		0,41	0,30
	Total	238	3,58	1,03			
Esteem	Afrikaans	150	3,62	0,88	0.74		
	English	47	3,55	1,08		0,06	
	African	41	3,71	1,01		0,09	0,14
	Total	238	3,62	0,94			

Products and services	Afrikaans	150	3,71	0,84	0.31		
	English	47	3,61	0,85		0,12	
	African	41	3,88	0,87		0,20	0,31
	Total	238	3,72	0,85			
Innovation	Afrikaans	150	3,02	0,95	0.14		
	English	47	3,03	0,90		0,01	
	African	41	3,34	1,03		0,32	0,30
	Total	238	3,07	0,96			
Workplace	Afrikaans	150	2,54	1,00	0.12		
	English	47	2,84	1,08		0,28	
	African	41	2,83	1,31		0,22	0,01
	Total	238	2,65	1,08			
Governance	Afrikaans	150	2,89	1,03	0.01		
	English	47	3,24	1,02		0,34	
	African	41	3,35	1,14		0,40	0,10
	Total	238	3,04	1,06			
Citizenship	Afrikaans	150	3,55	0,84	0.21		
	English	47	3,62	0,76		0,09	
	African	41	3,80	0,89		0,29	0,20
	Total	238	3,61	0,83			
Leadership	Afrikaans	150	3,03	0,92	0.00		
	English	47	3,23	0,90		0,22	
	African	41	3,54	0,98		0,52	0,31
	Total	238	3,16	0,94			

Performance	Afrikaans	150	3,41	0,87	0.14		
	English	47	3,55	0,76		0,17	
	African	41	3,69	0,91		0,31	0,15
	Total	238	3,49	0,86			
RepTrak_Total	Afrikaans	150	3,16	0,77	0.05		
	English	47	3,30	0,76		0,18	
	African	41	3,49	0,85		0,39	0,22
	Total	238	3,25	0,79			

Table 6-22 presents the data of the first one-way ANOVA, which shows the relationship between the respondents' home language and RepTrak™. The *p*-values indicate that none of the dimensions had statistical significance with all these values being smaller than 0. However, once again, even though *p*-values were recorded, these values cannot be used for interpretation as the study's sample does not equal the NWU's population – effect sizes must be used for interpretation when working with a sample. When considering effect sizes, once again a value of 0.2 indicates a small effect, 0.5 a medium effect and 0.8 a large effect. From Table 6-22, we note that two themes (trust = 0.37 and respect = 0.41) had a medium correlation effect, as did two dimensions (governance = 0.4 and leadership = 0.52). The remaining effect size values indicated small to insignificant correlation effects. This means that the home languages of respondents did have an effect on RepTrak, although the effect was small to medium. Each theme and dimension is discussed briefly hereunder.

In the **trust** theme, we have already noted that there was a medium correlation effect of 0.37 between Afrikaans and African languages. As African languages have the highest mean at 3.71, it is deduced that African language-speaking respondents showed more trust in the NWU compared to Afrikaans-speaking respondents. A small correlation of 0.25 was found between English and African languages, but an insignificant correlation between English and Afrikaans was recorded at 0.12. African-speaking respondents therefore trusted the NWU the most, followed by English-speaking respondents, and Afrikaans respondents trusted the NWU the least. The same is true for **respect** as a correlation effect of 0.41 was recorded between African languages and Afrikaans respondents, with the highest mean of 3.91 for African languages. A small correlation of 0.3 was recorded between English and African language respondents, and an insignificant correlation of 0.11 between English and Afrikaans respondents. Respondents who spoke African languages, therefore, respected the NWU the most, followed by English respondents, and Afrikaans respondents respected the NWU the least.

In the **admire** theme, only a small correlation effect of 0.2 is present between African languages and Afrikaans respondents. Insignificant correlations exist between English respondents with Afrikaans (0.10) and African languages (0.08). Although the correlations are small to insignificant, the means provided in the table indicate once again that African languages speakers are shown to admire the NWU more with the highest mean of 3.68. English respondents followed again, while Afrikaans recorded the lowest mean.

Insignificant correlations were recorded between all languages in the **esteem** theme. English with African languages recorded a 0.14 correlation, English with Afrikaans at 0.06, and Afrikaans with African languages at 0.09. African languages had the highest mean at 3.71, followed by Afrikaans with 3.62 and then English with 3.55. This indicates that African languages had the best perception of the NWU's esteem, followed by Afrikaans respondents, while English respondents had the worst perception of the theme, although their perceptions did not differ greatly from one another.

Considering the dimensions, small to insignificant correlations were recorded for **products and services**. A small correlation existed between English and African languages at 0.31, as well as between Afrikaans and African languages at 0.20. An insignificant correlation between Afrikaans and English was recorded at 0.12. African languages had the best perception of the dimension with the highest mean of 3.88, followed by Afrikaans respondents, while English respondents had the worst perception of the dimension.

For **innovation**, small to insignificant correlations were recorded again. African languages showed a small correlation with both English (0.30) and Afrikaans (0.32) respondents, while the correlation between English and Afrikaans was so insignificant, it virtually did not exist at 0.01. African languages had the best perception of the dimension with the highest mean of 3.34, while English and Afrikaans were almost equal at 3.03 and 3.02.

In terms of **workplace**, small to insignificant correlations were recorded again. Afrikaans, with English, showed the highest correlation, although small at 0.28. Afrikaans, with African languages, also had a small correlation of 0.22, while the correlation between English and African languages was insignificant at 0.10. English and African languages had the best perceptions of the dimension with means of 2.84 and 2.83, while Afrikaans recorded the worst perception of the dimension with the lowest mean.

With **governance**, we see two medium correlation effects between Afrikaans with both African languages (0.40) and English (0.34), while an insignificant correlation between African languages and English was recorded at 0.10. Respondents who spoke African languages had the best perception of the dimension with the highest mean (3.35), followed by English (3.24), while Afrikaans respondents had the worst perception with the lowest mean (2.89).

Citizenship showed small to insignificant correlations. Small correlations were found between African languages with Afrikaans (0.29) and English (0.20), while an insignificant correlation

between Afrikaans and English was recorded at 0.09. Again, African languages had the highest mean (3.80) and therefore the best perception of the dimension, followed by English (3.62) and lastly Afrikaans (3.55).

Leadership recorded medium to small correlations. The biggest correlation effect was found between Afrikaans and African languages (0.52), followed by English with African languages (0.31), while a small correlation of 0.22 was recorded between Afrikaans and English. Again, African languages had the best perception of the dimension with the highest mean (3.54), English the second best (3.23) and Afrikaans the worst (3.03).

The final dimension of **performance** recorded medium to small, to insignificant correlations. The largest correlation was between Afrikaans and African languages (0.39). A small correlation existed between English and African languages (0.22) and an insignificant correlation between English and Afrikaans (0.18). African languages perceived the dimension the best with the highest mean of 3.69, English second (3.55) and Afrikaans the worst (3.41).

The effect on the **holistic RepTrak™** model was medium to small. The largest correlation existed between Afrikaans and African languages (0.39), while smaller correlations existed between English and African languages (0.22) and English and Afrikaans (0.18). All three groups perceived the corporate reputation of the NWU as average, with means of between 3.16 and 3.49, and an average mean of 3.25. However, from the discussion hereabove, and these means, it can be deduced that respondents who spoke African languages were generally happier with the NWU's corporate reputation, and therefore they had a more positive perception of the university as compared to their English and Afrikaans colleagues. English-speaking respondents had the second-best perception of the NWU, and therefore a more negative perception than their colleagues who spoke African languages, but more positive than their Afrikaans-speaking colleagues. Afrikaans-speaking respondents seemed to have a more negative perception of the NWU when compared to their African languages and English-speaking colleagues.

The second and final one-way ANOVA evaluated the relationship between the campus on which respondents worked and RepTrak™. This relationship is presented in Table 6-23 hereunder.

Table 6-23: One-way ANOVA: Analysis of variance for the campus that respondents worked on and RepTrak™

Variables		N	Mean	Std. deviation	p-value	Effect sizes	
						Potchefstroom Campus with	Vanderbijlpark Campus with
Trust	Potchefstroom Campus	173	3,35	1,04	0.02		
	Vanderbijlpark Campus	40	3,35	0,98		0,00	
	Mahikeng Campus	29	3,90	0,94		0,53	0,56
	Total	242	3,41	1,03			
Admire	Potchefstroom Campus	173	3,50	0,99	0.13		
	Vanderbijlpark Campus	40	3,55	0,93		0,05	
	Mahikeng Campus	29	3,90	0,98		0,40	0,35
	Total	242	3,56	0,98			
Respect (feeling)	Potchefstroom Campus	173	3,55	1,05	0.05		
	Vanderbijlpark Campus	40	3,43	0,90		0,12	
	Mahikeng Campus	29	4,00	0,93		0,43	0,62
	Total	242	3,58	1,02			
Esteem	Potchefstroom Campus	173	3,62	0,94	0.03		
	Vanderbijlpark Campus	40	3,40	0,84		0,23	
	Mahikeng Campus	29	4,00	0,96		0,40	0,62
	Total	242	3,63	0,94			

Products and services	Potchefstroom Campus	173	3,72	0,86	0.16		
	Vanderbijlpark Campus	40	3,57	0,72		0,18	
	Mahikeng Campus	29	3,96	0,86		0,28	0,45
	Total	242	3,72	0,84			
Innovation	Potchefstroom Campus	173	3,04	0,95	0.01		
	Vanderbijlpark Campus	40	2,91	0,89		0,14	
	Mahikeng Campus	29	3,54	0,96		0,52	0,66
	Total	242	3,08	0,95			
Workplace	Potchefstroom Campus	173	2,67	1,11	0.21		
	Vanderbijlpark Campus	40	2,50	0,93		0,15	
	Mahikeng Campus	29	2,97	1,17		0,25	0,40
	Total	242	2,67	1,09			
Governance	Potchefstroom Campus	173	3,03	1,08	0.01		
	Vanderbijlpark Campus	40	2,83	0,96		0,19	
	Mahikeng Campus	29	3,54	1,01		0,47	0,71
	Total	242	3,06	1,06			
Citizenship	Potchefstroom Campus	173	3,59	0,84	0.02		
	Vanderbijlpark Campus	40	3,45	0,76		0,17	
	Mahikeng Campus	29	3,98	0,79		0,46	0,67
	Total	242	3,61	0,83			
Leadership	Potchefstroom Campus	173	3,10	0,97	0.03		
	Vanderbijlpark Campus	40	3,11	0,92		0,01	
	Mahikeng Campus	29	3,59	0,72		0,50	0,51
	Total	242	3,16	0,94			

Performance	Potchefstroom Campus	173	3,49	0,86	0.12		
	Vanderbijlpark Campus	40	3,33	0,92		0,17	
	Mahikeng Campus	29	3,76	0,72		0,31	0,46
	Total	242	3,50	0,86			
RepTrak_Total	Potchefstroom Campus	173	3,23	0,80	0.02		
	Vanderbijlpark Campus	40	3,10	0,74		0,17	
	Mahikeng Campus	29	3,62	0,73		0,48	0,70
	Total	242	3,26	0,79			

In Table 6-23 hereabove, the *p*-values indicate that none of the dimensions had statistical significance with all these values being smaller than 0. However, once again, even though *p*-values were recorded, these values cannot be used for interpretation as the study's sample does not equal the NWU's population – effect sizes must be used for interpretation when working with a sample. When considering effect sizes (where a value of 0.2 indicates a small effect, 0.5 a medium effect and 0.8 a large effect), we note that there was small, as well as medium to high correlation effects regarding the relationship between the campus that respondents worked on, and RepTrak™. Medium to high correlations were found in every theme and dimension at least once. This means that the campuses that respondents worked on did have a considerable effect on RepTrak™. Each theme and dimension will be discussed individually hereunder, after which the total effect on RepTrak™ is indicated.

When considering the theme of **trust**, medium correlations were recorded between the Potchefstroom Campus employees (hereafter referred to as PC) with Mahikeng Campus employees (hereafter referred to as MC) with a correlation effect of 0.53. A medium correlation was also recorded between MC and Vanderbijlpark Campus employees (hereafter referred to as VC*), with a recorded score of 0.56. No correlation existed between PC and VC* (0.00). In terms of means, MC showed to have the most trust in the NWU with the highest mean (3.90) while PC and VC* had equal perceptions with a mean of 3.35 each.

With regard to the theme of **admire**, medium correlations again existed between PC and MC (0.40) and VC* and MC (0.35), while an insignificant correlation of 0.05 was recorded between PC and VC*. MC had more admiration for the NWU with the highest mean (3.90), while VC* (3.55) and PC (3.50) were almost equal.

More or less the same relationship existed when considering the theme of **respect**. A medium correlation was recorded between PC and MC (0.43), while a medium to high correlation was found between VC* and MC (0.62). A small to insignificant correlation existed between PC and VC* (0.12). MC showed a great deal of respect for the NWU with the highest mean (4.00). PC showed the second-best perception here (3.55), while VC* had the least respect in the NWU (3.43).

Similarly, regarding **esteem**, a medium correlation was found between PC and MC (0.40) and a medium to high correlation between VC* and MC (0.62). A small correlation was present between PC and VC* (0.23). Each group therefore differed in terms of how they perceived the NWU's

esteem. MC had a good perception thereof with the highest mean (4.00), PC the second-best perception (3.62) and VC* the lowest (3.40).

When looking at the dimensions, we note small to medium correlations in **products and services**. A medium correlation was found between VC* and MC (0.45), while small correlations were found between PC with MC (0.28) and VC* (0.18). Again, MC had the best perception of the dimension, as their mean was the highest (3.96), followed by PC (3.72) and VC* (3.57).

Innovation showed a medium correlation between MC with PC (0.52) and a medium to high correlation of MC with VC* (0.66), while an insignificant correlation existed between PC and VC* (0.14). With the highest mean (3.54), MC had the best perception of the dimension, followed by PC (3.04), while VC* had a below average perception of the dimension with a mean of 2.91.

Insignificant, small, and medium correlations were noted in the **workplace** dimension. A medium correlation existed between VC* with MC (0.40), a small correlation between PC with MC (0.25) and an insignificant correlation between PC with VC* (0.015). The three groups therefore again varied in their perceptions of the dimension. MC had the highest mean (2.97) and therefore the best perception of the dimension, followed by PC (2.67) and then VC* (2.50). From this, we also note that each group had a below average, and therefore negative, perception of the dimension.

Insignificant, medium, and large correlations existed within the **citizenship** dimension. A large correlation was found between VC* with MC (0.71), indicating that these campuses had very different opinions of the dimension. A medium correlation existed between MC with PC (0.46), and an insignificant correlation was found between PC with VC* (0.17). Again, MC had the best perception of the dimension with the highest mean (3.98), followed by PC (3.59) and then VC* (3.45).

Concerning **leadership**, medium correlations existed between MC with both PC (0.50) and VC* (0.51), while virtually no correlation between PC and VC* existed (0.01). The opinions of MC therefore differed from those of PC and VC*. MC had the most positive perception of the dimension with the highest mean (3.59), followed by VC* (3.11) and PC (3.10), who were almost equal in their perceptions.

The final dimension of **performance** recorded a medium correlation between VC* with MC (0.46), while a small correlation existed between MC and PC (0.31) and an insignificant correlation was found between PC and VC* (0.17). Again, MC had the highest mean (3.76) and therefore the best perception of the dimension, followed by PC (3.49) and then VC* (3.33).

The effect of correlations on the **total RepTrak™** model ranged from high, to medium, to small. The greatest correlation existed between MC with VC* (0.70), indicating that these groups' opinions varied largely from one another. A medium correlation existed between MC and PC (0.48), indicating that these groups also differed from one another, although not as much as MC with VC*. A small to insignificant correlation existed between PC with VC* (0.17), which indicated that these two groups generally agreed with one another or only differed slightly. MC had the best perception of the NWU's corporate reputation with the highest mean (3.62), followed by PC (3.23) and VC* (3.10).

In summary, most of the demographic variables, except for two variables of the sample, did not have an effect on RepTrak™. Specifically, nonparametric correlations showed that the age and duration of employment of the respondents did not have an effect on RepTrak™. Similarly, two independent T-tests showed that the gender and type of staff member also did not have an effect on RepTrak™. However, two one-way ANOVAs showed that the remaining two variables, namely the home language of respondents and campus that they worked on, did have an effect on RepTrak™. The effect of the home languages of respondents was medium. Here we saw that respondents who spoke African languages, generally, had a better perception of the NWU's corporate reputation when compared to English- and Afrikaans-speaking respondents. English respondents also had a slightly better perception thereof when compared to Afrikaans respondents. The campus on which respondents worked had a medium to high effect on RepTrak™. Here we saw a considerable difference between the opinions of MC and VC*, with MC having a much more positive perception of the NWU's corporate reputation than VC*. PC's perceptions were more closely aligned with VC*'s, but did not differ as greatly from MC as VC* did.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to answer the third specific research question posed by the study, namely:

What are the perceptions of NWU staff regarding the university's current corporate reputation management according to the RepTrak™ measurement instrument? (refer to section 1.2.2).

The chapter showed that the RepTrak™ survey, applied to the context of the NWU, yielded results that could be used to determine how the sample perceived the corporate reputation of the NWU. The entire chapter was furthermore based on the interpretation of statistical results achieved from the Google Forms platform as well as descriptive statistics, a CFA, Cronbach's alpha,

nonparametric correlations, independent T-tests and one-way ANOVAs, as received from NWU SCS. It was reiterated on various occasions throughout the chapter that the study's findings were based on a sample, and not the entire population of the NWU.

The chapter began by providing a demographic profile of the sample. This demographic profile was formed using the answers from questions 1 to 6 in Annexure F. The variables recorded were age, gender and language of respondents as well as the type of staff member that respondents were, the campus that they worked on and the duration that they had been employed by the NWU. Here we saw that the sample vastly differed in terms of age, gender, language, and the campus that respondents worked on. In terms of age, the groups were unequally divided, and no respondents were under the age of 26. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were female, and less than 20% of respondents identified as male. In terms of language, the sample consisted of mostly Afrikaans-speaking respondents, although English and African languages were significantly present in the sample. Similarly, in terms of campus, the Potchefstroom Campus constituted the majority of the sample with over 70%, while the Vanderbijlpark Campus and Mahikeng Campus were more closely aligned when constituting the rest of the sample. The remaining two variables, namely staff type and employment duration, were more closely aligned in the demographic profile of the sample. The sample was equally divided between academic and support staff, and in terms of employment duration, the majority of the sample (around 70%) had worked at the NWU for one to 15 years, while the remainder of the sample had worked for 16 to 21+ years at the NWU.

The themes of RepTrak™ measured well in terms of the sample's perceptions. Here we saw that the majority of the sample rated all four themes, namely trust, feeling, admire and esteem, on a level 4 (agree). While large sums of the sample also remained neutral on each theme, more collective positive perceptions were indicated than negative. Three of the seven dimensions fared quite well, one fared average to good, one fared average to needing some attention, and the remaining two fared poorly. Specifically, the dimensions that measured good were products and services, citizenship, and performance. In these dimensions, no concerns were raised from interpreting the statistical data. Leadership was the dimension that fared average to good, while governance was the dimension that fared average, but needing some attention. In terms of leadership, the attributes pertaining to the NWU having an appealing leader and excellent managers made the difference between ranking the dimension as average to good and good. However, we noted that there were variables in terms of the appealing leader that may have influenced the sample's perceptions. In terms of governance, all three the dimensions' attributes

measured as average, except for that of transparent communication, which had an equal majority of neutral and disagree. This dimension also showed a high inclination towards negative perceptions of the sample and therefore made the difference between being measured as average and average to requiring attention. The dimensions that fared poorly were innovation and workplace. In terms of innovation, the three attributes each measured on a different scale. While the majority of the sample felt that the NWU was an innovative institution, the sample remained neutral on whether the university was the first to go to market with new products and services and remained divided on how quickly the university adapted to change. However, although divided on the latter, the sample showed a higher inclination toward a negative perception than a positive perception. In terms of workplace, the sample strongly disagreed that the NWU rewarded its employees fairly and that the university offered equal opportunities to employees. While the majority of the sample felt that the NWU demonstrated a concern for the wellbeing of employees, over 30% of the sample did not. The collective measurements of innovation and workplace therefore concluded these two dimensions as being poorly perceived by the sample. Moreover, concerns were raised in the comment section of the survey by respondents. The most notable concerns were:

- **Respondents felt that there was discrimination between academic and support staff.**
Here, respondents specifically felt that academic staff received more opportunities and benefits than support staff, and that the NWU did not consider that some support staff held postgraduate degrees. Support staff also felt that they had no room to grow at the NWU.
- **Respondents felt that there was discrimination between the staff on the three campuses.**
Here, respondents indicated that there was unequal pay between staff of the three campuses, although staff from one campus held the same positions as staff from another. Some respondents also felt that the workload was bigger for some campuses compared to others. Unfortunately, the comments did not present evidence as to which campuses received lower remuneration and bigger workloads.
- **Respondents felt that the NWU offered poor remuneration when compared to other universities.**
- **Respondents felt that the NWU performed well financially,** and therefore linked their concern of poor remuneration to this perception.
- **Respondents felt that the NWU did not communicate transparently with stakeholders.**

- Respondents felt that the NWU was a follower and not a leader when it came to innovation.
- Respondents felt that the NWU did not effectively look after the wellbeing of employees with psychological and physical disabilities.
- While some respondents indicated that the managers of the NWU were both good and bad, others indicated a very negative perception of managers at the university.
- In terms of leadership, respondents indicated that they felt it was difficult to present an opinion as the leadership had changed during the period of the study.
- In terms of citizenship, the respondents felt that the NWU was doing well, but that there was room for improvement.

The chapter then proceeded to discuss the validity of RepTrak™. Here a CFA was conducted, which concluded that the model was indeed valid. More specifically, each of RepTrak™'s attributes presented a standardised regression estimate of far above 0.3 and very close to 1 (lowest = 0.72 and highest = 0.91), indicating that each of the dimensions and attributes fitted well within the constructs that they were supposed to measure. Furthermore, the correlation between dimensions was also strong as the lowest correlation value was 0.53, and the highest was 0.89. This section therefore concluded that the study had proved that RepTrak™ could be used within a South African context, as well as in a university setting.

Reliability of the RepTrak™ model was also determined in this chapter. This was achieved through the calculation of Cronbach's alpha. As the themes of RepTrak™ consisted of only one statement each, a Cronbach's alpha value was not awarded to them. However, in terms of the dimensions, these values were awarded. As the lowest value was recorded at 0.82 and the highest as 0.91, the reliability of the model proved to be excellent as all dimensions far surpassed the minimum required value of 0.7 and were closer to the maximum ideal value of 1. The discussion on reliability also concluded that the best perceived theme was respect, while trust was the most poorly perceived theme. In terms of dimensions, we saw that products and services was the best perceived dimension, while workplace, governance and innovation were the most poorly perceived dimensions. Citizenship, performance, and leadership were found to be in-between. Moreover, the discussion on reliability concluded that the overall RepTrak™ score for the NWU was 65/100, indicating an average corporate reputation for the university. The NWU therefore has room for improvement when considering its corporate reputation.

Finally, this chapter used the previously defined demographic profile of the sample to determine what the relationship of each demographic factor was with RepTrak™. This was conducted by means of nonparametric correlations, independent T-tests and one-way ANOVAs. The results of these methods showed that age, gender, staff type and duration of employment did not have an effect on RepTrak™. However, the language of respondents as well as the campus that they worked on did have an effect on RepTrak™, the latter more than the former. In terms of the language, respondents who spoke African languages as a home language generally had a more positive perception of the NWU, while Afrikaans-speaking respondents generally had a more negative perception of the university. In terms of campus, MC generally had a more positive perception of the NWU, while PC and VC* were more closely aligned in having a generally more negative perception in comparison with MC, although VC* showed a more negative perception than PC.

The following chapter provides a conclusion to the study by answering the specific research questions and the general research question. It also provides recommendations to the NWU, as well as discussions pertaining to the limitations of the study, and its significance in future research.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This study aimed to determine what the key drivers of the NWU's corporate reputation should be in terms of the university's staff members' perceptions. The study was undertaken as the North-West University (NWU) has gone through various changes over the past two decades. These changes, such as the 2004 merger, the 2016 onwards processes of alignment, restructuring and shift to unitary model, and the call for transformation within the South African HES by various role players, had the potential to influence the corporate reputation of the NWU, especially in the eyes of its employees.

Each of the previous six chapters assisted in answering the primary research question posed by the study. Specifically, in Chapter 1, a framework of the study was presented. This included the background, general and specific research questions, and objectives, as well as a brief discussion of how the study would achieve its objectives. Chapter 2 provided a detailed discussion on corporate reputation by means of a literature study. The chapter discussed corporate communication, corporate reputation, stakeholder relations, the trends surrounding corporate reputation, the elements of corporate reputation, corporate reputation management, corporate reputation measurement, and the advantages of corporate reputation. Chapter 3 provided context to the study. Here, the study analysed the nature of the international HES as well as the nature of, and current influences on, the South African HES. The contextual discussion furthermore focused on the history of the NWU, and the past and present challenges of the university, including political issues and the call for transformation (the shift to a unitary model, alignment, restructuring and new united institution), student protests and negative media coverage, the 4th industrial revolution's effect on the NWU and the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the NWU. Chapter 4 provided a detailed discussion on how the study's research approach and methods were implemented to answer the second and third specific research questions. Significant focus was placed on semi-structured interviews and RepTrak™ in this chapter. In Chapter 5, the empirical findings of the semi-structured interviews were presented, while Chapter 6 presented the empirical findings of the online RepTrak™ survey.

This chapter aims to triangulate the data-sets of the previous chapters to draw conclusions for the study and to provide recommendations to the NWU that could aid in the improved

management of its corporate reputation. The main objective of this chapter is to answer the study's general research question:

What should the key drivers of the North-West University's corporate reputation management strategy be, according to staff members? (refer to section 1.2.1)

The chapter also aims to answer each of the three specific research questions of the study (refer to section 1.2.2):

- 1) *What are the theoretical points of departure regarding corporate reputation management?*
- 2) *What is the North-West University's approach to the university's current corporate reputation management?*
- 3) *What are the perceptions of NWU staff regarding the university's current corporate reputation management according to the RepTrak™ measurement instrument?*

The chapter furthermore provides discussions on the study's limitations, as well as its significance and possibilities for future research.

More specifically, the chapter's layout is as follows: the chapter begins by drawing conclusions from the literature review, the semi-structured interviews and the online RepTrak™ survey. Recommendations deduced from the study are then presented. In conclusion, the chapter then discusses the limitations and significance of the study. The following section begins these discussions.

7.2 Conclusions of the study

As stated above, the study presented three specific research questions that it aimed to answer. These specific research questions should collectively assist in answering the study's general research question. With three specific research questions, the discussion on the study's conclusions is therefore divided into three sections.

The first section uses the literature study to draw conclusions pertaining to corporate communication, corporate reputation, stakeholder relations, trends affecting corporate reputation, corporate reputation elements, corporate reputation management, corporate reputation measurement and the advantages of a strong corporate reputation. The second section provides conclusions regarding the assessment of the semi-structured interviews conducted with NWU Corporate Relations and Marketing's (CRM) management regarding the current approach to

corporate reputation management at the university. The third section provides conclusions regarding the perceptions that NWU staff had of the university's corporate reputation in terms of an assessment of the online RepTrak™ survey. The first section is presented hereunder.

7.2.1 Conclusion: Specific research question 1

The first specific research question of the study was:

What are the theoretical points of departure regarding corporate reputation management? (refer to section 1.2.2).

This question was answered by means of a literature study, which comprises Chapter 2. Chapter 2's outline showed that the theoretical points of departure for corporate reputation management included corporate communication, corporate reputation, stakeholder relations, trends affecting corporate reputation, corporate reputation elements, corporate reputation management and measurement, and the advantages of a strong corporate reputation.

Corporate communication literature emphasises the need for corporate communication, as well as practitioners in the field, to be considered essential organisational assets. This is because corporate communication is aimed at stakeholders (refer to section 2.2.1). Furthermore, it can be classified as either internal or external communication, where the internal is focused on internal stakeholders and the external on external stakeholders (refer to section 2.2.1). Corporate communication comprises three types of communication, namely management communication, marketing communication and organisational communication (refer to section 2.2.2). Management communication is defined as all communication that takes place between management structures, or positions, of an organisation with the employees that fall under these structures or positions. Management communication is therefore important, as it has an influence on the relationships between managers and employees (refer to section 2.2.2). Marketing communication is defined as all communication that is aimed at getting external stakeholders, or customers specifically, to buy products and services, support the brand or provide feedback on the quality of all the aforementioned (refer to section 2.2.2). Organisational communication is the more strategic form of corporate communication and is aimed at all stakeholder groups of the organisation (refer to section 2.2.2). Corporate reputation fits into organisational communication as corporate reputation is a strategic organisational function aimed at various stakeholder groups (refer to section 2.2.3).

Corporate reputation is defined as the collective perceptions that stakeholders have of an organisation (refer to section 2.3). These perceptions can be either positive or negative, and are conceived by stakeholders as a result of their past, present, and future interactions with the organisation at hand (refer to section 2.3). The perceptions are therefore formed over a specific time period. Elements such as finances, leadership, citizenship, culture, innovation, products, services, workplace, behaviour, and communication all contribute to the perceptions that stakeholders have of an organisation. As corporate reputation has such a vast reach on the organisation, it is considered a fragile, valuable, and strategic organisational asset (refer to section 2.3). Corporate reputation furthermore produces both tangible and intangible benefits when managed correctly (refer to section 2.3). In essence, corporate reputation relates strongly to stakeholder relations, as stakeholder perceptions constitute corporate reputation. Effective stakeholder management is therefore of the utmost importance when considering corporate reputation management (refer to section 2.3.1.1).

Stakeholders are defined as anyone, or any group, which is affected by an organisation. Each organisation has its own unique blend of stakeholders. These stakeholders can be internal or external groups, primary or secondary, normative, diffused, functional or customer-related groups, regulatory, community, organisation or media groups, or shadow groups (refer to section 2.3.1.1). Organisations also rate some stakeholder groups as being more important than others. As a result, **stakeholder relations** can prove to be a difficult task. As previously stated, when considering corporate reputation, stakeholder relations play an important role as stakeholder perceptions essentially form the corporate reputation. Therefore, the way in which stakeholder relations are managed should complement corporate reputation management and *vice versa* (refer to section 2.3.1.1).

There are various **trends** that have recently proven to have an effect corporate reputation. These include the Covid-19 pandemic, the 4th industrial revolution, virtual organisations, digital information, social technologies, social media parody accounts and online reputation management (refer to section 2.3.2). The Covid-19 pandemic refers to the contagious Corona Virus that sent the world into various lockdowns from the end of 2019. This affected corporate reputations as organisations had to find quick and effective alternatives to conduct business. Organisations that were unable to adapt quickly enough, saw their corporate reputations suffer (refer to section 2.3.2.1). The 4th industrial revolution refers to the worldwide implementation of various automation technologies, such as cyber physical systems (CPS), the internet of things (IoT) and cloud computing, which have intergraded the real and virtual worlds. This trend affects

corporate reputation as it has created a new culture of stakeholders that organisations have had to learn to communicate with, manage, and meet their expectations (refer to section 2.3.2.2). Virtual organisations are network organisations that have virtual properties and were established because of globalisation. These organisations are risky and most often fail. However, organisations should at the very least have virtual properties when considering corporate reputation, as traditional organisations can no longer handle the pace at which stakeholders require information, services, and products (refer to section 2.3.2.3). Digital information is used on virtual networks and online platforms. Again, because Industry 4.0 has created a new type of stakeholder, digital information becomes important when considering corporate reputation, as many stakeholders have begun to rely on digital information as a main form of communication (refer to section 2.3.2.4). Social technologies refer to social media platforms. This trend has influenced corporate reputation in the sense that most stakeholders use social media as form of communication daily, some even as their main form of communication. Organisations therefore must adapt their messaging to suit each platform, and to suit and reach each stakeholder group effectively. The management of these platforms is therefore essential (refer to section 2.3.2.5). Social media parody accounts refer to accounts, pages, or handles on social media platforms that are created with the main objective to intentionally mock its subject, or create humour, satire, or sarcasm about the subject. Many organisations have had to deal with social media parody accounts when considering their corporate reputations, as these accounts can spread a false narrative of the organisation, which, in turn, can potentially affect its corporate reputation (refer to section 2.3.2.6). Finally, online reputation management refers to the steps taken by organisations to ensure that they are positively perceived online. This is important as online platforms have become the norm for stakeholders. In addition, once information is available online, it is almost impossible to remove completely. Therefore, messaging or any form of media that can negatively affect an organisation's corporate reputation should ideally never reach online platforms (refer to section 2.3.2.7).

Elements of corporate reputation are found in literature. These include corporate identity, corporate image, corporate brand, corporate personality, corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture. Corporate identity refers to the combination of an organisation's visual and symbolic elements as well as its internal stakeholders' behaviours and actions. It is who the organisation thinks it is (refer to sections 2.4.1.1 and 2.4.1.2). Corporate image is linked to external stakeholders and in essence is the who/what external stakeholders think an organisation is. It is the sum of the various communications that an organisation has sent out over an extended period to these external stakeholders (refer to section 2.4.2.1). Corporate brand refers to the sum of all the associations

pertinent to a product or organisation. It focuses on the bond between stakeholders and an organisation, as well as how credible and reliable stakeholders perceive the organisation to be (refer to section 2.4.3.1). Corporate personality refers to the collective set of characteristics of an organisation that sets the organisation apart from its competitors (refer to section 2.4.4.1). Corporate behaviour refers to how stakeholders perceive the actions of an organisation (refer to section 2.4.5.1), while corporate culture refers to how things are done at an organisation (refer to section 2.4.5.2), and corporate ethics to the extent to which an organisation does what is right and good (refer to section 2.4.5.3). As each of these elements play a role in how an organisation's corporate reputation is perceived by stakeholders, it is important for organisations to understand and effectively manage each of these elements to effectively manage its corporate reputation (refer to guiding theoretical argument 2 in section 2.4.6.5.5).

Corporate reputation management is, however, more than just the effective management of corporate reputation elements. The basic theory surrounding corporate reputation management states that effective corporate reputation management can aid organisations in attaining strategic goals. The basic principles to managing corporate reputations are therefore to act proactively, communicate transparently and truthfully with stakeholders, ensure effective stakeholder relationship management, employ specialised communication staff who know what the organisation's desired corporate reputation is and how to go about achieving it, ensure that its management is present in all departments of the organisation, and finally, ensure that the organisation has a strategic plan in place that encompasses all of the above (refer to section 2.5.1). This strategic plan should be based on a theoretical model such as comprehensive reputation management that provides guidelines, or activities, required for effective corporate reputation management (refer to section 2.5.2). These activities include determining what the organisation wants to achieve, measure or change, followed by reputation audits, determining organisational goals, developing, and implementing a reputational management plan, conducting follow-up audits, and finally developing, and implementing stakeholder group-specific strategies (refer to section 2.5.2). Moreover, effective corporate reputation management strongly relates to crisis communication and reputational risk in the sense that effective corporate reputation management can reduce the likelihood of reputational risk and the need for crisis communication, and effective crisis communication and reputational risk identification can protect corporate reputation (refer to section 2.5.3).

Corporate reputation measurement refers to the tools or instruments an organisation employs to assess how its stakeholders perceive its corporate reputation. In theory, there are various tools

or instruments available to measure corporate reputations. The most prominent instruments found in literature are the RQ and RepTrak™. Interestingly, the latter was built upon the former (refer to section 2.6). This study made use of RepTrak™ to measure the perceptions of NWU staff of the university's corporate reputation (refer to section 1.6.2.1). RepTrak™ comprises four themes, namely trust, feeling, admire and esteem, and seven dimensions, namely products and services, innovation, workplace, governance, leadership, citizenship, and performance. Each of these dimensions is further divided into a collective 23 attributes. When applying RepTrak™, each theme and attribute is manipulated into a statement. These statements are used to create a survey, and respondents are asked to rate each statement. The results of each attribute are then used to provide a discussion and evaluation of each dimension. Furthermore, descriptive statistics aid in this evaluation. The result of RepTrak™ is to provide the organisation with a score of 0 to 100. RepTrak™ was chosen for this study as it is the most recent measurement instrument available and has received worldwide praise for its accuracy in some of the largest companies such as Apple and Google (refer to section 2.6.2).

A strong corporate reputation provides **various advantages** for organisations. These include stable financial performance, a competitive advantage, positive perceptions of products and services (as high quality), brand loyalty, assistance in effective stakeholder management, the ability to attract and retain paramount staff, a decreased likelihood of crisis and reputational risk, an enjoyable workplace, and a decreased likelihood of negative perceptions from stakeholders when issues surrounding the organisation do arise (refer to section 2.7.1).

From the above discussion, it is evident that corporate reputation, and the management and measurement thereof, is a key organisational asset that stems from corporate communication and more specifically, organisational communication. As a key asset that is easily influenced and one that can provide many advantages, it is advisable that the NWU understands the concepts of corporate reputation and the management and measurement thereof. The NWU should also ensure that a specialist communications practitioner, or group of such practitioners, is tasked with this management and measurement – something that the university has already ensured. A strong corporate reputation could assist the NWU to retain positive perceptions in the eyes of stakeholders when faced with challenges, such as those brought for the university during the past two decades. Specifically, NWU staff have been affected by the call for transformation in the HES and the shifts and processes that occurred within the NWU as a result. Effective corporate reputation management and measurement could therefore aid the NWU in specifically increasing its corporate reputation score in the eyes of its employees.

The NWU's approach to corporate reputation management is discussed in the following section.

7.2.2 Conclusion: Specific research question 2

The second specific research question posed by the study was:

What is the North-West University's approach to the university's current corporate reputation management? (refer to section 1.2.2)

In answering the question, the objective was to determine how the NWU approached corporate reputation management, i.e. how corporate reputation management was conducted at the university. As literature showed that organisations should employ a specialised communication practitioner or department of such practitioners to handle corporate reputation management (refer to section 7.2.1), the study identified that the NWU did indeed have such a department, namely Corporate Relations and Marketing (CRM). This department was further divided into three sub-departments, namely Corporate Communications, Stakeholder Relations and Marketing and Student Recruitment. Each sub-department was led by a director, and the overarching CRM was led by an executive director (refer to section 4.4.1.2). These departments were identified as being responsible for the corporate reputation management of the NWU. Therefore, each of the four directors was identified as possible interviewees for the **semi-structured interviews**. Each director agreed to provide an interview. These semi-structured interviews were therefore the research method utilised to answer the second specific research question, as presented hereabove.

The interview schedule was created using the concepts and constructs regarding corporate reputation and the management and measurement thereof identified in Chapter 2. In addition, RepTrak™ was also consulted when developing the interview schedule (refer to section 4.4.1.3). The empirical findings of the semi-structured interviews were presented in Chapter 5. The proceeding sections draw conclusions from these findings.

7.2.2.1 NWU CRM management's understanding of corporate reputation

When questioned about their understanding of corporate reputation, some interviewees provided quite a comprehensive understanding of the concept, while others provided an adequate understanding. Collectively, NWU CRM management therefore provided a sufficient understanding of the concept.

From the collective group, NWU CRM management discussed corporate reputation as being the perceptions that stakeholders have of an organisation. Some interviewees mentioned that these perceptions could be either positive or negative, and that they were developed as a direct result of the interactions between stakeholders and the organisation, or the experiences that stakeholders had with an organisation.

From literature, this study also added that these perceptions were developed over time and that a strong corporate reputation provided both tangible and intangible benefits (refer to section 2.3.1). None of the interviewees included these facets in their understanding of the concept (refer to section 5.3).

As corporate reputation was found to be affected by certain trends (refer to section 2.3.2), the next part of the interviews was focused on this concept.

7.2.2.2 NWU CRM's understanding of corporate reputation trends

The concept of trends was particularly difficult for NWU CRM management as the interviewees struggled to provide sufficient answers when asked what trends they would identify as having an effect on corporate reputation. None of the interviewees identified all the trends that were identified in section 2.3.2, and some interviewees were not able to identify any. Some trends were alluded to by the interviewees with the mention of technology, social media, and digital marketing. However, one interviewee identified an important trend that was not identified by the study, namely climate change initiatives. The study notes the importance of this trend and therefore concludes that corporate reputation, especially within a university setting, is affected by eight trends and not seven. These trends are: the Covid-19 pandemic, the 4th industrial revolution, virtual organisations, digital information, social technologies, social media parody accounts, online reputation management, **and climate change initiatives.**

Moreover, although interviewees struggled to identify the trends that affect corporate reputation as identified in literature, when interviewees were provided with a list of trends identified by the study, a sufficient understanding of each trend as well as how it had affected the NWU was presented.

Covid-19 was defined as the contagious Corona Virus that affected the world's population from the end of 2019 (refer to section 2.3.2.1). While no interviewee provided a definition of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was obvious to the researcher that they understood what Covid-19 was when discussing how they felt the trend had affected the NWU (refer to section 5.4.3.1). Most

interviewees stated that the trend had been a challenge for the NWU, while one interviewee did not, and only indicated that the trend had been managed well by the university. In addition, one interviewee felt that the pandemic was not a trend, but did agree that the pandemic had affected the NWU and other organisations worldwide (refer to section 5.4.3.2). Collectively, NWU CRM management indicated that the pandemic affected the NWU in various ways. Firstly, the pandemic created a challenge when national lockdowns were implemented. Here, the NWU had to quickly move from an in-contact institution to an online learning institution for students to complete their academic curriculums in a timely manner. This was not only challenging in terms of logistics, but also placed pressure on the university's employees, especially academic staff, and the finances of the university. The second challenge was to manage stakeholder relations effectively, as NWU CRM management indicated that stakeholders, especially students and parents, were unhappy about the online learning shift as they were paying for a contact service, but not receiving it. In the same sense, when lockdown restrictions were lifted, stakeholder management became a challenge when considering staff, as many staff members did not want to return to a physical office, but remain working from home. The third challenge pertained to community engagement. NWU CRM management indicated that community engagement projects were difficult to implement during the pandemic and that the pandemic highlighted the inequality in South Africa. These challenges identified by NWU CRM management compared well with what was identified in literature (cf. 2.3.2.8). Furthermore, only one interviewee stated that although the pandemic had affected the NWU with challenges, it also brought about a positive. This was that it had taught the university to stay relevant and be prepared.

The **4th industrial revolution** was defined as the implementation of automated technologies such as CPS, IoT and cloud computing on a global scale (refer to section 2.3.2.2). NWU CRM management provided a well-rounded understanding of what Industry 4.0 was, referring to specific technologies, the implementation thereof and the ways it had changed the business environment (refer to section 5.4.4.1). Furthermore, NWU CRM management suggested that the trend had created challenges for the NWU, such as the creation of new types of stakeholders with increased expectations, and pressure being placed on the university's digital platforms and staff who managed these platforms. The interviewees also suggested that the NWU was lagging behind when it came to addressing the trend and the challenges that it brought with it (refer to section 5.4.4.2). This compared well with the literature in section 2.3.2.8. In addition, this can also be linked to the negative perceptions of NWU staff regarding the university's innovation, as staff indicated that the university required work when it came to being innovative, adapting to change and being the first to present new ideas in the market (refer to section 6.3.2.2).

Virtual organisations were defined as organisations that had staff working remotely and offering products or services online (refer to section 2.3.2.3). While only one interviewee defined the trend as such, the rest of NWU CRM management provided a sufficient understanding of the trend, referring to aspects of virtual organisations such as technology and remote working conditions (refer to section 5.4.5.1). NWU CRM management's understanding of how the trend had affected the NWU was linked to the Covid-19 pandemic by all interviewees. NWU CRM management felt that the NWU had become a virtual organisation during national lockdowns and retained some properties of a virtual organisation post lockdown (refer to section 5.4.5.2). While this compares well with what was identified in section 2.3.2.8, interviewees did not allude to an additional aspect identified in the section. Section 2.3.2.8 also stated that the NWU had attained properties of a virtual organisation even before the pandemic, as it offered Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes along with other properties such as online applications and the use of webforms and other technologies as communication mediums.

Digital information, in its simplest form, was defined as communication from an organisation aimed at stakeholders that is disseminated on online platforms that these stakeholders regularly accessed (refer to section 2.3.2.4). NWU CRM management understood the concept differently from one another and each interviewee provided an answer that differed from the rest. However, every answer did at least have similarity in the sense that all interviewees alluded the presence of technology in the trend's definition. NWU CRM management struggled to provide insight as to how the trend affected the NWU, with half of the interviewees providing no insight on the topic. The remaining two interviewees presented different ideas on the topic as one interviewee alluded to the effect of the trend being present in the shift to online learning, and the other indicating its presence in more advanced technologies, such as the use of a bot and smart technologies. None of the interviewees alluded to the simple examples of digital information such as email newsletters, or websites, as identified in section 2.3.2.8. NWU CRM management's understanding of what digital information was, was adequate, but their understanding of how it had affected the NWU differed from one another and did not include all the elements as discussed in literature.

Social technologies referred to social media platforms and the use thereof by organisations (refer to section 2.3.2.5). In terms of understanding the concept, one interviewee required clarity, but was able to define social media once clarity was provided. All other interviewees linked social technology to social media immediately and provided a sufficient understanding of the concept (refer to section 5.4.7.1). In terms of how the trend affected the NWU, NWU CRM management

all agreed that the university made use of social technologies, that it was important that the university did so, and that a specific department within CRM, namely Marketing and Student Recruitment, was responsible for monitoring and managing the trend (refer to section 5.4.7.2). This compared well with section 2.3.2.8's discussion.

Social media parody accounts were defined as accounts on social media that are formed to intentionally mock or create humour, satire or sarcasm surrounding a specific subject (refer to section 2.3.2.6). NWU CRM management's understanding of the trend was excellent as each interviewee provided a definition that was in line with literature (refer to section 5.4.8.1). Similarly, the collective group showed knowledge that the NWU had been affected by the trend on numerous occasions and provided insight as to how this trend was managed, i.e. Marketing and Student Recruitment monitored the presence of such accounts and acted accordingly when they were identified (refer to section 5.4.8.2). This compared well with section 2.3.2.8. However, it should be noted that this proactive approach was only recently adopted by the NWU, as in 2020, the study found numerous active social media parody accounts at the time using a simple search on various social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Nonetheless, even though recent, it is good that the university has become aware of the trend and understands that it can affect the university's corporate reputation.

Online reputation management was considered the monitoring and management of all information regarding an organisation on online platforms (refer to section 2.3.2.7). NWU CRM management showed a sufficient understanding of the trend that compared well with literature (refer to section 5.4.9.1). Similarly, in terms of how the trend affected the NWU, NWU CRM management were well aware of this and provided insight into how the trend was managed (refer to section 5.4.9.2), which compared well with section 2.3.2.8.

In summary, NWU CRM management were not able to identify trends that affect corporate reputation on their own, except for one interviewee who added climate change initiatives to the list of trends identified by the study. However, when provided with a list of trends, the interviewees showed an understanding of what each trend was, as well as how it affected the NWU. In most instances, the interviewees' opinions were in line with literature. However, the trends of virtual organisations and digital information did not fare as well when compared to the remaining trends. In terms of virtual organisations, interviewees linked the trend to being a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which was not entirely true, as the NWU had attained properties of a virtual organisation before the pandemic. In terms of digital information, each interviewee understood

the trend differently in terms of both definition and application to the NWU. The collective group also failed to include the simplest aspects of digital information when applied to the NWU.

The following section presents the conclusion pertaining to the interviewees' understanding of the elements of corporate reputation.

7.2.2.3 NWU CRM management's understanding of corporate reputation elements

NWU CRM management were not able to identify the elements of corporate reputation when compared to literature – only one interviewee identified one element, namely behaviour (refer to section 5.5.1). However, as with the trends, when provided with a list of the elements as identified in literature, interviewees were able to provide discussions on the definition of each as well as apply the elements to the context of the NWU. While some interviewees indicated that the elements of corporate reputation were closely linked to one another, at time interviewees confused certain elements with one another. This was especially true when considering their understanding of corporate identity, corporate image, and corporate brand (refer to section 1.5.6.2).

Corporate identity was defined as the sum of the organisation's visual and symbolic elements in combination with internal stakeholder behaviour and actions, and specifically who the organisation thought it was (refer to section 2.4.1.1). NWU CRM management, however, defined corporate identity as only the visual elements of the organisation (refer to section 5.2.2.1). As a result of their understanding of the element, their application to the NWU, therefore, also only consisted of visual elements (refer to section 5.2.2.2), and failed to include stakeholder behaviour, for example (cf. section 2.4.1.1). As seen later in this discussion, the interviewees confused corporate identity with corporate brand.

Corporate image was defined as who/what stakeholders thought the organisation was as a result of the sum of communications sent from the organisation to stakeholders over a time period (refer to section 2.4.2.1). Only one interviewee was not able define corporate image and confused the term with corporate identity, while the remaining three interviewees did provide a definition in line with literature (refer to section 5.5.3.1). However, when asked how they would apply the element to the context of the NWU, only half of the interviewees were able to provide sufficient answers (refer to section 5.5.3.2).

Corporate brand was defined as the sum of associations regarding an organisation, or product (refer to section 2.4.3.1). Here, NWU CRM management showed a well-rounded understanding

of the element, although some interviewees did slightly confuse it with corporate identity, corporate image, and corporate values (refer to section 5.5.4.1). NWU CRM management felt that the corporate brand was the sum of the experiences and feelings that stakeholders had when considering an organisation and that it also included visual elements, the behaviour of internal stakeholders as well as the values and ethos of the organisation (refer to section 5.5.4.1). When applied to the NWU, the interviewees stated that the corporate brand of the university was the selling points that set the NWU apart from its competitors and made it unique (this compared well with section 2.4.3.4). However, although confusion existed between corporate brand with corporate identity, -image, and -values in their definition, this did not affect the accuracy of their application of the element to the NWU.

Corporate personality was defined as the sum of an organisation's characteristics that untimely set an organisation apart from its competitors (refer to section 2.4.4.1). NWU CRM management struggled to define corporate personality and confused it with the culture, ethics, and values of an organisation as well as with corporate reputation itself, linking it to the perception of stakeholders (refer to section 5.5.5.1). As a result, their application thereof within the context of the NWU referred to the university's ethic of care and actions (refer to section 5.5.5.2). This therefore did not compare well with section 2.4.4.3.

Corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture were defined as how the actions of an organisation were perceived by stakeholders (behaviour: refer to section 2.4.5.1), how the organisation acts (culture: refer to section 2.5.4.2), and the extent to which the organisation does what is good and right (ethics: refer to section 2.4.5.3). NWU CRM management also struggled to define this element as most of the interviewees hesitated at the question and felt that they had already answered it when defining the previous elements (refer to section 5.5.6.1). This suggests that NWU CRM management confused this element with other elements. Interviewees were not able to provide a definition of the element and rather only alluded to properties of its definition as being ethical and an organisation's actions (refer to section 5.5.6.1). When applying the element to the NWU, interviewees mentioned the NWU's ethic of care, its diversity, and social justice, which was in line with sections 2.4.6.2.4, 2.4.6.3.4 and 2.4.6.4.4, although some properties were not mentioned.

In summary, NWU CRM management were not able to identify the elements of corporate reputation. This raises concern as literature indicated that the effective management of corporate reputation begins with the effective management of its elements (refer to section 2.5.1). Although

they could not identify the elements, NWU CRM management did show an overall adequate understanding of the elements and how they applied to the NWU. However, improvement can be made in understanding the difference between corporate identity, corporate image, and corporate brand, as well as corporate reputation and corporate personality, and the general understanding of corporate behaviour, ethics, and culture, as a misconception of what these elements were was identified during the semi-structured interviews.

The following section discusses NWU CRM management's understanding of stakeholder relations.

7.2.2.4 NWU CRM management's understanding of stakeholder relations

Stakeholder relations were deemed to be an important organisational activity and especially so when considering corporate reputation and the management thereof (refer to section 2.3.2). In addition, it was found that all organisations have a set of stakeholder groups that are unique to the organisation and that each organisation should be able to identify their stakeholder groups and manage each group in a way that suits the needs of the specific group within the context of the organisation (refer to section 2.3.2).

NWU CRM management had a well-rounded understanding of stakeholder relations. The interviewees were collectively able to identify all the stakeholders of the NWU and no interviewee showed a poor understanding in this regard (refer to section 5.6.1). All the interviewees identified that internal stakeholders (staff and students) of the NWU were the most important stakeholders of the university, which compared well with literature (refer to section 2.3.2), although half of interviewees felt that all stakeholders were important and only provided a specific answer as they were asked to do so.

In addition, the interviewees showed a sufficient understanding that each stakeholder group was to be managed according to their profiles and needs, that this was done at the NWU, and was handled specifically by a sub-department of CRM, namely Stakeholder Relations (refer to section 5.6.3).

The following section discusses NWU CRM management's understanding of, and approach to, corporate reputation management.

7.2.2.5 NWU CRM management's understanding of corporate reputation management

In section 2.5.1, the study noted that **corporate reputation management** was employed to ensure that the corporate reputation of an organisation was effectively maintained, positively perceived and when threatened, handled appropriately. Corporate reputation management therefore basically entailed transparent communication, proactive approaches to crises and risk management, and effective stakeholder relation management (refer to section 2.5.1). Organisations should also ensure that a dedicated specialised staff member or department is responsible for corporate reputation management through specific strategy development and implementation, which are to be present in all facets of the organisation (refer to section 2.5.1). These strategies should be based on the **comprehensive reputation management** theory and therefore comprise activities that determine what the organisation wants to achieve, measure or change, reputation audits, determination of organisational goals, development, and implementation of reputational management plans, follow-up audits, and the development and implementation of strategies for specific stakeholder groups (refer to section 2.5.2). NWU CRM management showed a sufficient understanding of what corporate reputation management was and referred specifically to the use of strategies, processes and systems that aided organisations in ensuring effective corporate reputation. They also alluded to properties such as honesty, proactive approaches, and transparent communication. However, no interviewees seemed to know what comprehensive reputation management was in theory, and as such no one interviewee was able to discuss all the essential activities thereof, although most of the activities were touched on in the collective discussion (refer to section 5.7.4). A concern was consequently raised in the discussion of the semi-structured interviews regarding corporate reputation management: Did the NWU have a strategy in place for corporate reputation management? The answer was unclear (refer to section 5.7.4). When asked who they thought was responsible for corporate reputation management at the NWU, NWU CRM collectively agreed that *everyone* was responsible. *Everyone* included all the stakeholders of the NWU, while staff and students were particularly mentioned. However, all interviewees did state that there should be departments entrusted with implementing strategies and guiding the NWU's corporate reputation management. These departments were identified as the collective CRM (refer to section 5.7.2)

Moreover, effective corporate reputation management was found to aid organisations in the attainment of strategic goals and strongly related to crisis communication and reputational risk. Effective corporate reputation management was found to reduce the likelihood of reputational risk and the need for crisis communication, and effective crisis communication and reputational risk

identification were found to protect the corporate reputation (refer to section 2.5.3). On the topic of the attainment of strategic goals, NWU CRM management agreed that corporate reputation management did indeed play a crucial role here (refer to section 1.7.3). Similarly, the interviewees' opinions of how corporate reputation management assisted with crisis communication and reputational risk management compared sufficiently with literature, as all interviewees noted that these concepts could positively affect one another if they were managed correctly. However, little insight as to how crisis communication and reputational risk were managed at the NWU was provided (refer to section 1.7.5).

In summary, when considering NWU CRM management's understanding of corporate reputation management, the interviewees had a sufficient understanding of the construct. They showed a well-rounded basic understanding of what it was, who should be responsible for it, how it aided in the attainment of strategical goals, and how it related to crisis communication and reputational risk. The only concept that the interviewees did not fare as well in was the guidelines of corporate reputation management. While interviewees understood that this was concerned with a specific strategy, no one interviewee showed an inclusive understanding of all activities that should comprise such a strategy. The answer as to whether the NWU therefore had a comprehensive reputation management place was, therefore, unclear.

7.2.2.6 NWU CRM management's understanding of corporate reputation measurement

Corporate reputation measurement is achieved when an organisation utilises a tool or instrument that sufficiently suits the organisation's nature to measure the perceptions that certain identified stakeholder groups have of the organisation at hand (refer to section 2.6). NWU CRM management showed a sufficient understanding of the concept as all interviewees linked the concept to measuring stakeholder perceptions and the majority stated that the concept entailed employing specific tools or assessments to do so, although none of the instruments identified in literature were identified by interviewees (refer to section 5.8.1). The collective group differed in opinion regarding the frequency at which corporate reputation measurement should take place. Some interviewees stated that it should be a daily and constant activity. However, when using formal instruments, this would not be possible. It was clarified that these interviewees meant that organisations, and the NWU, should never lose touch with how they are perceived in the market on any given day. In terms of formal assessments, the interviewees' opinions varied from every quarter to every two to three years. This did not compare with literature that stated formal corporate reputation measurements should be conducted annually (refer to section 2.6).

Moreover, a concern was raised in this discussion as one interviewee felt that when an organisation found itself amid a negative situation, that corporate reputation should not be measured at that time. The concern was this: If the NWU avoided measuring how such circumstances affected its corporate reputation, how would it be able to sufficiently manage and mitigate these challenges so that the corporate reputation was not negatively affected in the long run (refer to section 5.8.2)?

The dimensions of **RepTrak™** were also assessed in the semi-structured interviews. With this, interviewees were asked what their overall opinion of each dimension was. **Products and services** fared excellent in the opinions of NWU CRM management. The interviewees stated that the NWU was the leader in the sector when it came to the presentation specific qualifications. However, the discussion of products particularly overshadowed that of services (refer to section 5.8.3.1). In terms of **workplace**, NWU CRM management felt that the NWU provided a good workplace, but that the collective staff stakeholder group of the university may vary in opinion of the university's workplace (refer to section 5.8.3.2). In terms of **innovation**, NWU CRM management agreed that this dimension was not the best, and that there was room for improvement (refer to section 5.8.3.3). **Governance** again fared excellent in the interviewees' opinions (refer to section 5.8.3.4). On **citizenship**, NWU CRM management was divided, as half of the interviewees felt that the dimension fared well, and the other half that it did do well but that there was room for improvement (refer to section 5.8.3.5). **Leadership** fared well within NWU CRM management, although the interviewees raised concern as to how effectively this dimension could have been measured at the time considering the changes that had recently taken place within the dimension (refer to section 5.8.3.6). In terms of **performance**, NWU CRM management was again divided, as some interviewees felt that the dimension was perceived as good, while others thought it to be excellent (refer to section 5.8.3.7).

In summary, NWU CRM management had a sufficient understanding of corporate reputation measurement, although their collective approach thereto could be improved upon by getting on the same page when considering how and when it should take place. In terms of their perceptions of the NWU's corporate reputation when assessed by the dimensions of RepTrak™, it seems that NWU CRM management feel that the NWU has a good corporate reputation, but that dimensions such as citizenship, workplace and innovation could be improved upon.

The followings section provides a discussion on the advantages of a strong corporate reputation based on the findings of the semi-structured interviews.

7.2.2.7 NWU CRM management's understanding of the advantages of strong corporate reputations

The **advantages of a strong corporate reputation** were identified as **a stable financial performance, an increased competitive advantage, high quality perceptions of products and services, brand loyalty, effective stakeholder relations, the ability to attract paramount staff, a decreased likelihood of crises and risks for an organisation, and the development of a good workplace** (refer to section 2.7). All interviewees proved to have knowledge that strong corporate reputations did indeed provide benefits for organisations. While the interviewees did not necessarily mention all the advantages identified in literature, they did allude to these advantages by mentioning some specific to the NWU. These included the **attainment of strong students and brand ambassadors, buy-in from stakeholders, better partnerships and collaborations, an increase in investments, and improved relationships with donors** (refer to section 5.9).

NWU CRM management therefore fared well in their understanding of the advantages of a strong corporate reputation. The following section concludes the answering of the second specific research question with a discussion of how interviewees thought the NWU fared in the South African HES.

7.2.2.8 NWU CRM's understanding of the NWU's corporate reputation within the South African HES

Throughout the study, the NWU was never referred to faring poorly within the South African HES. Rather, the study suggested that the NWU had been faced with challenges over the past two decades (refer to section 3.3), and that achieving a stronger corporate reputation could aid the university in managing the aftereffects of these challenges (refer to section 1.1.4).

However, as this study provided a detailed contextual discussion of the NWU in Chapter 3, the semi-structured interviews made provision to measure how NWU CRM management felt **the university fared in the sector** when compared to its competitors. The overall perception of NWU CRM management was that the NWU fared very well in the sector, especially considering the history and challenges of the university. The interviewees felt that external rankings provided sufficient evidence of this as well, and that the NWU continued to strive to be a leader in the HES.

In conclusion, NWU CRM management had a sufficient understanding of corporate reputation, although they struggled to identify the trends that affected the concept and the elements that

comprised it. Some misconceptions regarding the identified elements also surfaced, while some trends were not sufficiently understood within the context of the NWU. NWU CRM management also understood what corporate reputation management was, although it was unclear whether the NWU had a specific strategy in place to manage its corporate reputation. Although the interviewees understood what corporate reputation management was, some discrepancies existed in the interviewees' opinions regarding how regularly such an assessment should take place. NWU CRM management also shared a positive opinion regarding the dimensions of RepTrak™ when applied to the NWU and had a mutual agreement of what advantages a strong corporate reputation would bring to the NWU specifically. The interviewees also agreed that the NWU fared well within the South African HES when compared to its competitors.

The following section aims to answer the third specific research question.

7.2.3 Conclusion: Specific research question 3

The third specific research question aimed to determine what the perceptions of NWU staff were regarding the university's corporate reputation management by conducting a formal assessment utilising **RepTrak™**. This specific research question read as follows:

What are the perceptions of NWU staff regarding the university's current corporate reputation management according to the RepTrak™ measurement instrument? (refer to section 1.2.2)

In answering this, each of the four themes and seven dimensions of RepTrak™ can be individually discussed.

In terms of the themes of RepTrak™, all four themes measured well. The majority of respondents indicated that they agreed with the four statements used to measure the four themes. Respondents, therefore, felt that the NWU was an institution that they **trusted** (with 35.1% agreeing), that the NWU was an institution that they had a good **feeling** about (with 41% agreeing), that the NWU was an institution that they **admired** and respected (with 38.5% agreeing), and that the NWU had a good overall reputation (**esteem**) (with 41.4% agreeing). However, a large part of the sample (between 26.4 and 33.1%) remained neutral on each statement, i.e. neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Although a large part also remained neutral, the sample tended to have a more positive perception of each of the themes compared to the smaller percentage of the sample that perceived the themes negatively (refer to section 6.3.1).

In terms of dimensions, **products and services** were positively perceived by the sample. Here, each of the four attributes of the dimension received a good statistical review with the majority of the sample agreeing with each. The sample therefore felt that the NWU offered high quality products and services (50.6% agreed), that the NWU's products and services were of high value for money (43.9% agreed), that the NWU stood behind its products and services (47.7% agreed), and that the NWU met the needs of its customers (40.2% agreed). Only a moderate part of the sample remained neutral on the attributes, and a small percentage disagreed therewith. This dimension also recorded the highest *strongly agree* scores of all the dimensions. When provided with the opportunity to speak freely on the dimension, the sample felt that as staff of the university, they contributed to the high quality of its products and services. In addition, although the sample perceived the dimension positively, respondents felt that the university should place more focus on physically improving the quality thereof, rather than just projecting a desired positive image of the dimension. Products and services of the NWU therefore ranked as being very positively perceived by staff members of the NWU. The NWU should therefore proactively strive to maintain its high-ranking products and services. In addition, as staff seemed to perceive the quality of products and services as high because of their own influence on the dimension, it is advisable that the NWU assesses how the dimension fares with regard to its other stakeholder groups, especially its students, as these are the main customers of the university who purchase these products and services.

On the other hand, the dimension of **innovation** did not enjoy the same perceptions. While the majority of the sample felt that the NWU was innovative (36.8% agreed), a similar majority remained neutral on whether the NWU was generally the first institution to go to market with new products and services (40.6%). In addition, 39.8% of the sample felt negatively toward the attribute, while only 19.7% felt that the NWU was the first to go to market with new products and services. Therefore, the sample remained neutral in majority, but showed a tendency to have a more negative perception regarding the attribute. Similarly, the sample was divided on whether the NWU adapted quickly to change, as 27.2% agreed that it did, 27.2% disagreed and 22.6% remained neutral. When provided the opportunity to give commentary on the dimension, the sample felt that the NWU was more of a follower than a leader in the HES when considering innovation and that the university struggled to adapt to change. The dimension of innovation therefore did not fare well in the eyes of the university's staff members. The NWU should therefore act to improve its innovation by implementing systems and process that aid in adapting to change and encouraging research and services at the NWU to fit the needs of the sector.

The dimension of **workplace** also did not fare well in the eyes of the university's staff members. Here, the sample strongly disagreed with two of the dimension's three attributes. The sample therefore felt that the NWU did not reward its employees fairly (29.3% strongly disagree and 28% disagree) and that the NWU did not offer equal opportunities to its employees (27.2% strongly disagree and 23.4% disagree). Moderate percentages of the sample remained neutral on these attributes, while very small percentages had positive opinions. On the other hand, the majority of the sample felt that the NWU demonstrated a concern for the wellbeing of its employees (25.9% agreed), although a large percentage remained neutral on the topic and a significant percentage had a negative perception of the attribute. Concerns regarding the NWU's workplace were raised in the comments by the sample. Here, the sample felt that staff members with disabilities (both psychological and physical) were marginalised, that staff were generally overworked, that remuneration offered by the NWU was terrible, that discrimination was present between staff of different campuses and between academic and support staff in favour of academic staff, and that staff were not properly consulted by management about decisions that affected them directly. Workplace is therefore a dimension that requires immediate and significant attention from the NWU. The NWU should address each of the concerns raised by staff through open and transparent communication, in-person sessions from management that address the issues with open question-and-answer opportunities between staff and management, and/or through campaigns that address the issues. Remuneration increases should be strongly considered by management, and growth opportunities for support staff should be addressed. Policies regarding the wellbeing of staff with psychological disabilities should be reviewed and these staff members should be part of this process. Each campus should also be assessed in terms of its accessibility for the physically disabled and physical and structural improvements to buildings should be implemented accordingly. Finally, when addressing issues that affect staff, management should provide adequate channels for staff to provide feedback, and this feedback should be taken to heart in the decision-making process, while concerns should be addressed with more than just a mass email or video recording.

The dimension of **governance** measured as average in terms of the NWU staff's perceptions. The majority of the sample equally remained neutral and disagreed that the NWU was open and transparent in all communication, with 25.5% disagreeing and the same percentage remaining neutral. The remainder of the sample also showed a more negative perception of the attribute than positive. The sample remained neutral on whether the NWU behaved ethically (33.9%) and whether it was fair in the way that it did business (33.1%). However, in these attributes, the sample showed a more positive perception than negative. When speaking freely on the dimension, the

sample felt that the NWU was not transparent in communication, that the unitary model of the university was not working, that the NWU at times did not behave ethically and fairly toward its employees, and that the university worked according to a hidden agenda. In addition, opposing views on transformation were present, where some respondents felt the activity was overrated, and others that the NWU was not doing enough in this regard. The NWU should therefore pay attention to increasing its perceptions surrounding governance. The NWU could rework the narrative of its communication to have a more appealing characteristic that shows a stronger concern for staff's feelings. Issues that affect staff should also be identified sooner, and communication regarding such issues should be proactive, instead of waiting to see how staff will react to issues and then addressing concerns only after negativity has already grasped the hearts of staff members. Communication regarding the need for transformation and the unitary model, what has been achieved, and what still needs to be achieved should be considered. While issues such as this are generally addressed in the university's annual profile, direct and intentional communication with staff regarding the matter may be beneficial.

Citizenship fared well in terms of staff members' perspectives. While the majority of the sample (33.5%) remained neutral on whether the NWU acted responsibility to protect the environment, the majority of the remainder of the sample felt that it did. The majority of the sample also felt that the NWU supported good causes (41% agreed) and that the NWU had a positive influence on society (40.6% agreed). However, these two attributes also saw a reasonable percentage of the sample remaining neutral, but the negative perceptions of each of the three attributes were very small. It was surprising that while the statistics showed that the dimension fared well, the commentary provided by staff indicated that the university could stand to improve the dimension. Taking these comments into consideration, the NWU could improve upon the dimension through campaigns that encourage efforts to save and preserve resources, physically employing activities to ensure that these resources are preserved on its campuses and in its communities, and to educate its stakeholders on the importance thereof. The dimension can also be improved by decreasing the use of polystyrene and plastic within its catering departments. Options such as cardboard and recycled plastic should rather be considered, or stakeholders should be encouraged to bring their own reusable containers to cafeterias and dining halls.

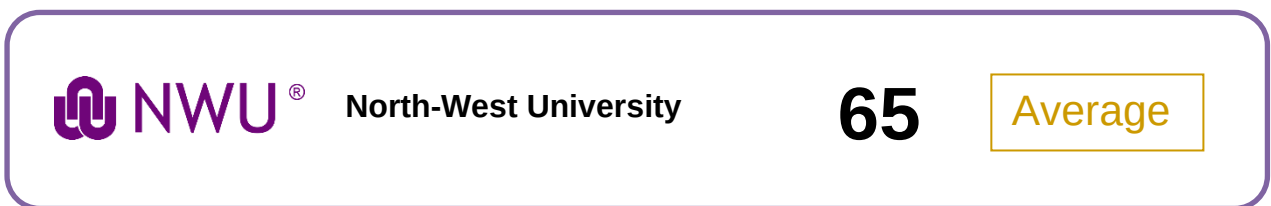
Leadership was a dimension that measured as average to good. The majority of the sample agreed that the NWU was a well-organised institution (31.8%) and that it had a clear vision for its future (37.2%), while a significant percentage also remained neutral on each of these attributes. The sample also remained neutral on whether the NWU had a strong and appealing leader

(38.5%) and excellent managers (36.8%), but the remainder of the sample had a more positive than negative perception thereof. When presented with the opportunity to speak freely on the topic, the sample indicated that they struggled to answer the question pertaining to the Vice-Chancellor (VC) being a strong and appealing leader, as there were variants within the attribute at the time of the study. This was a concern that was raised by staff, NWU CRM management and the researcher. Further comments on the dimension showed that a large part of the sample were unhappy with their managers and felt that many managers had a micro-management style, treated their subordinates differently, and were more than often not available to assist the staff who worked under them. The NWU should therefore attempt to improve the dimension by assessing the capabilities of every staff member in a management position. Training should be provided to managers that specifically encourages a management style that represents the NWU's ethic of care and inclusivity. As managers assess their subordinates, staff should also be provided with a platform to assess their managers' management styles at least once annually, and the feedback obtained should be taken into strong consideration and addressed by faculty and department management committees. In terms of the VC, the NWU should embark upon an assessment of how staff perceive the attribute after the new VC has fulfilled the position for about a year. Through this, the NWU will be able to draw a more accurate conclusion regarding the attribute.

Performance measured well as a dimension. The majority of the sample agreed that the NWU was financially profitable (36.4%) and that it showed strong prospects for future growth (37.2%), although a significant percentage of the sample also remained neutral on these attributes. Similarly, the majority of the sample remained neutral on whether the NWU produced better financial results than expected (43.5%), but the majority of the remaining sample felt that it did rather than did not. The sample also spoke freely on the dimension, indicating that they did not have enough information to base their opinions on facts, but that the information they did receive always seemed to shed a positive light on the dimension. Some respondents linked this to the poor remuneration they believed the NWU offered, questioning why remuneration was so poor when the NWU clearly had the means to increase employment packages. The NWU should therefore provide feedback to staff of the university's financial performance. This should include what activities the NWU identifies as requiring large financial contributions, what they feel should not receive large financial contributions, as well as provide a breakdown of what funds were allocated to what activities and why at the end of each financial year.

When conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the validity of RepTrak™ was confirmed. The standardised regression estimates for the model showed that it fitted well within the constructs that it was supposed to measure. For the attributes, the standardised regression estimates were all above 0.72, and for the correlations between dimensions above 0.53. Standardised regression estimates should be above 0.3 to indicate a goodness of fit, but the closer they are to 1, the better the fit (refer to section 6.4).

When considering the reliability of the model, the calculation of Cronbach's alpha provided scores that signified high internal reliability. All the scores were between 0.82 and 0.91. A score of 0.7 is considered good, but the closer the score is to 1, the better (refer to section 6.5). In this discussion, it was determined that workplace, governance, and innovation were among the lower-ranking dimensions with the smallest means, and citizenship, performance and leadership were among the higher-ranking dimensions with the highest means. In addition, the discussion concluded that the NWU had a score of 65 in terms of the RepTrak™ assessment. Figure 7-1 hereunder represents this score.



Source: Researcher's own interpretation

Figure 7-1: The North-West University's RepTrak™ score

As noted in Figure 7-1, the NWU received an average score after a RepTrak™ assessment with a sample of the university's staff members. Table 7-1 hereunder provides the rankings of scores achieved from the RepTrak™ instrument.

Table 7-1: Scores and rankings of RepTrak™

Score	Ranking
0-39	Poor
40-59	Weak
60-69	Average
70-79	Strong
80+	Excellent

Source: Author's own interpretation of RepTrak™ (2022:3)

Table 7-1 hereabove indicates that there is significant room for the NWU to improve its corporate reputation. While the highest-ranking score for RepTrak™ on 30/07/2022 was for the LG corporation on a global scale with a strong 72.3 (RepTrak™, 2022), it should be noted that the chances of achieving anything above a score of 72 are slim. The NWU should, however, still strive to achieve a strong rather than average score for its corporate reputation. To achieve this, the study provides recommendations to the NWU. These recommendations are presented in the proceeding sections after answering the study's general research question.

7.3 Answering the general research question

The general research question of the study was to determine what the key drivers of the NWU's corporate reputation management strategy should be according to the university's staff members:

What should the key drivers of the North-West University's corporate reputation management strategy be, according to staff members? (refer to section 1.2.1)

The RepTrak™ score of 65 achieved by the NWU showed that, in terms of staff members' perception, the university had an average corporate reputation, and there was therefore room to improve its corporate reputation. Each of the seven dimensions of RepTrak™ were relevant in terms of validity and reliability as well as in the assessment of each dimension. Each dimension and attribute of RepTrak™ should therefore be the key drivers for the North-West University's management strategy, although some dimensions should be regarded as requiring more attention than others. In addition, each dimension has certain attributes that should also be ranked as requiring more attention than others. When assessing and managing each of these dimensions effectively, the NWU will be able to increase staff members' perceptions in all themes (trust, feeling, admire and esteem). Organisational activities should therefore be employed by means of a corporate reputation management strategy to actively build on these dimensions and attributes. Table 7-2 hereunder ranks the dimensions and attributes according to level of attention that should be provided to each within this strategy.

Table 7-2: Key drivers for the NWU's corporate reputation management strategy in terms of staff member perspective (in level of importance)

Keys:	Measures poor, requires significant and immediate attention	Measures weak, requires substantial and immediate attention	Measures average, requires ample attention	Measures well, requires monitoring and maintenance
Level of importance	Dimension Mean	Key drivers for the NWU's corporate reputation management strategy in terms of staff member perspective		
		Dimensions	Attributes	
1	2.67	Workplace	Rewarding employees fairly	
			Offering equal opportunities to employees	
			Demonstrating a concern for the wellbeing of employees	
2	3.05	Governance	Being open and transparent in all communication.	
			Being fair in the way business is conducted	
			Behaving ethically	
3	3.07	Innovation	Adapting quickly to change	
			Being the first to go to market with new products and services	
			Being innovative	

4	3.16	Leadership	Having a strong and appealing leader
			Having excellent managers
			Being a well organised institution
			Having a clear vision for the university's future
5	3.49	Performance	Producing better financial results than expected
			Being financially profitable
			Showing strong prospects for future growth
6	3.61	Citizenship	Acting responsibly to protect the environment
			Having a positive influence on society
			Supporting good causes
7	3.72	Products and services	Meeting the needs of customers
			Products and services are of high value for money
			Standing behind products and services
			High quality products and services

While Chapter 6 alluded to the rankings of each dimension in section 6.3.3.2, the means recorded in Table 6-18 provide statistical evidence in terms of means for the rankings of each dimension. The dimension with the lowest mean therefore is considered the worst perceived dimension, while the dimension with the highest mean is considered the best perceived dimension in terms of staff members' perspectives. The attributes were ranked according to percentage of staff that best agreed with each as presented in sections 6.3.2.1 to 6.3.2.7.

In summary, **the key drivers for the North-West University's corporate reputation management strategy** should, in order of importance, be **workplace** (with a significant focus on employee rewards and opportunities and a focus to maintain a demonstration of concern for the wellbeing of employees), **governance** (with a substantial focus on open and transparent communication and an ample focus on conducting fair business and behaving ethically), **innovation** (with a substantial focus on adapting to change, an ample focus on being the first to go to market with new products and services, and a focus to maintain being innovative), **leadership** (with an ample focus on having a strong and appealing leader and excellent managers and a focus to maintain being a well-organised institution and having a clear vision for the institution's future), **performance** (with an ample focus on producing better financial results than expected and focus to maintain being a financially profitable institution that shows strong prospects for future growth), **citizenship** (with an ample focus on acting responsibly to protect the environment and a focus to maintain being an institution that supports good causes and has a positive influence on society), and **products and services** (with a focus on maintaining being an institution that stands behind its products and services and in addition offers high quality products and services that are of high value for money and that meet the needs of customers).

With the general research question of the study answered, recommendations can be made to the NWU for its corporate reputation management strategy. These recommendations are presented in the following section.

7.4 Recommendations for the NWU's corporate reputation management

Chapter 2 provided a theoretical discussion on corporate reputation and the management and measurement thereof, within the context of the international and South African higher education sector (HES). In Chapter 3, the context of NWU was discussed. In addition, four semi-structured interviews were conducted with NWU CRM management, and an online survey based on the RepTrak™ model was used to measure the perceptions of NWU staff regarding the university's corporate reputation management, although the latter was conducted on only a sample of the

NWU and not its entire population. However, it should be emphasised that the survey was sent to all staff across the NWU's three campuses, and all staff therefore had the opportunity to take part.

Taking all the aforementioned into consideration, recommendations can be made to assist the NWU in improving the key drivers of its corporate reputation in terms of staff members' perception. These recommendations can furthermore be divided into three groups, namely (1) recommendations for NWU CRM management, (2) recommendations for a corporate reputation management strategy for the NWU, and (3) recommendations to improve the dimensions and attributes of RepTrak™ within the context of the NWU. The proceeding sections present these recommendations.

7.4.1 Recommendations for NWU CRM management

Two recommendations can be made for NWU CRM management. These recommendations are presented in Table 7-3 hereunder.

Table 7-3: Recommendations for NWU CRM management

Recommendation 1: Identifying and defining corporate reputation
NWU CRM management should consider conducting a strategic session regarding corporate reputation. This session should include the executive director, each sub-department director and the various managers or team leaders who fall under each sub-department. The aim of the session should be to define corporate reputation and its management and measurement, as well as identify and define the elements of corporate reputation and trends that affect corporate reputation to ensure that the holistic CRM department and its management are on the same page in terms of each of the aforementioned. A consolidated document that identifies and defines all aspects of corporate reputation within the context of the NWU should result from this session. This document should be utilised when developing a strategic plan for corporate reputation management at the NWU.
Recommendation 2: Utilising the study
NWU CRM management should consider addressing the concerns raised in Chapter 6 by the sample of NWU staff with the university's management.

The proceeding section presents recommendations for a corporate reputation strategy at the NWU.

7.4.2 Recommendations for a corporate reputation management strategy at the NWU

As it was unclear as to whether the NWU had a formal strategy for corporate reputation management in place, it is recommended that the NWU should develop such a strategy. This activity can be broken down into nine recommendations. These recommendations were conceived from an understanding of the literature study (specifically from the theory discussed in sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2), combined with the contextual understanding of the NWU (as provided in Chapter 3). These recommendations are presented in Table 7-4 hereunder.

Table 7-4: Recommendations for a corporate reputation management strategy at the NWU

Recommendation 1: Ensure that CRM has a mutual understanding of corporate reputation
As the CRM department is responsible for guiding corporate reputation management and measurement (section 5.7.2), the staff who constitute the department should share a mutual understanding of what corporate reputation is, what it comprises, what it is affected by, what benefits it can yield, and how it should be management and measured. Each sub-department of CRM and each staff member of the department should understand what their role in the implementation of the corporate reputation strategy is, and what results they are expected to deliver according to a specified timeframe.
Recommendation 2: Stakeholder identification and management
All the stakeholders of the NWU should be identified and the management strategies for each re-evaluated to ensure that they remain relevant (section 2.3.2).
Recommendation 3: A strategic planning session to create a strategy template
A strategic planning session should be held within CRM. Here, a template for a corporate reputation management strategy that speaks to the unique nature of the NWU should be developed. This strategy should include what the NWU wants to achieve, change, or measure when considering its corporate reputation (section 2.5.2). More specifically, the NWU should aim to measure its corporate reputation within its stakeholder population and not just a sample. The corporate reputation should also be measured in terms of the perspectives of all stakeholders, and not just staff, although the perceptions of staff and students may be of greater importance given the NWU's current circumstances. In addition, the NWU should consider setting objectives to improve the perceptions that stakeholders have of its innovation, workplace, governance and leadership.

Recommendation 4: Measuring the NWU's corporate reputation
The NWU should conduct a formal assessment on a larger scale than the study to identify concerns in its corporate reputation among its various stakeholder groups (section 2.5.2). RepTrak™ showed to be valid (section 6.4) and reliable (section 6.5) within the context of the NWU and it is therefore advised that this instrument be used as the formal assessment tool.
Recommendation 5: Setting objectives for corporate reputation
Using the results obtained from the corporate reputation measurement, the NWU should set objectives or goals that it wants to achieve for its corporate reputation (section 2.5.2).
Recommendation 6: Reviewing the corporate reputation management plan
After implementing each of the aforementioned recommendations and assessing the results of each, the NWU should review the template strategy as compiled in the third recommendation. This should then be a detailed document that presents the strategy of the NWU's corporate reputation management and should therefore be aligned with the strategic goals of the university, the objectives of its corporate reputation, and the basic principles surrounding corporate reputation management in theory (section 2.5.3).
Recommendation 7: Determine accountability and conduct assessments
The NWU should determine who is responsible for attaining each of the objectives as presented in the previous recommendation and how these objectives should be attained (section 2.5.3). Timeframes should also be allocated to attaining these objectives, including measurements of how well the objectives were obtained at the end of these periods.
Recommendation 8: Follow up measurements
Once the NWU feels that it has worked on improving its corporate reputation by achieving the objectives set out in its corporate reputation management strategy, follow-up assessments of how the university's stakeholders perceive the university should be conducted annually (section 2.5.3).
Recommendation 9: Maintenance
The corporate reputation management strategy should furthermore be implemented in all dimensions of the university. Results of follow-up assessments should be used to determine whether the efforts made by the university to improve its corporate reputation were successful, and appropriate actions should follow. Once a favourable corporate reputation has been achieved in all stakeholder groups, the NWU should strive toward maintaining these positive perceptions through proactive and regular evaluation and action (section 2.5.3).

As it was unclear whether the NWU had a corporate reputation management strategy in place (section 5.7.4), implementing all the above recommendations will aid the NWU in developing a corporate reputation management strategy that is in line with comprehensive reputation management.

The following section provides recommendations on improving the dimensions of RepTrak™ within the NWU.

7.4.3 Improving the dimensions of RepTrak™ within the context of the NWU

Based on the findings presented in Chapter 6, the following recommendations can be made to the NWU to improve the dimensions of RepTrak™ within the context of the NWU in terms of staff member perceptions. As determined in section 7.3, these dimensions should receive attention according to a ranking of importance. The recommendations therefore follow this ranking.

Table 7-5: Recommendations to improve the dimensions of RepTrak™ within the NWU

Dimensions	Recommendations
Workplace	The NWU should pay substantial and immediate attention to improving the workplace of the university. Specifically, the NWU should assess and improve how employees are <u>rewarded</u> and provide all employees with <u>equal opportunities</u> . Reconsidering an <u>increase in remuneration</u> and providing <u>equal benefits to academic and support staff</u> are good starting points here. The NWU should also continue to demonstrate <u>concern for the wellbeing of its employees</u> .
Governance	The NWU should pay ample attention to its governance as soon as it has improved its workplace. Here, the university should first and foremost ensure that they <u>communicate openly and transparently</u> with stakeholders and that stakeholders feel that are being provided with truthful communication. The NWU should also assess how it can improve upon <u>conducting its business more fairly</u> and <u>behaving more ethically</u> , rather than just preaching an ethic of care.
Innovation	The NWU should implement strategies and processes to ensure that it is <u>able to adapt to change in a timelier manner</u> when required. The university should also <u>encourage research and services at the NWU to develop new products and services that address needs in the market and sector before its competitors do</u> .

	In addition, the NWU should continue to <u>strive toward being an innovative institution.</u>
Leadership	The NWU should <u>conduct a formal assessment of how the leadership at the university is perceived</u> once stability in the dimension has been established (once the new VC has been in the position for at least a year). <u>Managers at the NWU should also be provided with training and an ideal NWU management approach implemented</u> by all managers within the institution. The NWU should also maintain being a <u>well-organised</u> institution and having a <u>clear vision for its future.</u>
Performance	The NWU should pay attention to <u>producing better financial results than stakeholders expect.</u> The university should also continue to <u>remain financially profitable</u> and <u>retain its strong prospects for future growth.</u>
Citizenship	The NWU should continue to <u>foster a positive influence on society</u> and continue to <u>support good causes.</u> The university could improve the dimension by <u>acting more responsibly to protect the environment</u> by actively working to <u>reduce its carbon footprint.</u>
Products and services	The NWU should strive to <u>maintain high quality products and services</u> that are viewed as <u>high value for money</u> and that <u>meet the needs of customers.</u> The NWU should also continue to <u>stand behind these products and services.</u>

From the above discussions, the NWU therefore has various opportunities to improve its corporate reputation and the way it manages it.

The following sections bring the study to a close by discussing the limitations and future opportunities of the research.

7.5 Limitations of the study

The study was conducted within a single tertiary education institution in South Africa. The results of the study therefore cannot be used to improve the corporate reputation of other universities on a national or global level. Similarly, the results of the study can only aid the NWU in developing a corporate reputation management strategy based on the key drivers of the university's corporate reputation.

In addition, the study only measured the perceptions of staff members at the NWU and not any of the other stakeholders of the NWU. These perceptions were also only that of a sample of this stakeholder group, and not the population, although the entire population was invited to take part.

Moreover, the study employed RepTrak™ as a measurement instrument and therefore only the dimensions of this instrument were considered as drivers of corporate reputation, while other drivers may be present in literature and other measurement tools.

7.6 Significance of the study and opportunities for future research

The study contributed to literature by providing a literature review that covered corporate communication, corporate reputation, stakeholder relations, corporate reputation trends, corporate reputation elements, corporate reputation management and measurement, and the advantages that a strong corporate reputation can yield. These discussions can be used by future researchers investigating these concepts. In addition, the study provided a profile of the international and South African HES as well as a profile of the NWU. These discussions can be used in future research regarding the HES and/or the NWU.

The study provides various opportunities for future research. Firstly, the study's framework can be used to assess the NWU's corporate reputation and management thereof in terms of the university's other stakeholders. Secondly, the study's results can be used to develop a corporate reputation management strategy specific to the NWU. Thirdly, the study can be replicated and extended upon to assess the corporate reputations and management in terms of various stakeholders at other South African universities. Fourthly, the study can be replicated and extended upon to develop models for management and measurement for corporate reputations within South African universities. Fifthly, the study can be used to add an additional trend that affects corporate reputation, namely climate change initiatives. Finally, the study can be used to justify the use of RepTrak™ as a formal measurement of corporate reputation within a South African context.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to answer each of the specific research questions posed by the study to ultimately answer the study's general research question, which was:

What should the key drivers of the North-West University's corporate reputation management strategy be, according to staff members? (refer to section 1.2.1)

After conducting a literature review that provided concepts and constructs to be measured, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with NWU CRM management to determine how the university currently approaches corporate reputation management. The study also employed the use of RepTrak™ to assess how staff members of the NWU perceived the university's corporate reputation. It was found that the NWU had an average corporate reputation in terms of staff member perspectives and considerable room for improvement on the concept was therefore recommended. Specifically, the study recommended that the identified key drivers of the university's corporate reputation (namely the dimensions of RepTrak™) should be attended to in levels of importance (refer to Table 7-2) to improve its overall corporate reputation. Moreover, the study recommended that the NWU should develop and implement a comprehensive corporate reputation management strategy.

If considered by the NWU, the findings and recommendations presented in this study could aid the university in improving how it is perceived by its staff. Improving these perceptions could improve the corporate reputation of the NWU and make the management thereof easier in the future.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: PERMISSION BY NWU TO UNDERTAKE STUDY (NWU GATEKEEPER APPROVAL – RDGC)



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: +2718 299-1111/2222

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Research Data Gatekeeper Committee

NWU RDGC PERMISSION GRANTED / DENIED LETTER

Based on the documentation provided by the researcher specified below, on 04/02/2022 the North-West University (NWU) Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (NWU-RDGC) hereby grants permission for the specific project (as indicated below) to be conducted at the NWU:

Project title: Assessing key reputation drivers in terms of staff members at the North-West University.

Project leader: Prof L. Holtzhausen

Researcher/Project Team: A.G. Pieterse

Ethics reference no: NWU-00620-18-A7

NWU RDGC reference no: NWU-GK-22-009

Specific Conditions:

- The Researcher may request Ms M Santana to invite both target audience of the research study.

Approval date: 04/02/2022

Expiry date: 03/02/2023

General Conditions of Approval:

- The NWU-RDGC will not take the responsibility to recruit research participants or to gather data on behalf of the researcher. This committee can therefore not guarantee the participation of our relevant stakeholders.
- Any changes to the research protocol within the permission period (for a maximum of 1 year) must be communicated to the NWU-RDGC. Failure to do so will lead to withdrawal of the permission.
- The NWU-RDGC should be provided with a report or document in which the results of said project are disseminated.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemics the Committee would like to advice the researcher to practice the necessary caution and adhere to the National Covid-19 Guidelines when conducting research with participants.

Please note that under no circumstances will any personal information of possible research subjects be provided to the researcher by the NWU RDGC. The NWU complies with the Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000 (PAIA) as well as the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPI). For

an application to access such information please contact Ms Annamarie De Kock (018 285 2771) for the relevant enquiry form or more information on how the NWU complies with PAIA and POPI.

The NWU RDGC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the NWU RDGC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Prof Jeffrey Mphahlele

Chairperson NWU Research Data Gatekeeper Committee

Original details: (22351930) C:\Users\22351930\Desktop\test 2.docm
13 November 2018

Current details: (22351930) M:\DSS1\8533\Monitoring and Reporting Cluster\Ethics\Applications RDGC\Updated RDGC Permission Letter.docm
15 November 2018

File reference: 1.1.4.3

ANNEXURE B: ETHICS CLEARANCE (BASSREC)



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Fax: 018 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 018 299-4849
Email: nkosinathi.machine@nwu.ac.za

21 September 2021

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC)** on 21/09/2021, the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SERC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Assessing key reputation drivers in terms of staff members at the North-West University.																														
Study Leader/Supervisor: Prof L. Holtzhausen																														
Student/Research Team: A.G. Pieterse																														
Ethics number:	<table border="1"><tr><td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>6</td><td>2</td><td>0</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>8</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>7</td></tr><tr><td colspan="3">Institution</td><td></td><td colspan="5">Study Number</td><td></td><td colspan="2">Year</td><td colspan="2">Status</td></tr></table> Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation	N	W	U	-	0	0	6	2	0	-	1	8	-	A	7	Institution				Study Number						Year		Status	
N	W	U	-	0	0	6	2	0	-	1	8	-	A	7																
Institution				Study Number						Year		Status																		
Application Type: Single Study																														
Commencement date: 21/09/2021	Risk: <table border="1"><tr><td>Low</td></tr></table>	Low																												
Low																														
Expiry date: 21/09/2022																														
Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the <u>annual</u> (or as otherwise stipulated) <u>monitoring report</u> and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.																														

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

General conditions: While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply: • The study leader/supervisor (principle investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the BaSSREC: – annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and – without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study. • The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the BaSSREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited. • Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit. • The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started. • In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and BaSSREC reserves the right to:

- request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
- to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
- withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the BaSSREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- BaSSREC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via 21081719@nwu.ac.za / 13128388@nwu.ac.za.

The BaSSREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the BaSSREC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Prof Jacques Rothmann

Chairperson NWU Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Original details: (22351930) C:\Users\22351930\Desktop\ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY.docm
8 November 2018

File reference: 9.1.5.4.2

ANNEXURE C: TREE CERTIFICATES (OF RESEARCHER)



**Zertifikat
Certificat**

Promouvoir les plus hauts standards éthiques dans la protection des participants à la recherche biomédicale
Promoting the highest ethical standards in the protection of biomedical research participants

**Certificado
Certificate**



Certificat de formation - Training Certificate
Ce document atteste que - this document certifies that
Ashleigh Pieterse
a complété avec succès - has successfully completed
Introduction to Research Ethics
du programme de formation TRREE en évaluation éthique de la recherche
of the TRREE training programme in research ethics evaluation

Release Date: 2021/06/10
CID: paFM00100



Professeur Dominique Sprumont
Coordinateur TRREE Coordinator



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[REV: 20170210]



Zertifikat Certificat

Certificado Certificate

Promouvoir les plus hauts standards éthiques dans la protection des participants à la recherche biomédicale
Promoting the highest ethical standards in the protection of biomedical research participants



Certificat de formation - Training Certificate

Ce document atteste que - this document certifies that

Ashleigh Pieterse

a complété avec succès - has successfully completed

Research Ethics Evaluation

du programme de formation TRREE en évaluation éthique de la recherche
of the TRREE training programme in research ethics evaluation

Release Date: 2021/06/10
CID : P631og6PI.

Professeur Dominique Sprumont
Coordonateur TRREE Coordinator



Continuing Education Programs
Programmes de formation continue

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Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMS/ASSW/SAMW) (www.sams.ch) - Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (www.kfpe.ch)



Zertifikat Certificat

Certificado Certificate

Promouvoir les plus hauts standards éthiques dans la protection des participants à la recherche biomédicale
Promoting the highest ethical standards in the protection of biomedical research participants



Certificat de formation - Training Certificate

Ce document atteste que - this document certifies that

Ashleigh Pieterse

a complété avec succès - has successfully completed

Informed Consent

du programme de formation TRREE en évaluation éthique de la recherche
of the TRREE training programme in research ethics evaluation

Release Date: 2021/06/10
CID : e7f6GWKFj9

Professeur Dominique Sprumont
Coordonateur TRREE Coordinator



Continuing Education Programs
Programmes de formation continue

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Zertifikat Certificat

Certificado Certificate

Promouvoir les plus hauts standards éthiques dans la protection des participants à la recherche biomédicale
Promoting the highest ethical standards in the protection of biomedical research participants



Certificat de formation - Training Certificate

Ce document atteste que - this document certifies that

Ashleigh Pieterse

a complété avec succès - has successfully completed

South Africa

du programme de formation TRREE en évaluation éthique de la recherche
of the TRREE training programme in research ethics evaluation

Release Date: 2021/06/10
CID : Xc5CFqplAo

Professeur Dominique Sprumont
Coordonateur TRREE Coordinator



Continuing Education Programs
Programmes de formation continue

[REV : 20170210]

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Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMS/ASSM/SAMW) (www.sams.ch) - Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (www.kfpe.ch)

NWU[®]
NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA

DATE:

Approved 2 December 2021

Title of the research project	Assessing key reputation drivers in terms of staff members at the North-West University
Ethics number	NWU-00620-18-A7
Principal investigator	Ms Ashleigh Gail Pieterse
Student number	22821988
Address	1 Riverside Ave, Bailliepark, Potchefstroom
Email address	22821988@nwu.ac.za
Contact number	0838702403

This study has been approved by the **Basic Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) of the Faculty of Humanities of the North-West University (NWU-00620-18-A7)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010) and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee

members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records to make sure that we (the researchers) are conducting research in an ethical manner.

What is this research study all about?

- This study is an investigation of the corporate reputation of the NWU and how staff members of the university perceive this corporate reputation.
- The study involves the use of four semi-structured interviews with the Executive Director and Directors of NWU Corporate Relations and Marketing as well as an online email survey characterised by the RepTrak model posed to all staff of the NWU.
- The researcher has been trained to use the methods mentioned in the previous sentence.
- Approximately 4 (for semi-structured interviews) and 5993 (for the online email survey – thus including the whole NWU staff population) participants will be included in this study.
- The objectives of this research are:
 - General Research Objective: To determine what the key drivers of the North-West University's corporate reputation management strategy should be according to NWU staff members through conducting both qualitative and quantitative research in terms of a literature review, semi-structured interviews and the RepTrak™ measurement instrument.
 - Specific Research Objective 1: To determine the theoretical points of departure regarding corporate reputation management available in recent literature sources.
 - Specific Research Objective 2: To determine the North-West University's current corporate reputation management approach by means of semi-structured interviews.
 - Specific Research Objective 3: To determine the North-West University's staff member's perceptions surrounding the university's current corporate reputation management by conducting a RepTrak™ measurement.

Why have you been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate because you are the Executive Director for NWU CRM/a director of one of the three subdepartment of the NWU CRM.

What will your responsibilities be?

- You will be invited to participate in the noted study by partaking in a semi-structured interview with the researcher either via Zoom/MS Team or in person depending on Covid-19 protocols.
- You will 1 week to indicate whether you would be willing to participate.
- You will be requested to sign this Informed Consent Statement before the commencement of the study.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- There are no benefits based on your participation in the study.
- The indirect benefit will probably be the possible attainment of data of stakeholder perception of the NWU in the case or CRM directors to be used in future communication strategies.

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research and how will these be managed?

The possible risks in this study, and how these will be managed, are summarised in the table below:

Possible risk	Mitigation strategy
COVID 19 risk during face-to-face interviews.	Strict adherence to COVID-19 guidelines that include wearing of three-ply face masks throughout, social distancing of 1.5-2 metres and regular hand sanitising (during in person, face to face interviews) or using online alternatives for semi-structured interviews.
Lack of privacy and comfort during interviews due to uninvited/unwanted persons entering the interview during the semi-structured interviews.	Participants will be formally booked for an appointment in the official NWU diaries. The researcher will place a notice on the door of the interview room requesting that no disturbances be made.
Bad internet connections cutting online interviews off.	The researcher will arrange beforehand with participants of the semi-structured interviews done via online channels that stable internet connections are in order for both parties.

- However, we do believe that the benefits to you and to science (as noted in the previous section) outweigh the risks we have listed. If you disagree, then please feel free not to participate in this study. We will respect your decision.
- Should we learn, in the course of the research, that someone is harming you, or that you are intending to harm someone, then we must tell someone who can help you/warn the person you are intending to harm.

Who will have access to the data?

- The *handling, storage, security and analysis of data* is critical in ethical considerations. I will ensure data in both hard-(printed) and soft copy (electronic) are safely locked away and password-protected, respectively. Only the research supervisor will have access to my raw data where the need arises. At the analysis stage, as will be the case throughout, the use of coding will reinforce participants' non-identification, hence upholding the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.
- *Anonymity* will be ensured for CRM directors partaking in the interviews as I will assign a fictitious name to you before the interview starts (Participant A, B, C or D). Only this name will be used in the research process.
- *Confidentiality* will include the use of fictitious names for participants, organisations and locations. It involves not disclosing any information gained from an interviewee deliberately or accidentally in ways that might identify an individual.
- *Privacy* will be ensured by not probing unnecessarily if you do not wish to discuss particular matters.
- The data will not be *transcribed* as this is not required for an MA Study.
- I will not use a *translator/interpreter* for the purpose of the interviews/explaining the informed consent, etc.

- The data will be *stored safely in electronic form* for a period of five years after which it will be destroyed.

What will happen to the data?

The data from this study will be reported in the following ways: 1) through a content analysis, and 2) through descriptive statistics. In all of this reporting, you will not be personally identified. This means that the reporting will not include your name or details that will help others to know that you participated.

Data may be re-used in the form of information provided to the NWU CRM if requested in order to take into consideration for their future communication strategies.

Will you be paid/compensated to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

No, you will not be paid/compensated to take part in the study, but pre-packaged refreshments will be provided after the study. If participating in the research means that you have to travel especially for the purpose of participating, then your travel costs will be paid. There will thus be no costs to you involved.

How will you know about the findings?

- The general findings of the research will be shared with you by sharing a copy of the final dissertation after publication.
- If you would like feedback on your personal results, then you are welcome to contact me via email to request this.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You can contact Ms Ashleigh Pieterse (*researcher*) at 0838702403 (*cell phone number*) and 22821988@nwu.ac.za (*email address*) if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.
- You can contact the chair of the Basic Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Prof Jacques Rothmann) at 018 299 1595 or 21081719@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I *Blanked for anonymity agree to take part in a research study entitled: "Assessing key reputation drivers in terms of staff members at the North-West University".

I declare that:

- I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publically and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.
- I consent to an audio and/or audio-visual recording of the semi-structured interview with me conducted by the researcher.
- I am aware of the fact that I may request that the researcher does not continue with said recording if I request it.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.

Signed at (place) Potchefstroom on (date) 23 May 20 22

NC Manoko

Signature of participant

J De Beer

Signature of witness

• You may contact me again	☒ Yes ☐ No
• I would like a summary of the findings of this research	☐ Yes ☒ No
• I would like feedback on my functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires I completed	☐ Yes ☒ No

The best way to reach me is:

Name & Surname:

Postal Address:

Email:

Phone Number:

Cell Phone Number:

*

In case the above details change, please contact the following person who knows me well and who does not live with me and who will help you to contact me:

Name & Surname: _____

Phone/ Cell Phone Number /Email: _____

Declaration by person obtaining consent (if not the researcher)

I (name) _____ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

NA

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 ____

Signature of person obtaining consent

Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher

I (name) ASHLEIGH PIETERSE _____ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (place) Potchefstroom on (date) 23 May 20 22

ASHLEIGH PIETERSE

Signature of researcher

J. De Beer

Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher and participant

Personal face-to-face interviews during Covid-19 restrictions

Additional declaration by participant in those instances where the participant requests to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview:

By signing below, I _____, acknowledge the following information related to the required measures regarding Covid-19:

I declare that:

- It is my personal choice and preference to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher.
- This requires that _____ guard the personal health and safety of myself and the investigator:

NA: Interview conducted via MS
Teams

- I consent to _____ the interview using a thermometer. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I confirm that my temperature measured at _____ degrees. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I consent to use the three-ply mask provided by the researcher. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I consent to wear the three-ply mask for the full duration of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I consent to the researcher sanitising the interview context using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before the commencement of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I consent to the researcher using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before and during the interview if required. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 ____

Signature of participant

Signature of researcher

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I _____*_____ to take part in a research study entitled: "Assessing key reputation drivers in terms of staff members at the North-West University".

I declare that:

- I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publically and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.
- I consent to an audio and/or audio-visual recording of the semi-structured interview with me conducted by the researcher.
- I am aware of the fact that I may request that the researcher does not continue with said recording if I request it.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.

Signed at (place) Potchefstroom on (date) 8 June 20 22

Jean Stidworthy

Signature of participant

J De Beer

Signature of witness

• You may contact me again	☒ Yes ☐ No
• I would like a summary of the findings of this research	☒ Yes ☐ No
• I would like feedback on my functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires I completed	☐ Yes ☒ No

The best way to reach me is:

Name & Surname: _____

Postal Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone Number: _____

Cell Phone Number: _____

In case the above details change, please contact the following person who knows me well and who does not live with me and who will help you to contact me:

Name & Surname: _____

Phone/ Cell Phone Number /Email: _____

Declaration by person obtaining consent (if not the researcher)

I (name) _____ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

NA

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 ____

Signature of person obtaining consent

Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher

I (name) ASHLEIGH PIETERSE declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
Louis Jacobs
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (place) Potchefstroom on (date) 23 May 20 22

ASHLEIGH PIETERSE
Signature of researcher

J De Beer
Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher and participant

Personal face-to-face interviews during Covid-19 restrictions

Additional declaration by participant in those instances where the participant requests to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview:

By signing below, I [REDACTED]*, acknowledge the following information related to the required measures regarding Covid-19:

I declare that:

- It is my personal choice and preference to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher.
- This requires that I consent to the following strict measures to safeguard the personal health and safety of myself and that of the researcher/interviewer/primary investigator:
 - I consent to the researcher taking my temperature before the interview using a thermometer. ☒ Yes ☐ No
 - I confirm that my temperature measured at 36.7 degrees. ☒ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to use the three-ply mask provided by the researcher. ☒ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to wear the three-ply mask for the full duration of the interview. ☒ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to the researcher sanitising the interview context using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before the commencement of the interview. ☒ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to the researcher using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before and during the interview if required. ☒ Yes ☐ No

Signed at (place) Potchefstroom on (date) 8 June 20 22

JM Stidworthy
Signature of participant

ASHLEIGH PETERSE
Signature of researcher

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I  * agree to take part in a research study entitled: "Assessing key reputation drivers in terms of staff members at the North-West University".

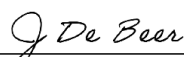
I declare that:

- I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publically and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.
- I consent to an audio and/or audio-visual recording of the semi-structured interview with me conducted by the researcher.
- I am aware of the fact that I may request that the researcher does not continue with said recording if I request it.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.

Signed at (place) Potchefstroom on (date) 12 May 20 22



Signature of participant



Signature of witness

• You may contact me again	☒ Yes ☐ No
• I would like a summary of the findings of this research	☒ Yes ☐ No
• I would like feedback on my functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires I completed	☐ Yes ☒ No

The best way to reach me is:

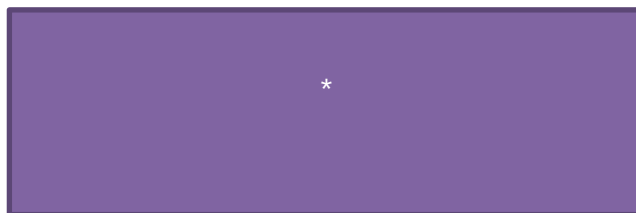
Name & Surname:

Postal Address:

Email:

Phone Number:

Cell Phone Number:



In case the above details change, please contact the following person who knows me well and who does not live with me and who will help you to contact me:

Name & Surname: _____

Phone/ Cell Phone Number /Email: _____

Declaration by person obtaining consent (if not the researcher)

I (name) _____ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____
- I encouraged him/her to ask _____ and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 _____

Signature of person obtaining consent

Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher

I (name) ASHLEIGH PIETERSE declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
Louis Jacobs
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (place) Potchefstroom on (date) 12 May 20 22

ASHLEIGH PIETERSE
Signature of researcher

J. De Beer
Signature of witness

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I ***** agree to take part in a research study entitled: "Assessing key reputation drivers in terms of staff members at the North-West University".

I declare that:

- I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publically and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.
- I consent to an audio and/or audio-visual recording of the semi-structured interview with me conducted by the researcher.
- I am aware of the fact that I may request that the researcher does not continue with said recording if I request it.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.

Signed at (*place*) Potchefstroom on (*date*) 23 May 20 22

W Makgowe
Signature of participant

J De Beer
Signature of witness

- You may contact me again ☒ Yes ☐ No
- I would like a summary of the findings of this research ☒ Yes ☐ No
- I would like feedback on my functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires I completed ☐ Yes ☒ No

The best way to reach me is:

Name & Surname:

Postal Address:

Email:

Phone Number:

Cell Phone Number:

In case the above details change, please contact the following person who knows me well and who does not live with me and who will help you to contact me:

Name & Surname:

Declaration by researcher and participant

Personal face-to-face interviews during Covid-19 restrictions

Additional declaration by participant in those instances where the participant requests to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview:

By signing below, I NA, acknowledge the following information related to the required NA regarding Covid-19:

I declare that:

- It is my personal choice and preference to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher.
- This requires that I consent to the following strict measures to safeguard the personal health and safety of myself and that of the researcher/interviewer/primary investigator:

- I consent to the researcher using a thermometer. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I confirm that my temperature is taken. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I consent to use the three-ply mask for the full duration of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I consent to wear the three-ply mask for the full duration of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I consent to the researcher sanitising the interview context using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before the commencement of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I consent to the researcher using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before and during the interview if required. ☐ Yes ☐ No

**NA: Interview
conducted via MS
Teams**

Signed at (place) Potchefstroom on (date) 12 May 20 22

W Makgowe
Signature of participant

ASHLEIGH PATERSE
Signature of researcher

ANNEXURE E: REPTRAK™ SURVEY MESSAGE AND INFORMED CONSENT

Invitation to participate in Quantitative RepTrak Survey for MA degree

Dear NWU staff member

As a master's student in Communication Studies at the North-West University I, Ashleigh Pieterse, am conducting research for my dissertation entitled: "Assessing key reputation drivers in terms of staff members at the North-West University," under the supervision of Prof Lida Holtzhausen (Director, NWU School of Communication Studies and supervisor for this MA study).

With this, I request that you please participate in the electronic survey below.

The survey will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Submissions for the survey will close at 17:00 on 31 May 2022.

Background and need for the study:

This study poses the argument that due to the transformation and other challenges that have taken place within the Higher Education Sector over the past decade, institutions such as the NWU have had to start placing more focus on their corporate reputation management strategy, especially when considering their corporate reputation management in terms of how their employees view the institution.

The survey's questions were derived using RepTrak (2005), a scientific measuring tool developed by the RepTrak Company (aka the Reputation Institute) that has been used worldwide to measure the corporate reputations of various companies. The survey has also been assessed by the NWU's Statistical Consultation Services to confirm validity and reliability.

This study attempts to determine how NWU staff perceive the university's key reputation drivers.

Take note: Ethical considerations

Please note that the survey does not request you to fill in any personal information. All submissions will therefore remain anonymous, and the survey will have no way of determining from whom any submission was provided. All submissions of this survey will furthermore be used only for the purpose of this study and processed as statistical data which will be interpreted in the findings thereof. The NWU's Department for Corporate Relations and Marketing will be provided with the holistic results of the study should it be requested.

This study has received ethics clearance from the NWU Faculty of Humanities Research Innovation Ethics and Higher Degrees, as well as BASSREC (ethics no. NWU-00620-18-A7). The researcher and supervisor have, in addition, completed four certificates in ethics training with TRREE.

Permission for the undertaking of this study was also granted by the Director of NWU Corporate Communications, Mr Louis Jacobs. In addition, the study was approved by the NWU Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (NWU RDGC) chaired by Prof Jeffrey Mphahlele (NWU RDGC reference no: NWU-GK-22-009).

Thank you in advance for taking the time to assist in this study.

Kind Regards

Ashleigh Pieterse

Participant Information and Informed Consent

Title of the research project: Assessing key reputation drivers in terms of staff members at the North-West University

Ethics number: NWU-00620-18-A7

Principal investigator: Ms Ashleigh Gail Pieterse

Student number: 22821988

Email address: 22821988@nwu.ac.za

Contact number: 083 870 2403

You are being invited to take part in a research project that forms part of my master's degree (Master of Arts in Communication). Please take time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part. Prior to publication of the study's results (or the point that publication is in process), you may also withdraw the data you generate.

This study has been approved by the Basic Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) of the Faculty of Humanities of the North-West University (NWU-00620-18-A7) and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the International Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010) and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records to make sure that we (the researchers) are conducting research in an ethical manner.

What is this research study all about?

- This study is an investigation of the corporate reputation of the NWU and how staff members of the university perceive this corporate reputation.
- The study involves an online email survey characterised by the RepTrak™ model (Reputation Institute, 2016b) posed to all staff of the NWU.

- The study makes use of a mixed-method approach (both qualitative and quantitative approaches). The qualitative approach is characterised by semi-structured interviews with selected NWU management. However, the online survey that you are being asked to participate in only forms part of the quantitative approach of the study.

- The researcher has been trained to use the aforementioned method.

- Approximately 5993 participants will be included in this study - thus including the whole NWU staff population.

- The objectives of this research are:

1. General Research Objective: To determine what the key drivers of the North-West University's corporate reputation management strategy should be according to NWU staff members through conducting both qualitative and quantitative research in terms of a literature review, semi-structured interviews and the RepTrak™ measurement instrument.

2. Specific Research Objective 1: To determine the theoretical points of departure regarding corporate reputation management available in recent literature sources

3. Specific Research Objective 2: To determine the North-West University's current corporate reputation management approach by means of semi-structured interviews (not applicable to participants completing the online survey)

4. Specific Research Objective 3: To determine the North-West University's staff member's perceptions surrounding the university's current corporate reputation management by conducting a RepTrak™ measurement.

Why have you been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate because you are a staff member at the NWU.

What will your responsibilities be?

- You will be invited to participate in the noted study by completing an online anonymous survey that will take no more than 15 minutes.

- You will be requested to confirm that you accept this informed consent statement by ticking a box before the commencement of the online survey.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- There are no benefits for you based on your participation in the study.

- The NWU can benefit from the study's findings by using the findings when re-assessing their corporate reputation management strategy.

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research and how will these be managed?

The possible risks in this study, and how these will be managed, are summarised in the below:

Possible risk 1: Poor internet connections cutting online questionnaires off.

Mitigation strategy for above: Questionnaires will remain open, and participants will not be limited on responses.

- However, we do believe that the benefits to you and to science (as noted in the previous section) outweigh the risks we have listed. If you disagree, then please feel free not to participate in this study. We will respect your decision.

- Should we learn, in the course of the research, that someone is harming you, or that you are intending to harm someone, then we must tell someone who can help you/warn the person you are intending to harm.

Who will have access to the data?

- The handling, storage, security, and analysis of data is critical in ethical considerations. I will ensure data in both hard-(printed) and soft copy (electronic) are safely locked away and password-protected, respectively. Only the research supervisor will have access to my raw data where the need arises. At the analysis stage, as will be the case throughout, the use of coding will reinforce participants' non-identification, hence upholding the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

- Anonymity will be ensured as the online survey does not ask for any participant to provide any identifiable personal information such as names, surnames, staff numbers, etc. The survey's results will furthermore be tallied and discussed in terms of statistics, and not discussed as individual responses.

- Confidentiality will include the use of pseudonyms for participants, organisations, and locations. It involves not disclosing any information gained from an interviewee deliberately or accidentally in ways that might identify an individual.

- Privacy will be ensured by not probing unnecessarily if you do not wish to discuss particular matters. All questions are general statements pertaining to the NWU's corporate reputation management.

- I will not use a transcriber for the purpose of the transcripts after the interview. The primary investigator will be responsible for transcribing the data – no other person will have access to the data.

- The data will be stored safely in electronic form for a period of five years after which it will be destroyed.

What will happen to the data?

The data from this study will be reported in the following ways: 1) through a content analysis (applicable to the semi-structured interviews), and 2) through descriptive statistics (in the case of the quantitative online survey). In all this reporting, you will not be personally identified. This means that the reporting will not include your name or details that will help others to know that you participated.

Data may be re-used in the form of information provided to the NWU Corporate Relations and Marketing if requested to take into consideration for their future reputation management strategies.

Will you be paid/compensated to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

No, you will not be paid/compensated to take part in the study. There are also no costs involved to participate.

How will you know about the findings?

- The general findings of the research will be available on the NWU Repository in the form of a copy of the final dissertation after publication is completed and accepted.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

• You can contact Ms Ashleigh Pieterse (researcher) at 0838702403 (cell phone number) and 22821988@nwu.ac.za (email address) if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.

• You can contact the previous chair of the Basic Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Prof Jacques Rothmann) at 018 299 1595 or 21081719@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.

*Prof Rothmann is no longer the chair of BASSREC but was at the time of this study's ethics approval.

Declaration by participant

By ticking the box in the section below, I agree to take part in a research study entitled: "Assessing key reputation drivers in terms of staff members at the North-West University".

I declare that:

- I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publicly and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.

I have read and understand the informed consent as discussed above and hereby agree to partake in the study by filling in the online survey.

☐

Click here to accept and continue to the questionnaire

ANNEXURE F: REPTRAK™ SURVEY

SECTION A: Demographic Information			
Question no.	Question	Options	Tick box
1	Age: Please indicate your age by choosing one of the designated groupings:	18 - 25	☐
		26 - 30	☐
		31 - 35	☐
		36 - 40	☐
		41 - 45	☐
		46 - 50	☐
		51 - 55	☐
		56 - 60	☐
		61 - 65	☐
		66+	☐
2	Gender: Please indicate your gender by choosing one of the following options:	Male	☐
		Female	☐
		Gender fluid	☐
		Agender	☐
		Other, please specify: _____	☐
3	Language: Please indicate your home language by choosing one of the following options:	English	☐
		Afrikaans	☐
		Setswana	☐

		Sotho				
		Other, please specify: _____				
4	Type of staff member: Please select one of the following options:	I am academic staff				
		I am support staff				
5	Campus: Please select the campus you work on:	Mahikeng Campus				
		Potchefstroom Campus				
		Vanderbijlpark Campus				
6.	Employment range: How long have you worked at the NWU since being appointment for the first time? Please select one of the options:	1 – 5 years				
		6 – 10 years				
		11 – 15 years				
		16 – 20 years				
		21+ years				
SECTION B: RepTrak™						
Please rate the following statements on a scale of 1 – 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree.						
Question no.	Attributes of RepTrak™ measured as statements posed to NWU staff	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
7	The North-West University (NWU) is an institution that I trust.	1	2	3	4	5
8	The North-West University (NWU) is an institution that I have a good feeling about.	1	2	3	4	5

9	The North-West University (NWU) is an institution that I admire and respect.	1	2	3	4	5
10	The North-West University (NWU) has a good overall reputation.	1	2	3	4	5
11	The North-West University (NWU) offers high quality products and services.	1	2	3	4	5
12	The North-West University's (NWU's) products (qualifications) and services are of high value for money.	1	2	3	4	5
13	The North-West University (NWU) stands behind its products (qualifications) and services.	1	2	3	4	5
14	The North-West University (NWU) meets the needs of its stakeholders.	1	2	3	4	5
15	The North-West University (NWU) is innovative.	1	2	3	4	5
16	The North-West University (NWU) produces products (qualifications) and services first to the market.	1	2	3	4	5
17	The North-West University (NWU) adapts quickly to change.	1	2	3	4	5
18	The North-West University (NWU) rewards its employees fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
19	The North-West University (NWU) demonstrates concern for the well-being of its employees.	1	2	3	4	5

20	The North-West University (NWU) offers equal opportunities to its employees.	1	2	3	4	5
21	The North-West University (NWU) is open and transparent in all communication.	1	2	3	4	5
22	The North-West University (NWU) behaves ethically.	1	2	3	4	5
23	The North-West University (NWU) is fair in the way it does business.	1	2	3	4	5
24	The North-West University (NWU) is environmentally responsible. acts responsibly to protect the environment.	1	2	3	4	5
25	The North-West University (NWU) supports good causes.	1	2	3	4	5
26	The North-West University (NWU) has a positive influence on society.	1	2	3	4	5
27	The North-West University (NWU) is a well-organised institution.	1	2	3	4	5
28	The North-West University's (NWU) has an appealing leader (VC).	1	2	3	4	5
29	The North-West University (NWU) has excellent managers.	1	2	3	4	5
30	The North-West University's (NWU) has a clear vision for its future.	1	2	3	4	5
31	The North-west University (NWU) is financially profitable.	1	2	3	4	5

32	The North-West University (NWU) produces better financial results than expected.	1	2	3	4	5
33	The North-West University (NWU) shows strong prospects for growth.	1	2	3	4	5
34	Is there is anything you would like to add, or elaborate on regarding any of the previously asked questions? If so, please use the text area below to do so.					

ANNEXURE G: LANGUAGE EDITING

To whom it may concern

Cecile van Zyl
Language editing and translation
Cell: 072 389 3450
Email: Cecile.vanZyl@nwu.ac.za

14 October 2022

Dear Mr / Ms

Re: Language editing of dissertation (Assessing key reputation drivers among staff members of the North-West University)

I hereby declare that I language edited the above-mentioned dissertation by Ms AG Pieterse (student number: 22821988).

Please feel free to contact me should you have any enquiries.

Kind regards



Cecile van Zyl
Language practitioner
BA (PU for CHE); BA honours (NWU); MA (NWU)
SATI number: 1002391