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Organisational Reputation and Innovation in the Higher Education Industry: A Correlation Study based on the RepTrak™ Model in the Context of Corporate Communication

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Abstract

Although there is ample literature in organisational innovation, not enough attention is accorded to the correlation between innovation and corporate reputation in the context of corporate communication in the higher education industry. This study was prompted by the urge to close this research gap. Three hundred and thirty-one (331) international, or foreign students from the Infrastructure University of Kuala Lumpur (IUKL), Malaysia were recruited as respondents through a simple random sampling technique who completed a 21-item questionnaire with a very high reliability ($\alpha = 0.92$). Only one correlation hypothesis was tested which was formulated on the innovation dimension of the RepTrack™ model and it was accepted. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 23, and a moderate correlation (Person's $p = 0.00$, $r = 0.51$) was found between innovation and reputation. In addition, reputation is expressed as high esteem, love, respect, and trust. The study concludes that a university is more likely to be held in high regard when it has strong drive towards innovation, both managerial and technological. The article recommends that for IUKL's reputation to keep soaring locally and internationally, it should double its commitment to adopt both managerial and technical innovative strategies. Future research should explore the differential influence of managerial and technical innovation in IUKL and other institutions of higher learning.

Keywords: corporate communication, reputation, higher education institution, innovation, RepTrak model.

1. Introduction

Social needs-based educational institutions play a crucial role in the survival and advancement of society. To adapt to the challenges of a world that is becoming more unstable, it must change. All stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, educational administrators, researchers, and policymakers) must participate in evolution for high-quality students who are prepared for life and the workplace to emerge from an innovative teaching and learning environment. Aspects of the education system such as theory and practise, curriculum, teaching and learning, policy, technology, institutions and management, institutional culture, and teacher preparation can all see improvement through the lens of educational innovation (Nguyen, 2020).

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Higher education has significantly grown as well as become more diverse and differentiated in recent years. The most striking differences can be seen in the organisation of student groups, the nature of students' learning needs, the internal dynamics and structures of institutions, and the growing globalisation of higher education systems (Brennan et al., 2014). The following innovative measures were suggested by Brennan et al. (Brennan et al., 2014) for higher education institutions, including fostering an institutional culture of innovation, considering incentives and rewards for staff, involving faculty in the development of new learning technologies, leveraging inter-institutional collaborations to enhance student selection and quality, and creating suitable strategies to advance faculty members' skills; A review of current regulatory boundaries and linkages (Nguyen, 2020).

Innovation in the learning environment includes four elements: learning environment innovation (four components: learners, teachers, content, and resources); innovation leadership, design, evaluation, and feedback; through the ability to expand the relationship of partners; and implementation of innovative learning principles (Nguyen, 2020; OECD, 2013). Nguyen (Nguyen, 2020) and Serdyukov (Serdyukov, 2017) assert that the need for innovation in education is greater than ever. The level of education that a nation's citizens receive has a significant impact on its social and economic well-being. Innovation in education is crucial because it plays a significant part in building a sustainable future.

The public, organisational leaders and policy makers all benefit from innovation. Innovation has to do with organisational effectiveness, productivity, and social and economic advancement. Innovation is primarily defined as a technology-based phenomenon and understood as a product or business process, even though it is studied in a variety of fields in the physical and social sciences, as well as in the fine arts and humanities (Damanpour et al., 2018; Godin, 2008). The potential impact of non-technical innovations has long been acknowledged by scientists (Evan, 1966).

But the technology-based perspective on innovation continues to be dominant (Damanpour, 2014). According to patents, R&D spending, the number of new goods or services, the number of scientists and engineers involved, and the number of new products or services, academic research has primarily examined the causes and effects of product manufacturing and process innovation (Armbruster et al., 2008; Dambur, 2010). Recent reviews confirm the predominance of technological innovation research and show that strategic and managerial innovation, as well as non-technical processes, have received relatively little attention (Cerne et al., 2016; Damanpour et al., 2018; Qiu et al., 2020).

The development and adoption of technological and non-technological innovations are part of the study of organisational innovation. The adoption of managerial innovation, a non-technical innovation, is the subject of this study. New initiatives and methods in management that influence strategy, structure, managerial procedures, and decision-making (Damanpour, Aravind, 2012). Through these programmes' accreditation, accreditation bodies hope to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their administrative processes and systems (Walker et al., 2015). We examine how organisations strategically adopt managerial innovation, assuming that they do so in response to environmental changes or appease senior executives (Damanpour et al., 2018). Due to pressures from the corporate environment's competitiveness, globalisation, and rising customer awareness and expectations, as well as the current market and CEO trend of "doing more with less," organisations are forced to acquire new knowledge that strengthens their capabilities and continuously enhances their current systems and processes in order to avoid performance gaps. New management plans and practises must therefore be adopted rather than choosing not to (Custódio et al., 2019; Damanpour et al., 2018; Hervas'-Oliver, Peris-Ortiz, 2014; Qiu et al., 2020).

This study aims to: (1) provide a descriptive analysis of the respondents' sociodemographic characteristics and (2) determine the correlation between IUKL's innovativeness and its corporate reputation.

Innovation Types: Innovation researchers categorise innovations into different types in order to simplify and make them easier to understand. Our research is positioned within the organisational innovation literature thanks to the distinction between the two types of innovation (product versus process; technical versus non-technical) (Damanpour et al., 2018). The classification of products and processes is the one that dominates innovation research. Offering new products or services to meet user needs while also introducing novel elements into the production or service processes is referred to as product innovation (Damanpour, 2010; Damanpour et al., 2018; Hall et al., 2012).

Industrial innovation, typically R&D-based innovation, has been the primary focus of research in product process classification, which has led to an understanding of product and process innovation as technical innovation (Damanpour, 2010; Tether, Tajar, 2008). The distinction between technological and social structures serves as the foundation for technological non-technical classifications (Custódio et al., 2019; Evan, 1966). Managerial innovation, also referred to as organisational innovation, managerial innovation, and organisational innovation, is regarded as non-technical innovation (Cerne et al., 2016). The introduction of new programmes or practises pertaining to an organisation's policies, structures, administrative procedures, decisions, and external relations is what we mean by management innovation (Custódio et al., 2019; Damanpour, Aravind, 2012; Damanpour et al., 2018).

Concept of Organisational Innovation: Innovation is examined at the industrial or economic level in economics, at the individual and group levels in psychology, and at both the organisational and organisational unit levels in management. Studying organisational innovation, which includes business and public innovation, is referred to as organisational innovation (Damanbur, 2017). Research on organisational innovation examines the causes, mechanics, and effects of developing and implementing innovations within organisations. It is crucial to distinguish between generation and adoption processes because they take place in different areas of the organisation frequently; and are not always influenced by the same set of precedents. Additionally, businesses can develop and apply a variety of innovations. The different roles and relative weights that different types of innovation play within value chains suggest that there may be differences in the external and internal factors that influence the creation and uptake of particular innovations. Identification of innovation dimensions pertinent to this research is necessary due to the complexity and diversity of organisational innovation research (Custódio et al., 2019; Damanpour et al., 2018; Hira et al., 2021).

Concept of Reputation: A growing body of research has been using reputation indices to judge how good organisations are. Reputation has to do with the internal feelings of individuals about organisations. That organisation can be a profit or non-profit venture; a country or a state; a university or a company; a school or even an individual (Esa et al., 2022; Khoshtaria et al., 2020; Ponzi et al., 2011; Tay et al., 2020). Reputation is the overall evaluation often expressed as the admiration and esteem in which an organisation or company is held. It answers whether one is good or bad (Brenneke et al., 2020). It also determines the extent to which people trust an organisation (Adebesin, Mwalugha, 2020; Al Shobaki et al., 2020; Golata, Sojkin, 2020).

Reputation is described as the collective representation of multiple constituencies, the image of a company [or organisation] built up over time and based on a company [or organisation's] identity programs, its performance and how constituencies have perceived its behaviour (Argenti, Druchenmiller, 2004; Pires, Trez, 2018). Reputation is also described as intangible (Abdullah, Abdul Aziz, 2013; Rindova, Martins, 2012; Taamneh et al., 2022; Shah, Abdullah, 2016). Thus, it is very difficult to measure. Still, scholars have tried in their ways to describe what reputation means and how best it can be measured.

Past research has variously defined reputation. For Rashid and Mustafa (Rashid, Mustafa, 2022), reputation is the emotional connection between people and companies. Reputation can be measured by the level of trust, admiration, respect, and good feeling. Companies [or organisations] with strong reputations have this emotional connection. And they attract increased in support from their key stakeholders. According to Singh and Misra (Singh, Misra, 2021), corporate reputation is the overall (often expressed as admiration, respect, and esteem) in which a company is held. Thus, he posits that corporate reputation answers the question, are you good or bad. It determines if people trust the company. Therefore, discussing this in connection with universities would tell how some of their attitudes and practices lead to criticisms and reputational injury. Corporate reputation can also be defined in terms of several attributes that form a buyer's perception as to whether a company is well known, good or bad, reliable, trustworthy, reputable or believable (Abdullah, Abdul Aziz, 2013). Corporate reputation is concerned with how people feel about an organisation based on whatever information (or misinformation) they have on the organisation's activities, workplace, past performance, and prospects (Ponzi et al., 2011; Pires, Trez, 2018).

A good reputation creates a favourable operating environment, but it demands continuous maintenance and demonstration through good practices. It delivers promise; this is how organisations will behave in the future (Ponzi et al., 2011; Rimkutè, 2018). Many tend to interchange the three concepts of reputation, image, and identity. Anything that has to do with the painting of the good values of an organisation is identified with one of the three concepts. But

scholars have distinguished the three concepts though they are not without relationships, namely corporate image, corporate identity, and corporate reputation.

1. *Corporate image*: this is intangible; it is the belief and impressions held by stakeholders about a company (Singh, Misra, 2021). Stakeholders can be students, employees, community and so on. Gołata and Sojkin (Gołata, Sojkin, 2020) posit, "Image is a reflection of an organisations reality." This means that the stakeholder examines what the organisation is all about, what the organisation is doing and the direction it is heading to (Abdullah, Abdul Aziz, 2013; Ponzi et al., 2011). Hence, the corporate image answers the question of what people think about you (Singh, Misra, 2021).

2. *Corporate identity*: this has to do with attributes, symbols, nomenclature, and behaviours used by the company to express and identify itself (Singh, Misra, 2021). Managing identity is vital to portray a good image of the organisation (Abdullah, Abdul Aziz, 2013). Unlike the image, identity is tangible. It should be made unique, unambiguous, thrilled, and simple. In other words, the actual identity should match the covenanted identity, which is the corporations promise to its stakeholders (Chelysheva, Mikhaleva, 2020). The role of corporate identity is to measure who you are (Boafo et al., 2020; Melewar et al., 2018; van der Rijt, 2021).

3. *Corporate reputation*: corporate reputation is the overall evaluation often expressed as admiration, respect, esteem, and good feeling (Adebesin, Mwalugha, 2020; Ajayi, Mmutle, 2021; Esa et al., 2022). Like the image, reputation is also intangible. It is the emotional connection between people and organisations. Therefore, corporate reputation answers the question, are you good or bad? It determines if people trust the organisation (Singh, Misra, 2021; van der Rijt, 2021).

However, it should be observed that three concepts are related. Some scholars have given further definitions, which show how identity and image are attached to reputation. Adebesin and Mwalugha (Adebesin, Mwalugha, 2020), and Abdullah and Abdul Aziz (Abdullah, Abdul Aziz, 2013) have defined corporate reputation as "a collective term referring to all stakeholders' views of corporate reputation, including identity & image". Burke gave a related definition of corporate reputation as "the collective representative of multiple constituencies, images, of a company built up over time based on a company's identity programs, its performance and how constituencies have perceived its behaviour" (Burke, 2016).

Having provided a well-reviewed conceptual foundation for the study, next we should provide the theoretical framework upon which the study was grounded. However, before we do that it would be better for us to review some literature on the Malaysian higher education system for us to have some understanding of the Malaysian higher education context in relation to the objectives of the study.

Theoretical Framework of the Study: The concept of reputation has received great attention from scholars of various fields. Literature on reputation is appreciably piling up (e.g., Kaur, Singh, 2018; Khoi, 2021). In addition, scholars have developed different research models, which help us to quantify the intangible nature of companies. To this end, it can be found suitable to use a new model designed by Reputation Institute called the RepTrak model (Prado, Ballabriga, 2016). RepTrak is a tool developed from extensive international research, which provides organisations with a standardised framework that can be used to quantify their reputation. RepTrak has 7 dimensions and 23 drivers. It also has a pulse that determines what reputation is. Based on the assessment of the seven dimensions, five of the dimensions are not applicable in the present study, only innovation is. However, to provide comprehensive literature evidence on the model, reviews of the literature on the five of the most related dimensions were performed (Chan et al., 2018).

The dimensions of the RepTek model are briefly discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

(1) *Leadership*: this is the act of a leading a group of people or organisation. It is part of the success of any organisation to establish a competent and focused leadership. Any organisation that has failed to establish good leadership, such has planned to fail from the beginning. Leadership is very important; it reflects the capacity to direct, support and strategic competence to create value for an organisation. In this model, leadership has three drivers, which include the establishment of a strong and respected leader, a clear vision for the future and well-organised leadership (Prado, Ballabriga, 2016). Research has shown that 31 % of employees said that unethical culture in business would lead them to act unethically too (Chan et al., 2018; Prado, Ballabriga, 2016).

(2) *Products and services*: the nature of products and/or services also adds to the reputation of the employee. A client should be treated very well. An organisation should have good value for

finance, goods and services should be of high quality, complaints should be handled satisfactorily, and the needs of the clients should be satisfied (Prado, Ballabriga, 2016).

(3) *Innovation*: this is another important dimension of assessing reputation in the RepTrak model. Innovation is the process of translating an idea or invention into goods or service that creates or for which customers will pay. To be regarded as an innovation, an idea must be replicable at an economical cost and must satisfy a specific need. Innovation involves the deliberate application of information, imagination, and initiative in deriving greater or different values from resources and including all processes by which new ideas are generated and converted into useful products. In business, innovation often results when ideas are applied by the company to satisfy the needs and expectations of the customers. In a social context, innovation helps create new methods for alliance creation, joint venturing, flexible work hours, and the creation of buyers' purchasing power. This dimension also has three drivers, which include being first to market, adapting to changes and innovative company (Prado, Ballabriga, 2016).

(4) *Governance*: governance is about how transparent the management is, whether cooperation behaves ethically and fair in the way they do business. In other words, effective governance improves financial and operational transparency. This is because it decreases the information asymmetries between insiders and outside investors. By adopting governance provisions, it may improve financial transparency because it accentuates information disclosure (Hlel et al., 2020). Jang et al. (Jang et al., 2016) defined governance as a company's policy in which the policy is presented in standard writing that accentuates the company's code of ethics. In other words, it is to create a high-level normative principle and redefine how a business should be conducted in a moral context of business.

(5) *Citizenship*: corporate citizenship is the extent to which businesses are socially responsible for meeting legal, ethical, and economic responsibilities placed on them by shareholders. The aim is for businesses to create higher standards of living and quality of life in the communities in which they operate, while still preserving profitability for stakeholders (Campopiano et al., 2019; Homer, 2021; Singh, Jamil, 2021).

Corporate citizenship is a business leadership process that focuses on a company's impact on society and its relationships with stakeholders (Waddock, 2017) and the strategies on the operationalisation of its relationship with an impact on stakeholders and the natural environments (Homer, 2021). While defining citizenship according to institution theory Lewis et al.'s (Lewis et al., 2019) says, "It is a business that has a long-term existence in the industry; it has to do with the area of economic, legal, and ethical responsibility of industry." However, the RepTrak drivers of citizenship are not different from what the above scholars said. Citizenship has three drivers: supporting a good cause, contribution to society, and protection of the environment (Campopiano et al., 2019).

Conceptual Framework of the Study: This study focused on the innovation dimension of the RepTrak model. Therefore, the independent variable of the study is only one, which is, innovation. The dependent variable, which is, reputation, was measured based on four sub-variables, namely esteem, feelings, admiration, and trust (e.g., Fombrun et al., 2000) (see Figure 1). Hence, only one hypothesis was tested, and it is formulated as below.

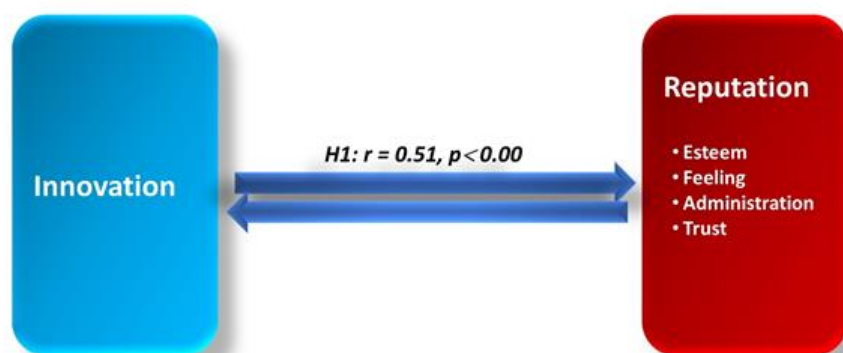


Fig. 1. The conceptual framework of the study.

Hypothesis of the Study: Given the preceding literature review, this study formulates the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant relationship between IUKL's reputation and its innovativeness.

2. Materials and methods

Research Design and Population: This study focused on providing an understanding of the correlation of between the reputation of the Infrastructure University, Kuala Lumpur (IUKL), Malaysia and its organisational innovation (in the context of corporate communication). Survey research approach was employed especially given that a large sample was involved (e.g., [Singh, 2022](#)). The data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire. The sample was selected from the population of international students at the university.

Sample and Sampling Technique: Surveying a whole population of foreign students at IUKL may be practically impossible, hence the need for the selection of a representative sample from the sampling frame ([Singh, 2022](#)). Because it guarantees the generalisation of data and elements of the population have the probability of having equal chances of being selected in the sampling process ([Singh, 2022](#)), a simple random sampling technique was employed to recruit the respondents of the study. The scholar argues that probability sampling gives the possibility of generalisation, and because the sample is chosen randomly, the result is assumed the reflective view of all the respondents ([Wimmer, Dominick, 2013](#)). The population of this study was 1,852. However, using the Krejcie and Morgan's ([Krejcie, Morgan, 1970](#)) sampling calculator, 319 respondents are enough to represent the population.

Location of the Study: This study was conducted at IUKL. IUKL was established in 1998 and it was the centre of Kumpulan Ikram tertiary education activities. In 1999, Ikram College had its name changed to Ikram College of Technology (ICT). On 13 September 2003, ICT was upgraded by the Malaysian Ministry of High Education to the status of a university college with a new name Kuala Lumpur Infrastructure University College (KLIUC). In 2012, KLIUC has further upgraded to a full-pledged university with the name Infrastructure University, Kula Lumpur. IUKL's vision is to be a world-renowned infrastructure university, and its mission is to strive for excellence innovatively in various fields of infrastructure by providing quality education, advanced knowledge, state-of-the-art technology, and excellent professional services ([IUKL Website, 2022](#)).

IUKL was chosen because of the following reasons. First, unlike most public universities which provide admission to international students mainly at postgraduate levels only, IUKL is a private university that believes in internationalizing its innovative strategy by offering admission to both undergraduate and postgraduate international students. Second, the population of International students at the university is very significant – it constitutes up to 40 % of the entire population of the students. Thus, because of cultural and social differences, it is important to assess their perception of the university's reputation. Third, IUKL witnesses an important landmark in its history. It used to be a college and now a full-pledged university. It is undergoing massive transformation including in the areas of the rebranding of its name, logo, corporate colour(s), identity, image, etc. Finally, physical infrastructures are rehabilitated, and new ultra-modern buildings are under constructed. Hence, this study deemed IUKL's reputation is worth assessing to determine whether these innovations are correlated with its reputation ([IUKL Website, 2022](#)).

In addition, IUKL has been in the education industry for more than 20 years providing quality education and various professional services excellently well. It also has a global affiliation with top-ranking universities in the United Kingdom, Nepal, Indonesia, Australia, China, Pakistan, etc. It was rated 5-star in the teaching and facilities category in the 2020 QS rating ([IUKL Website, 2022](#); [QS, 2020](#)).

Research Instruments, Adaption, Pre-Testing, and Organisation: The research instrument used in this study was RepTrak, which measures seven dimensions: leadership, financial performance, workplace, innovation, governance, products and services, and citizenship. The model was adapted and adapted because measuring 'workplace' and 'financial performance' do not apply and are irrelevant to students. Financial performance is confidential and cannot be assessed by students while the workplace has to do with the feelings of the staff. To obtain a reliable result, only five dimensions were adopted. In addition, RepTrak pulse was also tested, which serves as the dependent variable, and it encompasses esteem, feelings, admiration, and trust.

Pilot study: a pilot study was conducted to determine the reliability of the RepTrak model. Twenty-one (10 %) questionnaires were administered to international students on campus – at the Café, the Postgraduate School and Bloc A. The result shows a reliability score of 0.92 Cronbach's Alpha as shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Reliability of the Test of the RepTrak Model-Based Instrument

Scale's Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha of RepTrak Model	Number of items
0.92	0.96	21

Operationalisation of Variables: The adapted dimension of the RepTrak model in this study is innovation. The dependent variable is reputation, which is based on the emotional appeal of the students' high esteem, admiration, respect, and trust as well as their good feelings toward IUKL. Thus, to determine IUKL's reputation, the innovation dimension was tested.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument: The instrument employed a 7-point Likert scale.

The respondents' choices were ranked in order from 1) strongly disagree, 2) partially disagree, 3) disagree, 4) not sure, 5) partially agree, 6) agree and 7) strongly agree. Likert scale was employed because of the following reasons: it is very precise and presents no ambiguity; it can lend itself to various statistical manipulation and analysis; and can be applied in natural and behavioural studies. It has all the attributes of a good scale: definite order and standardised distance. Besides, interval ratios such as the Likert scale have high validity than ordinal or nominal scales. They can be measured in arithmetic mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variation, and variance (Ponzi et al., 2011).

The RepTrak model has strong scale reliability (Ponzi et al., 2011). This means that it has steady and stable measurements across time and the various items in the instrument. The model has convergent validity with the variance extracted from all the independent variables to the latent variable as 0.92, which has exceeded the benchmark of 0.50 (e.g., Ponzi et al., 2011) as shown in Table 1, above. Convergence validity is assuring that the variables are valid to be measured and corresponding to the concept.

Data Analysis and Statistical Significance: The study measures the data from descriptive data such as the central tendency to inferential data. Frequency analysis was adopted to describe each of the datasets. Inferential data were also measured to identify the relationship between two variables. The interval scale is a continuous variable; hence, the statistical tool that was used is Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis. The value for a Pearson's correlation can fall from 0.00 to 1.00. Pearson's correlation is largely used in linear relationships. It shows whether the relation is positive or negative. The relationship is said to be positive when both variables increase or decrease; whereas it is also said to be negative when one variable is decreases and the other increases. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 23.

3. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the correlation between IUKL's innovation and its corporate reputation. Only the Innovation dimension of the RepTrak model was examined, hypothesised, and tested in the study's conceptual framework. Malaysia has grown in popularity as a higher education destination, particularly among Asian, Middle Eastern, and African students, over the last decade. IUKL is a Malaysian private university located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city, boasting of high degree of innovative drives including the way it focuses on recruiting international students. Not less than 40 % of its students are international, coming from various countries around the world. Because of Malaysia's advantageous position in the educational ecosystem, many research studies focusing on international students, including the current study, have been conducted.

The study used a survey method to recruit participants, who were chosen at random. As a result, the discovery can be generalised (Singh, 2022). Our lone hypothesis has confirmed that there is moderately positive correlation between innovation and IUKL's reputation.

Respondents' Sociodemographic Characteristics: This sub-section discusses the findings of the study on Objective 1, which seeks to provide descriptive analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents of this study.

Some of the most important sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents are gender and age. By gender, 293 (88.5 %) of the respondents are males, 38 (11.5 %) females. This is not surprising as most of the students are from Muslim dominated countries, and in Islam, women have some restrictions on travelling without Mahram (male companion) (e.g., Nisha, Cheung,

2022). However, this is contrary to Wan's (Wan, 2018) study, which found that female students' enrollment in Malaysian higher educational institutions is higher than that of male students. Arguably, there could be no contradiction if his study were on local Malaysian students. While by age, most of the respondents (203, 66.9 %) were aged 21-25 years while the remaining 61 respondents were aged 26-30 years. While this indicates that most of the respondents were under the age of 30, all of them were youth (young people). On marital status, a vast majority of them (304 91.8 %) were single, with only 24 of them married. Thus, the survey questionnaire was largely completed by international students who were single.

Moreover, of the 331 respondents, most of them (85 %) were undergraduates. It has been observed that since the September 11 attacks in the United States international students, especially those of Arab origins enroll in Malaysian universities (Alzubaidi, Rechards, 2010; Chin, 2019; Nadeem et al., 2020; Sirat, 2008). Although the respondents were enrolled in various faculties of IUKL, most of them were enrolled in the Faculty of Engineering with a sizeable number of them enrolled in faculties of business and information technology. This suggests that courses related to engineering, business management and information and communication technology (ICT) are the most popular among international students at IUKL.

Correlation between Innovation and Reputation: In this sub-section, findings of the study regarding Objective 2 are discussed, which seek to provide empirical evidence on the correlation between innovation and reputation.

The Innovation dimension of the RepTrak model: The second important dimension is innovation. According to Freeman's Innovation theory (Freeman, 2008), innovation is the main growth factor for an organisation, producing competitiveness that would be achieved through investment in R&D (Research & Development) and other intangible efforts. Similarly, Custódio et al. (Custódio et al., 2019), Hall et al. (Hall et al., 2012) and Anderson, Lundvall et al. (Lundvall et al., 2002) described innovation as the work of several managers that interact with each other and during the interaction process, they are designing, emerging and exchanging knowledge with each other.

In this case, universities, which serve as the knowledge reservoir of modern society, should be innovative enough; should also compete favourably with other institution and should be very fast in adapting to changes. This can be done through research and assessing to progress on what is going on in other sister institutions as well as updating visions to be in conformity with future challenges. Similarly, Universities are supposed to adapt to changes easily. This is especially in the area of technology.

The database of the institution, method of lecture delivery, teaching aids, day-to-day activities, payment or admission processing fee should be continuously updated through artificial intelligence and integrated learning system. This makes communication easier and matches with current development. Thus, it is part of organisation's reputation to be to be innovative.

The finding has shown that IUKL innovation is perceived positively by the international students. This can be apparent because the finding is consistent with the existing literature as there is a positive correlation between IUKL leadership and its reputation at a very strong significant level $p < 0.00$. This is good news to the institution's commitment to innovation. By extension, the institution is committed to its vision, which is to be a world-renowned Infrastructure University. Therefore, when the institution keeps its flag flying, then it is in its way to attain its dream. Hence, the alternative hypothesis that says that there is a positive relationship between IUKL and its reputation is upheld.

Overall, however, the study advances our knowledge of how academic institutions control innovation to preserve their reputation.

Results show that in higher education institutional environments, innovation is only associated with organisational (institutional) reputation as it relates to the media. Statistics imply that innovation and IUKL's reputation are significantly but only moderately related. Although the findings partially support the research hypothesis, they also show that it has an impact on IUKL's ability to be an innovative higher education institution, to compete with other Malaysian higher education institutions, and to adapt to change quickly.

The moderate importance of this assumption can be explained by the fact that innovation cannot directly affect relationships with third parties like industry, communities, or international partners or provide direct financial results because it primarily involves the regulatory environment, infrastructure, governance, citizens, and processes. The only modest correlation between IUKL's high reputation and innovation is that those who are subject to and regulated by

the changes brought about by innovation benefit from those changes. Modern management techniques, a flexible organisational structure, a supportive work environment that encourages innovation, IT communication convenience, and even IUKL staff and students will be pleased.

Technological innovation: According to the results of the RepTrack model test, innovation is related to each of the three sub-dimensions that measure IUKL's reputation as an innovative university, its competitiveness with other higher education institutions, and its ability to change. Statistics demonstrate how innovation at IUKL can affect both international affairs and student satisfaction. Consider the nature of innovations, which are mainly connected to the introduction of new products/services, satisfaction of external users, customer needs and market demands through modified products/services, incorporation of technology into production, etc., to find explanations. Through new and on-demand courses that are designed to meet students' needs by enlisting stakeholders in the course review or creation process, and gathering feedback from all stakeholders including local students, external users and markets, innovation can generate direct revenue and is relevant to industry and society, employee satisfaction, and other factors.

Results of the model test indicate a strong correlation between reputation of the business and innovation. Additionally, innovation may have an impact on the global activities of universities like IUKL, which may have an impact on student satisfaction. The internationalisation of IUKL students will logically be promoted by revising current products and services after consulting stakeholders, introducing new products like online courses or disciplines taught in English and other languages, meeting community and employer requirements, etc.

The hypothesis's results, which are thought to be of moderate importance, are the most intriguing aspect of the experimental results (as opposed to the strongly significant results). This outcome can be partially explained by the fact that improvements in specific organisational performance can be attained through the combined influence of many other factors, such as knowledge assets, deliberate and methodical management activities, and other resources that are not typically thought of as resources for innovation. Therefore, by concentrating only on innovation outcomes and IUKL reputation, there are significant potential interactions in moderation and mediation that cannot be detected.

Future studies ought to focus on these claims. Furthermore, there are not many studies available at the time of this research on the correlation between innovation and reputation in the context of Malaysian higher education industry. It is possible that there are cutting-edge curricula, but university officials are not aware of them. The moderate importance of this hypothesis may be due to a lack of knowledge on the subject.

The moderate level of hypothetical significance is also a result of the research's context. The Malaysian educational system is still strongly influenced by central control. The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) is in charge of centrally managing higher education institutions, and these institutions have limited autonomy. Innovative methods and their advantages might thus be disregarded. Due to uncertainty regarding courses, student enrolment, academic assessment, degree awarding, staff appointments, budget decisions, infrastructure, and facility maintenance, higher education institutions in Malaysia struggle to adopt any novel measures that would help in increasing efficiency.

Overall, the results are consistent with trends in the current literature, reflecting the positive relationship between reputation and innovation (Alipour, Karimi, 2011; Brennan et al., 2014; Nguyen, 2020) and confirming that innovation is the main determinant of the reputation of an organisation or company (Crossan, Apaydin, 2010; Odumeru, 2013). The study helps to reaffirm the point made by many prominent scholars in previous research that innovation affects organisational reputation in many ways, ranging from facilitating adaptation to change, improving the efficiency or effectiveness of internal operations, and gaining competitiveness and reputation, to financial realisation or economic gain (Damanpour et al., 2009; Crossan, Apaydin, 2010; Nguyen, 2020).

3. Results

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents: This sub-section answers Objective 1 of this study, which seeks to provide descriptive analysis of the respondents' sociodemographic characteristics.

As can be seen in [Table 2](#), of the 331 respondents, 293 (88.5 %) are male international students with the remaining 38 (11.5 %) being female students. On the age of the respondents, [Table 2](#) shows that 203 (61 %) of the respondents are aged from 21 to 25 years, 61 (18 %) are aged from 26 to 30 years while 56 (17 %) are aged from 16 to 20 years. Concisely, all the respondents are young people below the age of 30 years.

Table 2. Respondents' Demographic Data (n = 331)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	293	88.5
Female	38	11.5
Total	331	100
<i>Age</i>		
16-20	56	16.9
21-25	203	61.3
26-30	61	18.4
31-35	8	2.4
36 or older	3	0.9
Total	331	100
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	304	91.8
Married	24	7.3
Divorced	2	0.6
Widow	1	0.3
Total	331	100
<i>Respondents based on their Levels of Study</i>		
Undergraduate	283	85.5
Postgraduate	48	14.5
Total	331	100
<i>Respondents based on their Faculties</i>		
Engineering & Technology	142	42.9
Architecture & Build Technology	5	1.5
Communication & Languages	34	10.3
Business Infrastructure	78	23.6
Information Technology	70	21.1
Applied Science & Foundational Studies	2	0.6
Total	331	100

Regarding marital status, [Table 2](#) (above) shows that 304 (91.8 %) of the respondents were single and that only 24 students (7.3 %) were married. Two students were divorced while only one was a widow. Regarding the respondents' level of studies, [Table 2](#) shows that 283 (85.5 %) students participated in the study with 48 of them (14.5 %) postgraduate. Regarding the respondents' faculty of study, [Table 2](#) (above) shows that 142 (42 %) are from the Faculty of Engineering and Technology Infrastructure. The remaining high percentages include 70 (21.1 %) respondents from the Faculty of Information Technology Infrastructure and 35 (10.3 %) from the Faculty of Communication and Language Studies.

Measurement for the Correlation Variables: This sub-section answers Objective 2 of this study, which seeks to determine the correlation between the innovation dimension of the RepTek model and reputation.

The RepTek model's dimension that was used to assess IUKL's reputation is innovation. As shown in [Table 3](#) the first question on this category is whether IUKL is an innovative institution. As many as 110 students (33.2 %) partially agreed that IUKL is an innovative institution; 108 of them (32.6 %) agreed; 51 of them (15.4 %) strongly agreed; 16 students disagree; nine (9) students partially disagreed, and no student strongly disagreed. However, only 36 of them were not sure. The mean score of the responses is 5.34, which is high.

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Perception of IUKL's Innovation (n = 331)

Statement	Strongly disagree	Partially disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Partially disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean score
IUKL is an innovative institution.	0.3 %	2.7 %	4.8 %	10.9 %	33.2 %	32.6 %	15.4 %	5.4 %
IUKL competes favourably with other Malaysian institutions.	0.9 %	1.5 %	5.4 %	10.3 %	33.5 %	31.7 %	16.6 %	5.36 %
IUKL is fast in adapting to changes.	0 %	1.4 %	4.2 %	8.8 %	32 %	35 %	17 %	5.44 %

The next question seeks to know the students' opinion regarding whether IUKL competes favourably with other universities. Many of the respondents (111, 33.5 %) partially agreed that the institution competes favourably with other universities; 105 students representing (31.7 %) agreed, 55 respondents (16.6 %) strongly agreed. However, 34 students were not sure; 18 of them disagreed, five (5) partially disagreed and only three (3) strongly disagreed. The mean score of the total responses is 5.36.

The next question is whether IUKL is fast in adapting to changes. One hundred and sixteen (116, 35 %) agreed that the institution is fast in adapting to changes; 106 of them (32 %) partially agreed; 57 of them (17 %) strongly agreed; 14 respondents disagreed, 6 of them partially disagreed while only three (3) of them strongly disagreed. However, only 29 of them were unsure. The mean score of the total responses is 5.44, indicating how a very high score as shown in Table 3 above.

Table 4 contains data that were generated from measuring the dependent variable, reputation. Regarding the statement whether the international students have high esteem toward IUKL, 109 (33.9 %) of the respondents agree that they have high esteem for the institution, 107 (32.3 %) of them partially agree, and 69 (20.8 %) strongly agree. However, only 28 of them indicated they are not sure, 13 disagree, 3 partially disagree and 2 strongly disagree. The mean score of all the responses is 5.53 as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Percentage Distribution of the Students' Perception of IUKL's Reputation (RepTrak pulse) (n = 331)

Statement	Strongly disagree	Partially disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Partially disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean Score
I have high esteem for IUKL.	0.6 %	0.9 %	3.9 %	8.5 %	32.3 %	33.9 %	20.8 %	5.53 %
I admire and respect IUKL.	0.6 %	0.9 %	1.8 %	4.8 %	33.5 %	36.9 %	21.5 %	5.66 %
I trust IUKL.	0.6 %	0.9 %	1.8 %	5.4 %	43.4 %	37.5 %	19.3 %	5.62 %
I have good feelings toward IUKL.	0.6 %	0.9 %	1.5 %	3.3 %	32 %	32 %	29.6 %	5.60 %

Regarding the statement, whether the respondents admire and respect IUKL, 122 (33.9 %) agree that they admire and respect IUKL, 111 (32.3 %) partially agree, 71 (20.8 %) strongly agree, 16 are not sure, 6 disagree, 3 partially disagree, and 2 students strongly disagree. The mean of the total responses is 5.56 as shown in Table 4 above. Regarding the issue of trust, 124 (37.5 %) of the

respondents agree that they trust IUKL, 114 (34.4 %) partially agree, 64 (19.3 %) strongly agree, 16 indicated not sure, 3 disagree, and 2 strongly disagree. The total mean of the responses is 5.62, which is quite high (see Table 4 above). The last statement was whether the respondents have good feelings about IUKL. Many of them (106, 32 %) agree that they have good feelings toward the university, 106 (32 %) partially agree, 98 (29.6 %) strongly agree, 11 of them are not sure, 5 disagree while 2 strongly disagree. The mean score of the responses is 5.80, which is the highest (refer to Table 4 above).

Determining the Correlation between Innovation and Reputation: Table 5 shows that IUKL innovation is moderately correlated with its reputation, where Person's $r = .55$ and the significance level is $p = .00$. Hence, we can say that H1 was accepted. This result is also reflected in Figure 1 (refer to Section 1, under Sub-Section *Conceptual Framework of the Study*).

Table 5. Relationship between Innovation and Reputation

Variables	<i>P</i>	<i>r</i>
Innovation → Reputation	0.00	0.51**

Note: **Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed)

5. Conclusion

This study advances our knowledge of how innovation is correlated with a higher education institution's reputation.

The key theoretical implications of this study include that it offers empirical support for the beneficial association between corporate reputation in academia and innovation. This contributes to the field's literature while also assisting in the statistical confirmation of a number of hypotheses about the relationship between these two factors in a scholarly setting. The relationship between innovation and company reputation in the context of private higher education in Malaysia has not received much attention, despite previous studies in a similar context. We conducted our research using the RepTrack model's innovation dimension as a guide, and we discovered that innovation has an impact on organisational reputation. The value of this to practitioners is enormous.

Additionally, by illustrating the role of innovation as a management tool in enhancing the organisation's national and international reputation, student preferences, and staff performance, the study contributes to the literature on reputation management in academic settings. The widely used RepTrack Model Scale has been adopted to assess the organisational reputation and innovation performance of higher education institutions. It is based on the theory of eminent scholars. It is a helpful resource for future researchers who plan to study the same subject in academic settings abroad.

From the managerial implications perspective, this study makes recommendations for creative methods and projects that could improve academic institutions' standing; as a result, they can act as guidelines for the staff members of these organisations. The findings of this study are important to academic institution leadership because they have immediate application to daily life. The outcomes may be interesting to departments and their businesses once they want to promote innovation and thereby improve the reputation of their organisation.

The findings of this study show that managers of academic institutions should be more cognizant of the value of innovation, act appropriately, put roadmaps for innovation initiatives into practise, and create innovation policies that support better organisational performance. Managers must use advanced management strategies that support flexible organisational structures, foster a culture of innovation to lessen resistance to change, and maximise the advantages of information technology in governance, education, and research and development activities if they are to improve the reputation of higher education institutions. Additional strategies are suggested, such as ongoing evaluation of current curricula, reducing or adding new disciplines in response to societal needs, involving stakeholders in the educational process, promoting outreach, and enhancing capabilities through collaborations between higher education institutions and other organisations.

Limitations and Suggestions for Additional Study. There is room for additional research directions given the study's context and research design. First, because this study chose to focus on innovation in a very specific context for higher education institutions, the results may not be

general and representative. Second, despite the fact that this was not the study's primary focus, all of the participants were IUKL students, who most likely spoke favourably of their group. To prevent bias against future research, it is advised that qualitative surveys be conducted in addition to quantitative surveys. Third, future researchers may be interested in comparative studies of innovation and reputation in the fields of education or other industries across various nations. Fourth, long time series data will allow researchers to understand the causal relationship between reputation and innovation better compared to one-off studies conducted in a cross-sectional research setting. These are highly recommended future research directions.

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