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# **REPUTATIONAL INTERDEPENDENCE: AN EXAMINATION OF CATEGORY REPUTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the reputational attributes of three different categories of post-secondary institutions in Canada. Our goal is to contribute to an understanding of the drivers of institutional marketing in higher education by examining category-level reputation. Few researchers have explored the influence and implications of category-level reputation in higher education. Thus, we examine category-level reputation within the context of a study measuring the reputational attributes of three distinct categories of post-secondary institutions (medical-doctoral universities, primarily undergraduate universities, and career colleges) among a single key stakeholder group-employers. We leveraged mixed-methods to analyze the reputational attributes of the three categories. This included one-on-one interviews with employers (N = 30) and a survey of hiring managers (N = 164). The results suggest that among this stakeholder group each category possesses distinct reputational attributes that influence its position in the highly competitive educational marketplace. The implication of category-level reputation in higher education may have a profound influence on stakeholder's formation of beliefs and attitudes towards an institution by anchoring an institution's brand in a category. This anchoring effect may be an asset and offer rewards such as increased prestige; however, it may also act as a liability and risk an institution's position. As a result, category-level reputation may be an important and little understood anchor of an institution's brand and their position in

the marketplace.

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