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TRENDS IN MISSION FRAMING: A GLOBAL ANALYSIS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present the underlying structure of the mission statements of universities. The sample contains 360 mission statements from 52 different countries extracted from the official websites of the universities. This study used content analysis, which is an often used and accepted analytical tool for mission statements. A set of keywords was prepared to measure the characteristics and components separately. The findings of this research support earlier studies on many counts. All mission statements appeared as 'broad' in scope. 'Environmental responsibility' and 'Technology' has emerged as the least frequently used characteristic and components respectively. Eighty percent of universities have mission statements with a range of 0-70 words for each mission statement with 54.3 as an average number of words. Word clouds of mission statements reflect three key pillars of the university's mission statements for example 'University', 'Research', and 'Society'. Managerial implications and directions of future research have also been appended at the end.

1. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, for the last couple of decades, mission statements are considered as an important element for university's strategic plans and planning processes. Moreover, researchers have used them as a source of information (Idowu-Faith, 2023) especially data sources for surveys on a variety of topics (Rižnar, & Faganel, 2023). This focus, for example, is on the development of university identity (Ajiboye, 2023), linking it to sustainability (Lopez, & Martin, 2018), or linking it to performance (Cortés, Rivera, & Carbonelld, 2022).

However, as previous researchers have found, systematically analyzing and comparing university mission statements is difficult for several reasons (Kuenssberg, 2011). First, there is no standard definition of their purpose, content, or format. Documents from different organizations vary in length and language is often imprecise, especially since not all organizations distinguish "mission" from "vision", "goal". or their "value". Second, universities can involve a wide variety of stakeholders (Delucchi, 2000; Sattari, Pitt and Caruana, 2011), including but not limited to students, graduates, faculty, staff, government, society, and community. Third, universities need to be inclusive in all their activities, so that they engage in different discourses in teaching, learning and research contexts (Atkinson, 2008). Fourth, they need to strike a balance between different stakeholders while promoting their image to the public and presenting themselves as part of the higher education actor in the region. Fifth, while targeting multiple audiences at once, mission statements can often become ambiguous, sometimes contradictory, and sometimes misleading (Taylor & Morphew, 2010). Despite these limitations, several studies for higher education institutions have considered mission statements conceptually correct and the starting point for analysis in business schools (Davies, & Glaister, 1997; Palmer, & Short, 2008; Orwig, & Finney, 2007; Ahmad, 2021; Mazurek, et al, 2020), in law schools (Organ, 2010), in medical schools (Lewkonia, 2001), in engineering schools (Creamer, & Ghoston, 2013), in social work schools (Holosko, et. al, 2015), in universities (Cortés Sánchez, 2018). Similarly, mission statements were also considered a useful indicator of the extent of higher education institutions, universities, and even market-oriented colleges (Idowu-Faith, 2023; Gonzalez-Campo, Murillo-Vargas, & Garcia Solarte, 2021; Flavin, Zhou Chen, & Quintero, 2020; Fugazzotto, 2009). They are likely to contain evidence of how higher education institutions strive to differentiate themselves from their competitors

(Kosmützky, 2012). The mission statement is therefore seen as an important indicator of how universities want to present themselves.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of the mission statement is largely based on the seminal work of Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, in the mid-1970s (David, 1989). A mission statement is a statement of attitude and outlook. The mission statement is considered an effective strategic tool and is the foundation for achieving organizational goals, guiding the development of strategic plans to achieve the set goals (Breznik & Law, 2019). A mission statement, sometimes called a "belief statement," "goal statement," "philosophy statement," "business principles," or "operations statement," sets forth a lengthy intent an organization's definition of what it wants to be and to whom it wants to serve (David, 1989).

The mission statement is one of the most important strategic documents for any organization and serves as the foundation for the entire planning process of the organization (Stone, 1996). It is valuable to for-profit and nonprofit organizations because it provides direction, focus, and unity to all members of the organization. A good mission statement should be clear, relevant to the unique characteristics and circumstances of the organization, up-to-date, inspiring, emphasize the individuality of the organization, and encourage constant effort to achieve its goals. The mission development process includes a vision of the future, forming a task force to develop the mission statement, writing the mission statement, communicating the ultimate mission statement throughout the organization, and executing the mission statement and finally presenting mission statement to larger audience (Stone, 1996). The underlying structure or composition of a mission statement has two parts. One is based on characteristics and the other is based on what constitutes a mission statement i.e., components. A characteristic is a specific feature of a mission statement, and a component is a system that provides and encapsulates the functionality needed to implement that characteristic.

2.1. Characteristics of Mission Statements

David (1989) provided a brief description of all the characteristics, which were later confirmed by recent studies. Characteristics are defined as unique features or attributes of mission statements that distinguish one mission statement from others (David, 1989).

2.1.1. Scope

These statements are often broad in scope and include consideration of possible alternative goals and strategies without unduly restricting management creativity. However, overly general statements do not rule out potentially dysfunctional strategic alternatives. Many studies have suggested that mission statements must be broad, and this may allow for some implied inputs and outputs to be introduced without dramatic changes to the institution's character and/or focus, be it strategy or operations (Ellis, & Miller, 2014). Earlier research has also criticized the mission statements of universities as 'notoriously broad' (Dickeson, 2010), as 'vague paper tigers' (Leonard, 2000), as 'be everything for everyone' (Ellis, & Miller, 2014), and sometimes as 'laden with hollow platitudes' (Ireland and Hitt, 1992).

2.1.2. Length

Generally, the length of mission statements should not be too long and should be less than 250 words (David, 1989). However, several recent studies have suggested a 100-150 word guideline without compromising any of the essential features and components of the mission statement (Adebanke Olusola, et al, 2022). More recently, various studies have reported word counts in mission statements as 56.6 (Ahmad, & Al-Shaikh, 2021), 35.9 (Siddiqui, 2021a; Ahmad, & Siddiqui, 2021), 31.2 (Al-Falah, & Siddiqui, 2021), 32.4 (Zarzuelo, et al, 2019), 34.2 (Siddiqui, 2021b). The average word count from these studies was 42 words per mission statement.

2.1.3. Relevance

An ideal mission should be related to the usefulness of the company's product or service in the marketplace (Cortés, 2022). For universities and other higher education institutions, the relevance of their products and services would be education, teaching, research, community services.

2.1.4. Enduring

These statements should be as timeless and enduring as possible. It is not uncommon for a company to revise its mission statement as it evolves (Coker, 2022). For universities mission statements should not hold periods like semesters, months, and years.

2.1.5. Inspiring

An effective mission statement should evoke positive emotions and feelings toward the organization. It must be inspirational in the sense of motivating the reader to take action (Camelia, & Marius, 2013). At the university level, the importance of 'inspiring' characteristics has more important as the university is the largest single place to inspire the future generation of the society.

2.1.6. Reconciliatory

A good mission statement shows an organization's relative attention to meeting the needs of its various stakeholders, including employees, managers, shareholders, directors, customers, suppliers, vendors, creditors, governments (local, state, federal, and international), trade unions, competitors, environmental groups, and the public (Cortés, Rivera, & Carbonelld, 2022). Similarly, for universities or other higher education institutions different stakeholders may include students, graduates, alumni, employers, staff, faculty, administration, employees, managers, suppliers, vendors, creditors, governments (local, state, federal, and international), and the public.

2.1.7. Socially Responsible

This statement describes the company's obligations to conduct its business in a socially responsible and ethical manner. This includes complying with the law, protecting universal human rights, protecting society, and benefiting the communities in which the company operates ((Ajiboye, 2023). At the university level, social responsibility means social, social, and cultural issues.

2.1.8. Environmentally Responsible

This reflects the company's commitment to sustainability and environmental protection. This helps companies and stakeholders align their actions with their mission for a better world (Aib, & Shehzad, 2023). At the university level, this means climate change, a green environment, clean water, clean air, and other environmental issues.

2.2. Components of Mission Statements

Mission statements can vary in length, content, format, and specificity. Components are parts of the system that provide and encapsulate the functionality needed to implement features. Most strategic managers and academics believe that an effective statement should include all nine components of the mission statement. More recently, studies have suggested that having nine components in a mission statement is a myth (Siddiqui, 2021a). Various studies have reported the number of mission statement components (Ahmad, & Al-Shaikh, 2021;

Siddiqui, 2021a; Ahmad, & Siddiqui, 2021; Al-Falah, & Siddiqui, 2021; Siddiqui, (2021b) found that only 4% of mission statements with all nine components were replicated in four different studies. These studies also show that 87% of companies have between three and eight components in their mission statements.

2.2.1. Customers

Since the mission statement is the most readable part of any company document, it's important to include your target customers. It will also connect businesses with target customers (Mion, Adaui, Bonfanti, & De Crescenzo, 2023). University's customers may include, students, parents, graduates, alumni, employers, governments, and ultimately society.

2.2.2. Products or Services

Marketers find defining products and services in a mission statement extremely helpful in attracting customers (Abd Rahman, Senik, & Nadzri, 2020). For universities products or services may include teaching, learning, research, and community services.

2.2.3. Markets

This component is very important for companies operating in different countries. This reflects their preference for the company's geographical presence (Jeon, & Cho, 2021). For universities may include geographical representation of markets like, international, regional, local, and/or national.

2.2.4. Technology

This will reflect an emphasis on technology support or innovation within the organization, as well as the company's technological development (Jang, Choi, Woo, & Peachey, 2023). Recent studies have suggested that patents and grants granted to any university are directly correlated with the number of components of its mission statements (Fitzgerald, & Cunningham, 2016).

2.2.5. Survival, Growth, and Profitability

Companies at different stages of the life cycle adopt different strategies. New startups may seek survival in their mission, while growth will be the goal for companies in the growth phase. Ultimately, mature companies will consider profitability as their primary concern (Berbegal-Mirabent, Mas-Machuca, & Guix, 2021).

2.2.6. Philosophy

It must be aligned with the company's fundamental beliefs, values, aspirations, and ethical priorities (Seo, 2020). It is one of the most commonly chosen components of mission statements among universities and other higher education institutions (Stober, 1997).

2.2.7. Self-concept

It must present the firm's major competitive advantage (also known as distinctive competence or a unique selling proposition) concerning its major rivals (Serra, et al 2022). For universities, it could be the location of the university or the employability of graduates. For example, universities located near Silicon Valley, USA have relatively higher placement as compared to their competitors.

2.2.8. Concern for Public Image

It must demonstrate the company's main competitive advantage (also known as differentiating competence or unique selling proposition) over key competitors (Khalifa, Desmidt, & Huisman, 2023).

2.2.9. Concern for Employees

It reflects the efforts of all employees toward long-term goals. The mission statement should be broad enough for each employee to identify their main idea. It must convey the message that employees are valuable assets of the company (Yadav, & Sehgal, 2019). For universities, it is relevant to their faculty, staff, and other employees.

2.3. Setting the Context

In this study, universities were selected to study their mission statements. This selection method has many advantages. First, universities are mature, stable, customer-centric, market-facing entities that provide the highest intellectual possible input for the mission statements. At universities mission statements are normally part of strategic management/planning documentation (Connell, & Galasiński, 1998); therefore, it is easy to extract mission statements from their official websites. Research gaps suggest that not many studies have explored the underlying structure of universities' mission statements in detail. Therefore, this descriptive study aims to fill this gap by conducting a content analysis of the mission statements of leading universities. The aim is also to synthesize and classify the characteristics and components of mission statements and provide generalizable answers to the following research questions:

What is the average length of a mission statement for universities (RQ 1)?

Which characteristics of mission statements are most adopted by universities (RQ 2)?

Which components of mission statements are most adopted by universities (RQ 3)?

Which are the key themes in the mission statements of universities (RQ 4)?

3. METHODOLOGY

This section deals with methodological issues. It begins with the population and sample rationale for the study. It further illustrates the methodology by providing a brief excerpt of the mission statements and content analysis techniques used in this study for data analysis.

3.1. Population and Sampling

The top 400 universities were studied for this research based on their international rankings and the public availability of their mission statements through their official websites. Only 360 university's mission statements were extracted from their official websites (Al Falah, 2023c). Table 1 presents a list of countries.

Table 1: Country of Origin for Selected Universities (N=360).

S. No.	Country	Frequency	Percentage
1	Argentina	5	1.4
2	Australia	19	5.3
3	Austria	3	.8
4	Belarus	1	.3
5	Belgium	4	1.1
6	Brazil	2	.6
7	Brunei	2	.6
8	Canada	10	2.8
9	China	16	4.4
10	Colombia	1	.3
11	Denmark	5	1.4
12	Egypt	1	.3
13	Estonia	1	.3
14	Finland	4	1.1
15	France	17	4.7
16	Germany	15	4.2
17	Greece	1	.3
18	Hong Kong	5	1.4
19	India	8	2.2
20	Indonesia	3	.8
21	Iran	1	.3
22	Ireland	4	1.1
23	Israel	1	.3
24	Italy	10	2.8
25	Japan	12	3.3
26	Kazakhstan	5	1.4
27	Macau	1	.3
28	Malaysia	5	1.4
29	Mexico	1	.3
30	Netherlands	8	2.2
31	New Zealand	5	1.4
32	Norway	4	1.1
33	Oman	1	.3
34	Pakistan	2	.6
35	Philippines	1	.3
36	Poland	1	.3
37	Portugal	3	.8
38	Qatar	1	.3
39	Russia	7	1.9
40	Saudi Arabia	4	1.1
41	Singapore	2	.6
42	South Africa	3	.8
43	South Korea	6	1.7
44	Spain	9	2.5
45	Sweden	7	1.9
46	Switzerland	3	.8
47	Taiwan	9	2.5
48	Thailand	2	.6
49	Turkey	3	.8
50	United Arab Emirates	2	.6
51	United Kingdom	42	11.6

3.2. Data Collection

The mission statements for each selected university were collected from their official websites. This technique of obtaining vital information

through official websites is quite common in previous studies of official university artifacts (Adebanke Olusola, et al 2022; Mynard, et al 2022), or business schools (Mazurek et al., 2020; Siddiqui, 2021).

3.3. Content Analysis

This study used content analysis, which is an often-used and accepted analytical tool for mission statements (Bayrak, 2020). Content analysis or text analysis is "a technique used to objectively and systematically identify certain characteristics of a message" (Holsti, 1969). This offers the possibility of collecting oral, printed, and electronic data both qualitatively and quantitatively (Mburu et al. 2013). In other words, this is "a summary and quantitative analysis of news based on the scientific method (including attention to objectivity, inter-subjectivity, a priori design, reliability, and hypothesis testing) and the types of variables that can be measured "is not limited to" or "the context in which the message is created or presented" (Neuendorf, 2002). Content analysis is often used in the literature to analyse mission statements, especially for universities (AdeUniversitye, et al 2022; Ahman, 2020; Gözükara, 2015; Cortés-Sánchez, 2017). This also reflects that content analysis is the most favored technique among modern researchers/academicians for working on mission statements and making refined judgments (Anzai, & Matsuzawa, 2013).

3.4. Measuring Keywords

The framework used to analyse mission statements is based on two parts: one deals with eight possible characteristics and the other works with nine possible components of mission statements (Crawford Barniskis, 2016). A set of keywords was prepared to measure the characteristics and components separately. Tables 2 and 3 present the characteristics and components of mission statements, respectively.

Table 2: Characteristics of Mission Statements with Measuring Keywords.

Characteristics	Measuring Keywords
Scope	No monetary amounts, numbers, percentages, or ratios
Length	The maximum limit is less than 250 words
Relevant	Career, Profession, Success
Enduring	No months, years, or periods
Inspiring	Attractive words
Reconciliatory	More than one stakeholder
Socially responsible	Social, Community, Society.
Environmentally responsible	Climate, water, trees, energy, pollution, nature, green

Adopted from Al Falah, & Siddiqui (2021).

Table 3: Components of Mission Statements with Measuring Keywords.

Components	Measuring Keywords
Customers	Students, Graduates, Alumni, Employers
Services and products	Education, Teaching, Research, Training
Markets	International, Global, Regional, and National
Technology	Technology
Philosophy	Philosophical intentions, values, beliefs,
Self-identity	Uniqueness, Exceptional, Best, Distinction
Concern for Public image	Social, Community, Society
Concern for employees	Employees, staff, Faculty, Work environment
Concern for survival, profitability, and growth	Growth, Resources, Efficiency, Optimal, Profit

Adopted from Al Falah, & Siddiqui (2021).

4. ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

This section provides the findings and discussion based on descriptive statistics as answers to the seven research questions (RQs) outlined earlier. Mission statements from 360 universities were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The total number of words was 19,565 in 360 mission statements with an average of 54.3 words per mission statement. Vocabulary density was 0.142, which is defined as the ratio of the total number of words to the number of unique words in a document. Therefore, a higher vocabulary density value close to 1 indicates a simple text with fewer unique words. On the other hand, a lower density value represents a complex text with more unique words." The vocabulary density of the data in this study appeared to be on the lower end with a value of 0.142, indicating that the universities have a wide variety of unique words in their mission statements.

4.1. Length of Mission Statements (RQ 1)

Academics, researchers, and professionals often wonder how many keywords are appropriate to communicate a mission statement effectively. Regarding the number of words in the mission statements, there was an 80:20 split in the number of words in the mission statements (Figure 1). Eighty percent of universities have mission statements with a range of 0-70 words for each mission statement. Meanwhile, 20% of universities have mission statements with more than 70 words. Overall, the average number of words was 54.3.
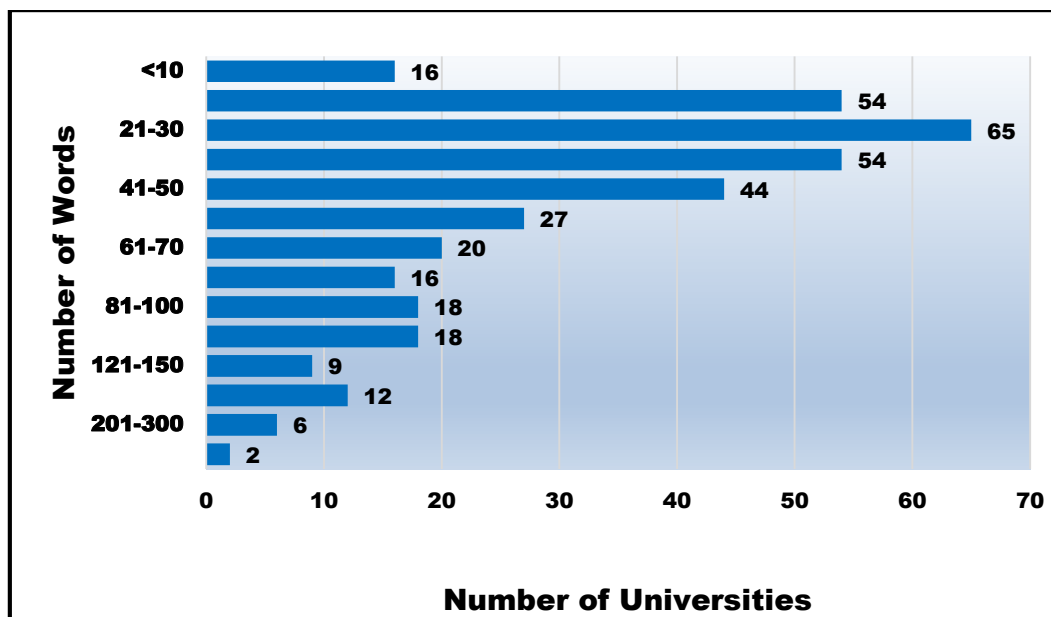
Figure 1: Number of Words in University's Mission Statements.

4.2. Characteristics of Mission Statements (RQ 2)

The characteristics of the university's mission statements [N = 360] were analyzed using the frequency distribution and the criteria described in Table 2. Figure 3 shows the mission statement characteristics with the frequency of publication.

Firstly, "Environmentally responsible" is the feature least frequently used by top universities in the world. One possible explanation is that environmental responsibility is always associated with manufacturing concerns; therefore, universities may have compromised their responsibilities for the environment and climate change.
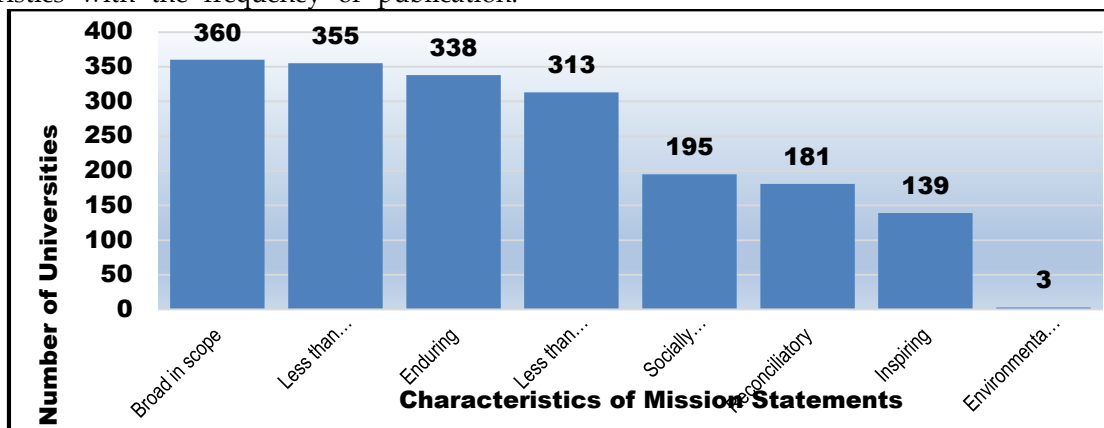

Figure 2: Characteristics of Mission Statements.

4.3. Components of Mission Statements (RQ 3)

The components of the university's mission statements [N= 360] were analyzed using frequency distribution and criteria outlined in Table 3. Figure 4 shows the mission statement components with the frequency of occurrence. Component 'Technology' was the least frequently used component among the top universities. A possible explanation might

include that although universities and their operations are mapped on modern-day technology and this dependence will increase in the future. However, universities do not count technology as part of their mission, rather they take technology as tools to achieve profit centers but they have non-profit intentions. Therefore, in their mission statements, it is reflected as well.
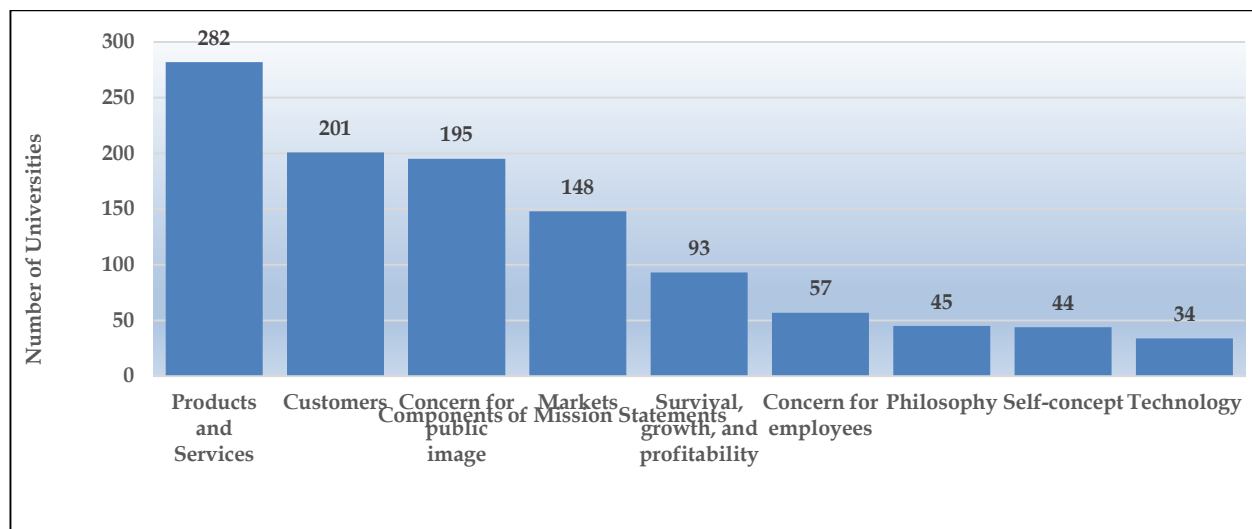
Figure 3: Components of Mission Statements.

4.4. Major Themes in Mission Statements (RQ4):

Major themes in mission statements were extracted using the word cloud technique. Many earlier studies have used this technique to analyze different mission statements (Cortés Sánchez, 2018). A word cloud is a visual representation of word data. In other words, it may be a collection, or cluster, of words portrayed in several sizes. The greater and bolder the word shows up, the more frequently it is mentioned in the text and the more important it is. Figure 4 presents the word cloud observed in the university's mission statements. Prominent words 'university', 'research', and 'society' form the common themes.

Figure 4: University's Mission Statement – Cirrus.

Voyant Tools were also used to draw Cirrus for the university's mission statements. Cirrus is a word cloud that displays the frequency of words appearing in a corpus. Words that occur more frequently appear larger (Schumann, 2022). This technique is extensively used to display word frequency in documents, particularly mission statements. (Mukwena, 2020). Figure 5 presents the major cirrus in the mission statements for universities. It has three major elements 'university', 'research' and 'society'. The broader lines connecting different words show strong relationships among the keywords. For example in this cirrus 'research' is linked with 'teaching' and 'education'.
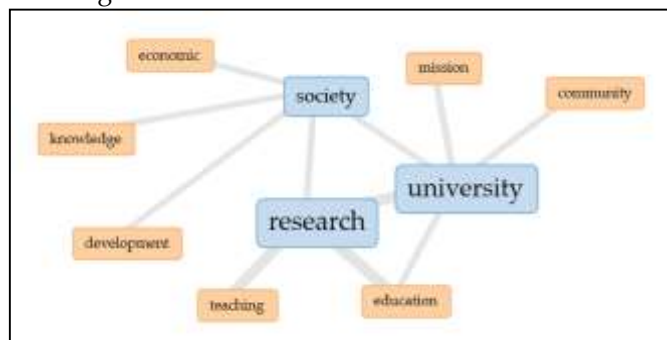

Figure 5: University's Mission Statement – Underlying Structure.

5.   CONCLUSIONS   AND RECOMMENDATION

Worldwide, the university is seen as an icon of prosperity and a determinant of income, skills, and professions in any country. Probably it is one of the most important investments a country should make for its citizens (Pee, & Vululleh, 2020). In order to be successful universities need missions and goals to achieve, therefore, mission statements have also gained enormous importance for any university (Ellis, & Miller, 2014). This research makes many

significant findings for academicians, senior university managers involved in strategy formulation, and society in general.

Firstly, the mission statement of almost all universities analyzed in this research is quite broad (Figure 2). This observation is consistent with earlier research (Dickeson, 2010; Leonard, 2000; Irish and Hitt, 1992). This level of broadness may not allow the universities to focus on their core competencies, and target markets, and eventually may lose sight of their strategic/operational focus.

Secondly, on the other extreme, several universities have used less than 10 words to describe their missions (Figure 1). These statements have merely used one or two components in their mission statement making these statements 'vague' and may defeat the purpose of these statements. This observation also supports earlier criticism of mission statements as 'vague paper tigers' (Leonard, 2000).

Thirdly, environmental responsibility has emerged as the least frequently used characteristic by the top universities of the world (Figure 2). Normally universities are considered as the epicentre of environmental responsibility and the hub for climate change research. But this trend has not been translated into their mission statements. Senior university administration and faculty should take note of this missive trend and take corrective action.

Fourth, 'Technology' has emerged as the least frequently used component among the top university's mission statements (Figure 3). Technology has several facets for higher education institutions. Modern teaching and learning at territory education is completely technology-based, and technology will continue to play a pivotal role in the education industry. The global higher education industry is on the brink of transformation, including digital transformation, but universities remain silent on the issue. Therefore, universities should incorporate 'technology,' more specifically 'financial technology (FinTech),' or at least technology enablement, into their missions. This will help universities to attract young customers through the use of technology.

Finally, over the past two decades, the education sector has made remarkable strides on many fronts. High use of cell phones and social media by students and teachers is becoming the norm. This provides an opportunity to evaluate any product or service, or more specifically, educational offerings without much effort by their customers and potential customers. This requires all universities to express their concerns about stakeholder views in their mission statements. Universities need to update their mission statements to more often reflect the views of all stakeholders.

5.1. Suggestions for Future Research

Many universities have put innovation and technology at the heart of their mission statements. Further research is needed to support their claim by linking innovation to the number of patents the university has obtained. For a long time, a length of 100 to 150 words was considered acceptable for mission statements (David, 1989). In this study, the average length of the mission statements was 54.3. It's time to change this rule of thumb from the 100 - 150 category to the 30 - 60 range. However, this recommendation needs further investigation.

This study does not address the relationship between university size (in terms of assets, number of students, faculty, staff, etc.) with mission statements and their components/characteristics. Another limitation of this study is that it provides an interesting direction for future research.

There is no single best mission statement for any particular organization, so it is more important to evaluate mission statements. A comprehensive model needs to be developed to link mission statements and their relevance to each type of business. It also provides an interesting direction for future research.

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