THE Times Higher Education

CONSULTANCY

GLOBAL POWERHOUSE UNIVERSITY BRANDS

A DIGITAL BRAND DIAGNOSTIC

"

Reputations are built primarily on the foundation of high-quality activities, outputs and achievements, but professional communications, marketing and stakeholder engagement can play an important role in building a clear and distinctive identity and a compelling narrative for the University"

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

GLOBAL POWERHOUSE UNIVERSITY BRANDS

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POWERHOUSE BRANDS

THE BEST UNIVERSITIES IN THE WORLD HARNESS DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS TO SUPPORT THEIR STRATEGIC AIMS, TO BUILD AWARENESS OF THEIR HIGH-QUALITY OUTPUTS AND PROUDLY DIFFERENTIATE THEIR MISSION.

OUR ANALYSIS HAS SHOWN THAT INVESTMENT MADE BY THE GLOBAL POWERHOUSE UNIVERSITY BRANDS INCLUDED WITHIN THIS REPORT GUARANTEES THEM HUGE ENGAGEMENT IN THEIR DIGITAL CONTENT.

THE HIGHEST VOLUME OF WEBSITE VISITS, PER YEAR, AMONGST THIS GROUP REACHES ALMOST 60 MILLION. SEVERAL MILLION MORE THAN TYPICAL B2B OR B2C DIGITAL PLATFORMS.

WEBSITE OPTIMISATION STRATEGIES RECOUP EXTRAORDINARY RETURN ON INVESTMENT, EQUIVALENT TO MILLIONS OF USD OF INVESTMENT IN PAID ADVERTISING WHEN SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTED.

CONTENT IS TAILORED TO AUDIENCE, WHILST MAINTAINING AND RETAINING THE EXCLUSIVITY AND AUTHORITY CREATED BY EACH OF THESE WORLD CLASS INSTITUTIONS.

STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE STAKEHOLDER AUDIENCES VIA SOCIAL MEDIA VARY ACROSS THE WORLD'S BEST KNOWN HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS.

IF SUCCESSFUL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IS MEASURED BY THE VOLUME OF ENGAGEMENT, SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES AMONGST THIS HIGH PERFORMING GROUP INCLUDES LINKAGES BETWEEN A VARIATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS AND EXTERNAL CONTENT SOURCES, CULMINATING IN EXTREMELY HIGH LINK VELOCITY.
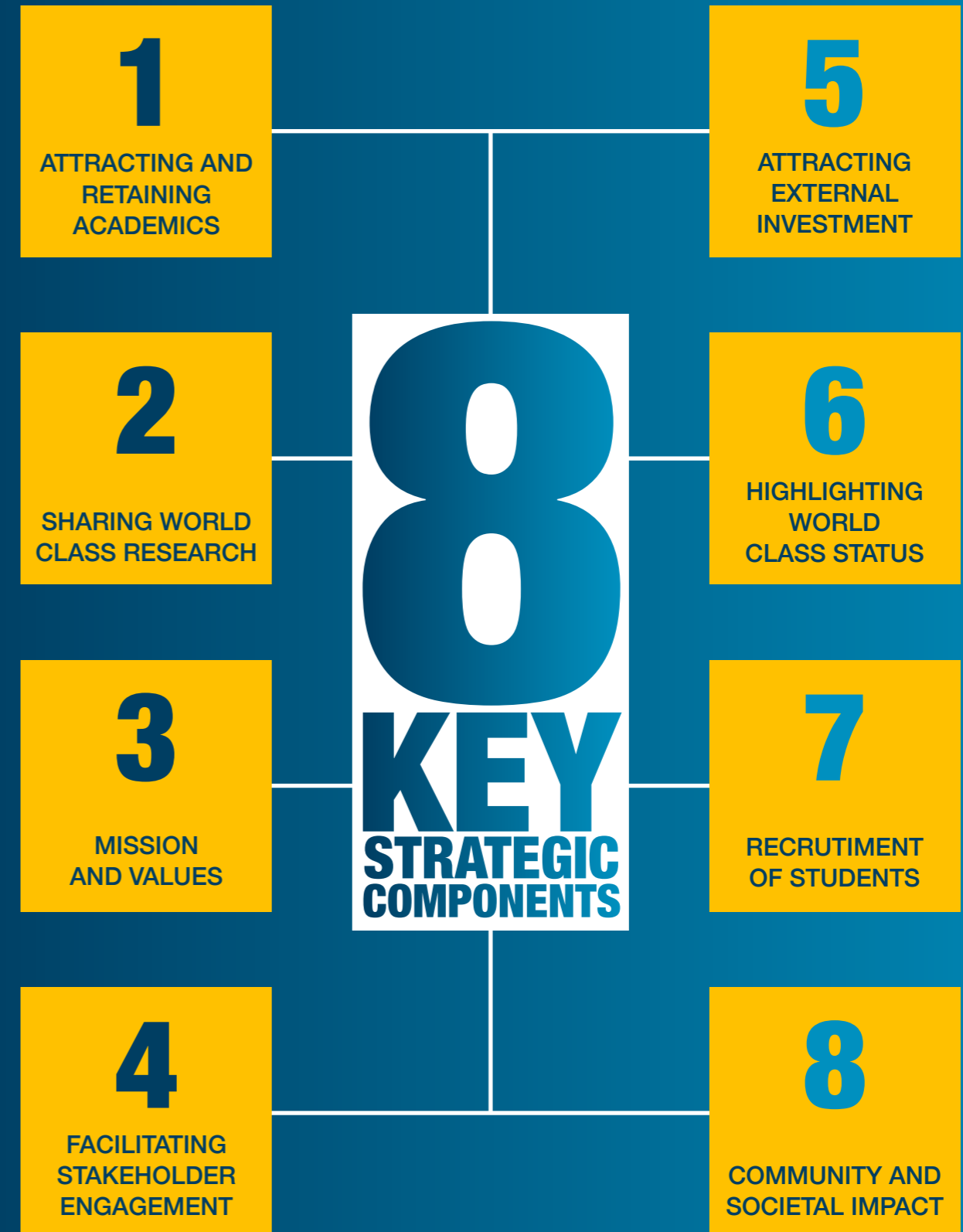
DEVISING A UNIVERSITY'S COMMS STRATEGY

A university reputation is built on the awareness of, and engagement with, the exceptional outputs and achievements of all staff, students and stakeholders associated with that institution. The perception held by future students, partners and collaborators of a universities' reputation is based in the impression formed in their minds via engagement with data and information obtained through interaction with the university, and communications about that university (Cole and Bruch, 2006).

Based on this understanding of the formation of a university's reputation, we can assert that the creation of a comprehensive communications strategy is a very important task for all universities globally. A university communications strategy plays a vital role in strengthening the development of a positive reputation and increasing awareness of an institution's outputs and achievements.

An examination of the key strategic components of universities' communications strategies suggests that, by and large, they are comprised of several common objectives.

These objectives can include attracting and retaining world class academic staff; sharing ground-breaking research outputs; clear communication of the institutions' mission and values; facilitating increased and positive external stakeholder engagement; attracting external investment; highlighting their world class status; supporting the recruitment of students and highlighting the community and societal impact of the university's work.

These objectives are constructed to support the successful achievement of the institutions unique mission.■

8 KEY STRATEGIC COMPONENTS

1 ATTRACTING AND RETAINING ACADEMICS

2 SHARING WORLD CLASS RESEARCH

3 MISSION AND VALUES

4 FACILITATING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

5 ATTRACTING EXTERNAL INVESTMENT

6 HIGHLIGHTING WORLD CLASS STATUS

7 RECRUTIMENT OF STUDENTS

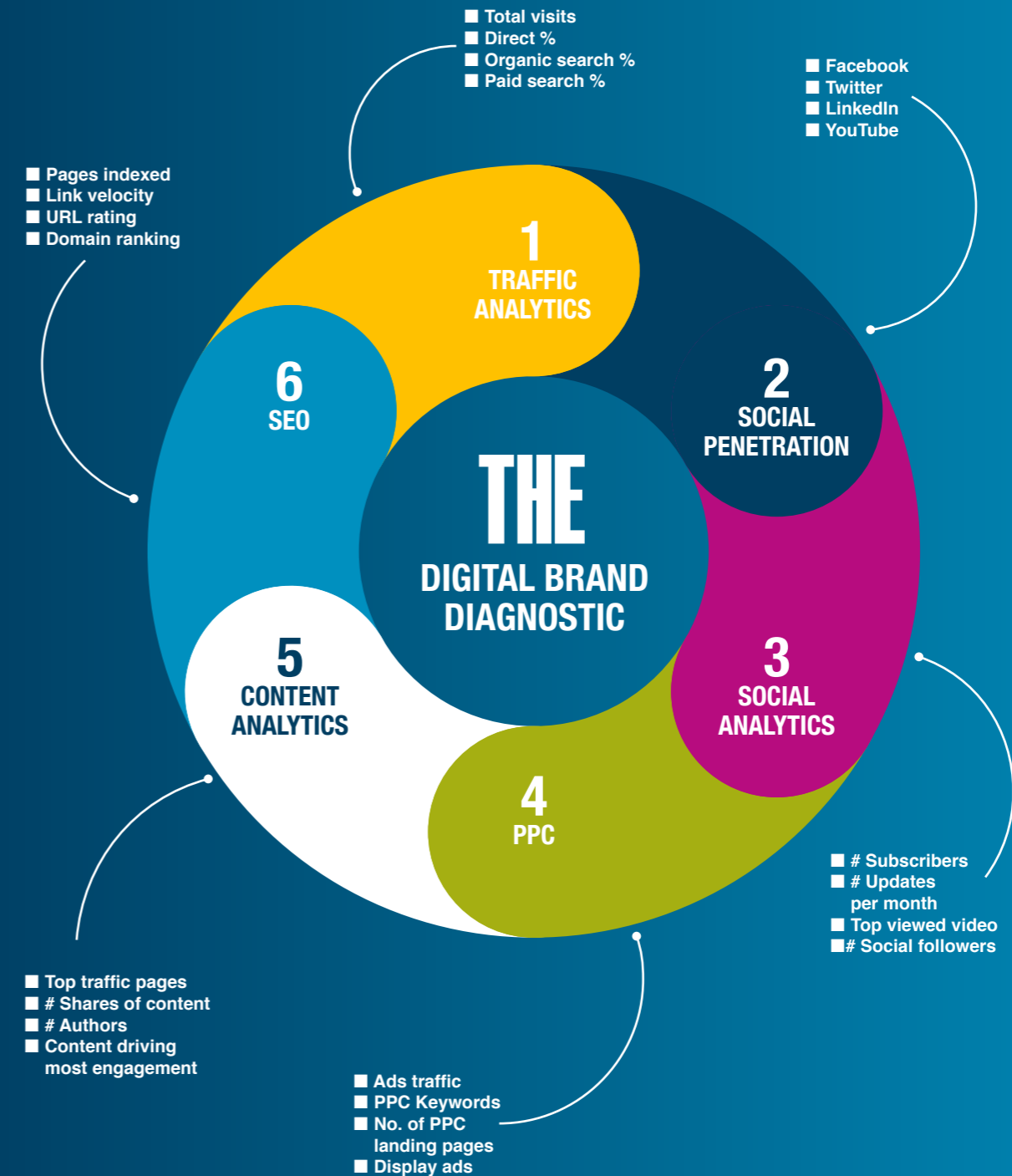**8** COMMUNITY AND SOCIETAL IMPACT

DIGITAL BRAND DIAGNOSTIC

Digital communications tools play a crucial role in helping to achieve the goals set out in a university communications strategy. They enable timely and cost-effective communication with multiple stakeholder audiences locally, regionally, and across the world. Supporting increased awareness of and engagement with the exceptional outputs and achievements of all staff, students and stakeholders that is associated with' the positive growth of' a university reputation.

Leveraging the use of several digital monitoring and intelligence tools, Times Higher Education Consultancy team have created a Digital brand diagnostic tool. These analytical tools produce over 70 digital metrics that provide dynamic real time insight into the power behind a university brand.

Our digital diagnostic process utilises eight digital monitoring and intelligence tools. The resulting data is presented in six analytical categories, within which each of the digital metrics provide insight into the content profiled and strategies employed as part of universities' communications strategies. Using these tools, we can measure the overall website traffic to an institution's website, by origin and source; a university's social media penetration and analytical performance; the pay per click (PPC) use and PPC strategies used to increase web traffic, the most engaging and frequently shared content' might read better, search engine optimisation strategies used, and the equivalent financial saving gained via a well optimised website. ■

- ■ Total visits
- ■ Direct %
- ■ Organic search %
- ■ Paid search %

- ■ Facebook
- ■ Twitter
- ■ LinkedIn
- ■ YouTube

- ■ Pages indexed
- ■ Link velocity
- ■ URL rating
- ■ Domain ranking

1 TRAFFIC ANALYTICS

6 SEO

2 SOCIAL PENETRATION

THE DIGITAL BRAND DIAGNOSTIC

5 CONTENT ANALYTICS

3 SOCIAL ANALYTICS

4 PPC

- ■ # Subscribers
- ■ # Updates per month
- ■ Top viewed video
- ■ # Social followers

- ■ Top traffic pages
- ■ # Shares of content
- ■ # Authors
- ■ Content driving most engagement

- ■ Ads traffic
- ■ PPC Keywords
- ■ No. of PPC landing pages
- ■ Display ads

SEARCH ENGINE DOMINANCE

Driving consistent and high volumes of traffic to a university website, so that key stakeholder audiences can engage with the exceptional outputs and achievements of the institution, thus supporting positive growth of their reputation, is central to a communications strategy.

An October 2020 study carried out by THE Consultancy team asked our panel of prospective international students, THE Student Pulse, the primary sources of information they used to find out about a university. Results from this study showed that a University website remains the most important source of information for this audience, gaining the largest number of responses (586).

Ever since the introduction of Google Search in 1997, the worldwide market share of all search engines has been dominated by this search engine. Google has dominated the search engine market, maintaining an 86.86 percent market share as of July 2020.

In July 2020, online search engine Bing accounted for 6.43 percent of the global search market, Chinese search engine Baidu's market share was 0.68 percent.

It is therefore vital to understand how your university's website performs when searched by potential future students, partners, and collaborators around the world. Understanding the performance of your university's website is the starting point for THE Digital brand diagnostic tool; analysing the power behind global powerhouse university brands. ■

SOURCES OF INFORMATION USED TO FIND OUT ABOUT A UNIVERSITY, DRIVING JUDGEMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION *

UNIVERSITY WEBSITES	**586**
RANKINGS	**501**
SOCIAL MEDIA	**320**
TEACHER OR CAREERS ADVISOR	**264**
NEWS MEDIA	**243**
FAMILY OR FRIENDS	**199**
PRINT BROCHURES	**115**
EMPLOYER	**76**
OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	**30**
PARENT/ GUARDIAN	**25**

WORLDWIDE MARKET SHARE OF SEARCH ENGINES, JANUARY 2010 TO JULY 2020 **

MARKET SHARE

Google   bing   Yahoo!   Baidu   Yandex RU
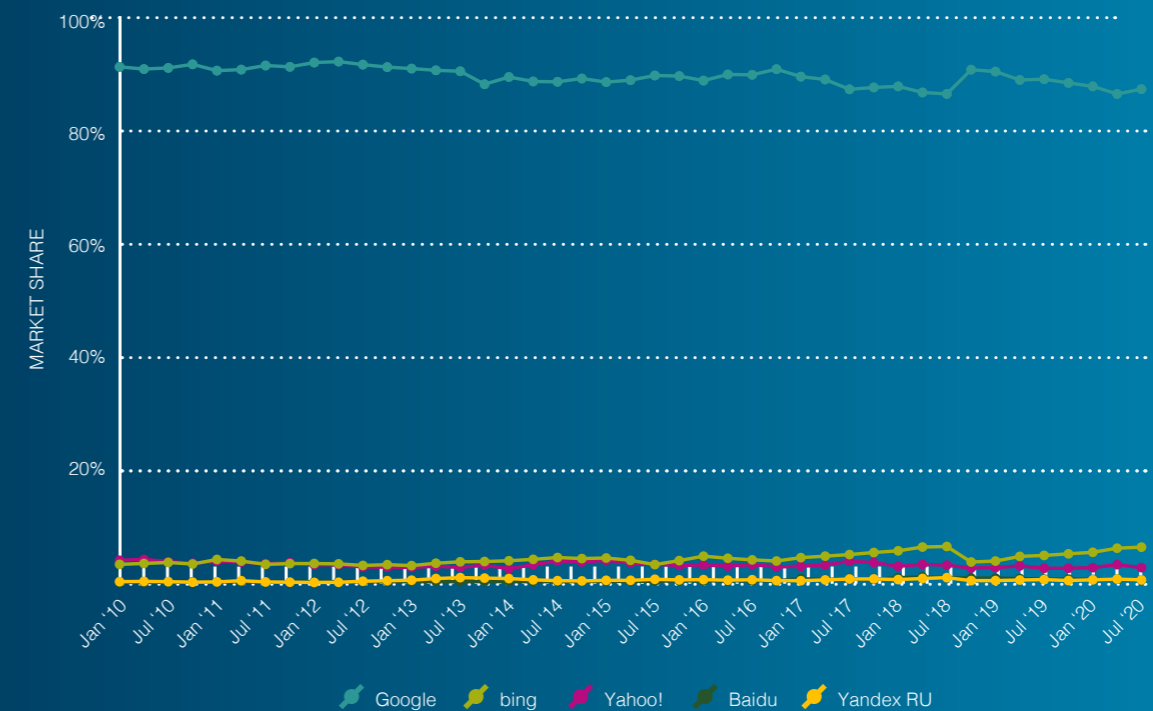
GLOBAL POWERHOUSE UNIVERSITY BRANDS

THE Consultancy team selected 15 powerhouse university brands to take part in this global digital diagnostic exercise. We identified a wide range of universities that are featured within the Times Higher Education 2021 World University Ranking, and 2020 World Reputation Ranking. Institutions selected represented a broad global geographic spread, including universities from Australia, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, China, Taiwan, Denmark, Germany, Canada, Switzerland, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The global powerhouse university brands selected for our analysis are listed in table 1, below.

TRAFFIC ANALYSIS

Analytics of the traffic generated by our 15 global powerhouse brands sets the foundations of investigation. Source of website traffic are defined as;
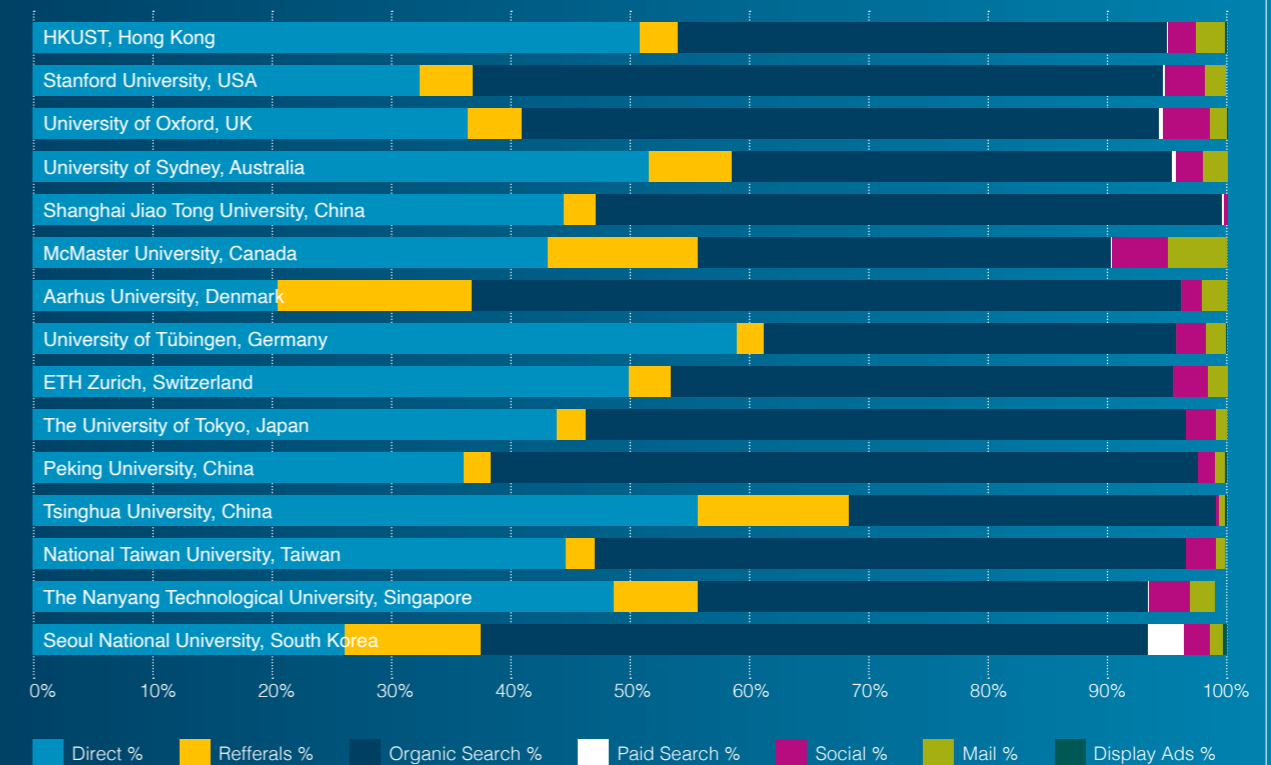
- **Direct:** Any traffic where the referrer or source is unknown, such as direct entry of URL into browser
- **Referral:** Traffic that occurs when a user finds you through a site other than a major search engine
- **Organic:** Traffic from search engine results that is earned, not paid
- **Paid search:** Traffic from search engine results that is the result of paid advertising via Google
- **Social:** Traffic from a social network, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, or Instagram
- **Mail:** Traffic from email marketing that has been properly tagged with an email parameter
- AdWords or another paid search platform
- **Display ads:** Traffic from banners or other advertising formats made of text, images, flash, video, and audio placed on internet websites and apps . ❯

15 GLOBAL POWERHOUSE UNIVERSITY BRANDS

UNIVERSITY	WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKING '21	WORLD REPUTATION RANKING '20
University of Oxford, UK	1	5
Stanford University, USA	2	3
ETH Zurich, Switzerland	14	17
Tsinghua University, China	20	13
Peking University, China	23	16
The University of Tokyo, Japan	36	10
The Nanyang Technological University, Singapore	47	51
University of Sydney, Australia	51	51
HKUST, Hong Kong	56	91
Seoul National University, South Korea	60	45
McMaster University, Canada	69	126
University of Tübingen, Germany	78	101
National Taiwan University (NTU), Taiwan	97	40
Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China	100	51
Aarhus University, Denmark	106	101

GLOBAL POWERHOUSE BRANDS: TRAFFIC ANALYTICS *

HKUST, Hong Kong
Stanford University, USA
University of Oxford, UK
University of Sydney, Australia
Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China
McMaster University, Canada
Aarhus University, Denmark
University of Tübingen, Germany
ETH Zurich, Switzerland
The University of Tokyo, Japan
Peking University, China
Tsinghua University, China
National Taiwan University, Taiwan
The Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
Seoul National University, South Korea

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Direct %　Refferals %　Organic Search %　Paid Search %　Social %　Mail %　Display Ads %

❮ Our analysis shows that some universities achieve the largest volume of website traffic from direct search. Approximately a third of these institutions, for example HKUST 50.8%, THE University of Sydney 51.6%, the University of Tubingen 59%, Tsinghua University 55.7%. However, the dominance of organic search traffic is clear, particularly for the highest ranked institutions within the group selected; Stanford 57.9%, University of Oxford 53.4%.

SOCIAL PENETRATION

Facebook and YouTube are most widely used social media channels by this group of universities. Peking University attracts the largest proportion of website traffic originating social media from Facebook (91.45%). They have a large Facebook following of 2.5 Million people and have a very active from social media, specifically from Facebook presence promoting topics such as the World Day of Social Justice, International Mother Language Day and Lunar New Year. Shanghai Jiao Tong University attracts the most social media originating-website traffic from YouTube. They have a very active presence on this social media channel, and regularly post videos that obtain thousands of views.

Universities with the highest proportion of website traffic originating from social media are Nanyang Technological University, ETH Zurich, McMaster University, and the University of Oxford. The approach taken to social media by these institutions varies with one consistent characteristic, they implement highly strategic connectivity between a large variety of social media channels and external content sources, culminating in extremely high link velocity. A fundamental SEO technique that provides significant benefits. ■

15 GLOBAL POWERHOUSE UNIVERSITY BRANDS

Legend: Youtube% — LinkedIn% — Twitter% — Facebook% — Social %
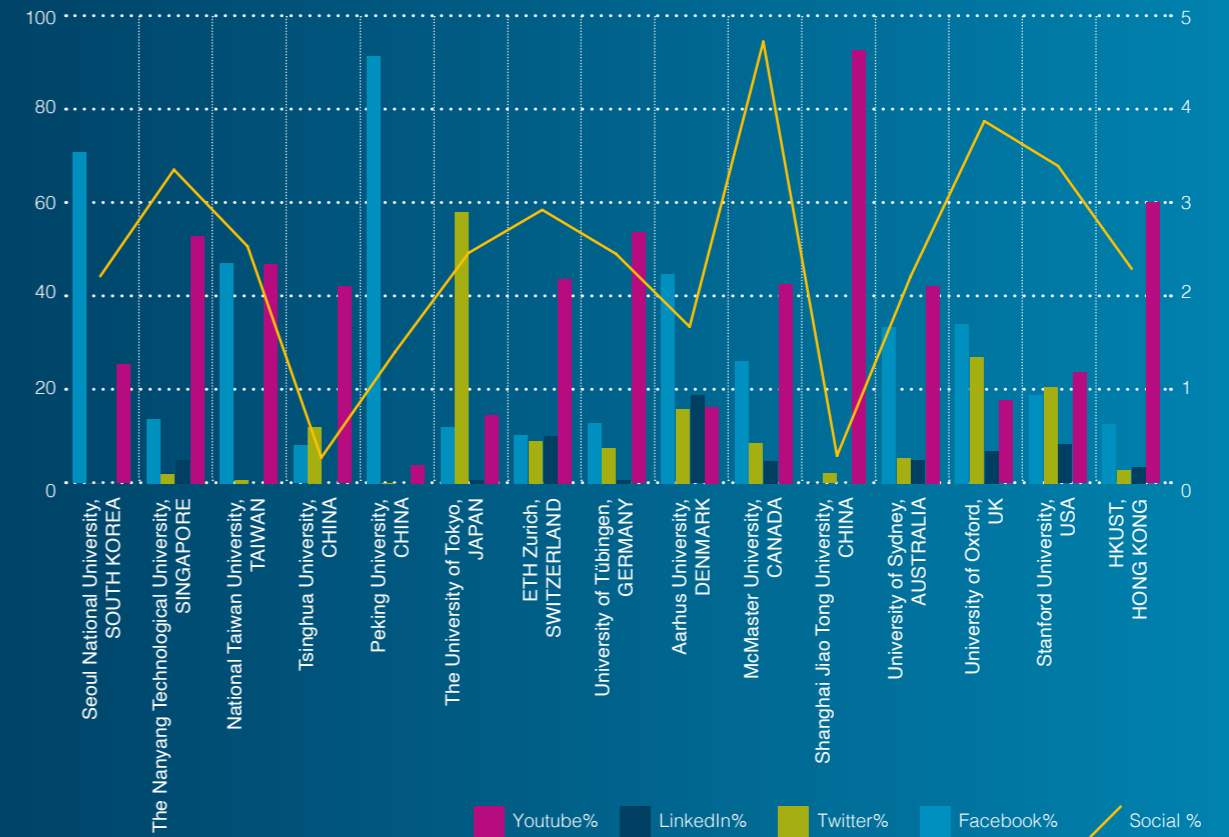
SOCIAL ANALYTICS

The highest number of Facebook fans:

4.3 MILLION

CONTENT ANALYTICS

The highest number of engagements (shares or reactions) of the most popular content gained across all channels on Social Media (12-month period):

155,000

PAY PER CLICK

The highest monthly budget dedicated to clicks coming from paid keywords:

(USD)

$120,000

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

The largest estimated financial saving via SEO increased organic traffic if funded by Google Ads
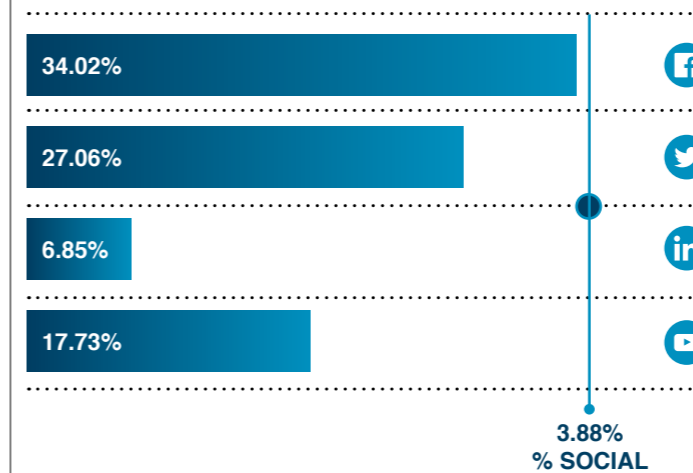
$11.1 MILLION (USD)

ESTABLISHED INNOVATOR

Total website visits (last 3 months)

Total monthly website visits

CASE STUDY

UNIVERSITY OF **OXFORD**

SOCIAL PENETRATION: % OF WEB TRAFFIC COMING FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

34.02%	f
27.06%	twitter
6.85%	in
17.73%	youtube

3.88% % SOCIAL

TOPICS COVERED ON FACEBOOK 2020
- #Covid19 vaccine
- Covid-19 test, Oxsed RaViD Direct
- DeepMind, Oxford's thriving AI community
- The Michael Dillon LGBT+ Lectures
- 2020 Romanes Lecture
- Oxford Net Zero Programme to tackle global carbon emission
- We must change what we eat to solve the climate crisis
- UK enters lockdown 2.0

f **The University of Oxford gains the largest proportion of social media generated website traffic from Facebook, 34.02%. The university has 4.29 million Facebook followers.**

2,900

PPC: Display ads (global): The number of banners,text, images, flash, video, and audio ads placed on internet websites and apps

19,500

Content analytics: Referral domains: The number of domains that put the link to their most popular piece of content in the last year

$760,000 USD

The estimated cost of their organic traffic if they paid for it in Google Ads

49,992

Social analytics: Tweets Article Shares From Website (1 year): The number of articles shared by website visitors via Twitter plugin directly on the website

***THE* WORLD UNIVERSITY RANK 2021**

1ST

***THE* WORLD REPUTATION UNIVERSITY RANK 2020**

5TH

Total website visits (last 3 months)
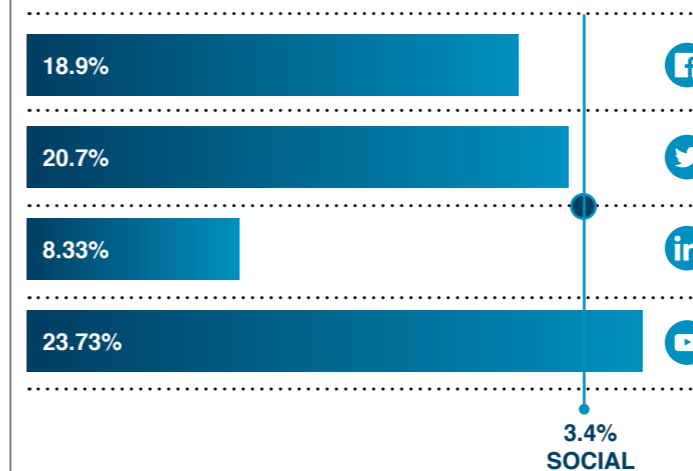
21.2 million

Total monthly website visits

3.07 million

TECH HIGHFLIER

CASE STUDY

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

SOCIAL PENETRATION: % OF WEB TRAFFIC COMING FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

18.9%	Facebook
20.7%	Twitter
8.33%	LinkedIn
23.73%	YouTube

3.4% SOCIAL

Stanford University gains the largest proportion of social media generated website traffic from YouTube, 23.7%. The university has apporximtely 1.2 million Youtube chanel subscribers, 3790 videos on YouTube, and 174 million life time views.

50,000

PPC: Display ads (global): The number of banners,text, images, flash, video, and audio ads placed on internet websites and apps

31,000

Content analytics: Referal domains: The number of domains that put the link to their most popular piece of content in the last year

$11.1ᴍ USD

SEO: estimated monthly organic search saving: The estimated cost of their organic traffic if they would need to pay for it in Google Ads

21,000

Social analytics: Tweets Article Shares From Website (1 year): The number of articles shared by website visitors via Twitter plugin directly on the website

THE WORLD UNIVERSITY RANK 2021

2ᴺᴰ

THE WORLD REPUTATION UNIVERSITY RANK 2020

3ᴿᴰ

Total website visits (last 3 months)
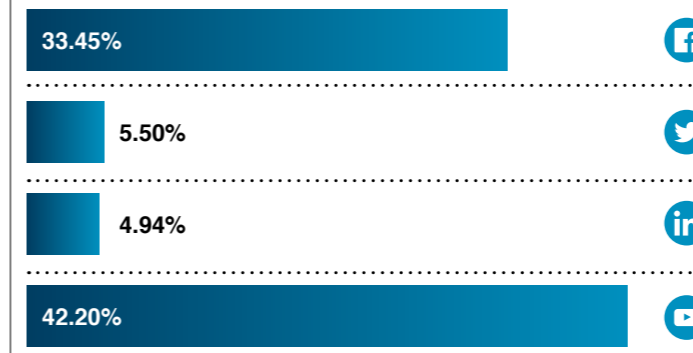
58.4 million

Total monthly website visits

9.1 million

INSPIRATIONAL LEADER

Total website visits

Total monthly

CASE STUDY

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

SOCIAL PENETRATION: % OF WEB TRAFFIC COMING FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

33.45%

5.50%

4.94%

42.20%

University of Sydney attracts 42% of its social media originating website traffic from YouTube, and 33.4% from Facebook. The university has approximately 23,000 YouTube subscribers. They have a far smaller volume of website traffic originating from Twitter and LinkedIn. The university's social media content focuses on the institutional values, highlighting the importance of leadership in post COVID19 society.

531

PPC: Display ads (global): The number of banners,text, images, flash, video, and audio ads placed on internet websites and apps

2000

Content analytics: Referral domains: The number of domains that put the link to their most popular piece of content in the last year

$70, 000 USD

SEO: estimated monthly organic search saving: The estimated cost of their organic traffic if they would need to pay for it in Google Ads

4,100

Social analytics: Tweets Article Shares From Website (1 year): The number of articles shared by website visitors via Twitter plugin directly on the website

THE WORLD UNIVERSITY RANK 2021

51ST

THE WORLD REPUTATION UNIVERSITY RANK 2020

51-60TH

Total website visits (last 3 months)

14.6 million

Total monthly website visits

1.3 million

ASIAN GIANT

CASE STUDY

NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

SINGAPORE

SOCIAL PENETRATION: % OF WEB TRAFFIC COMING FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

- 13.70% (Facebook)
- 1.93% (Twitter)
- 4.92% (LinkedIn)
- 52.94% (YouTube)

The Nanyang Technological University attracts the largest proportion of social media generated website traffic from YouTube, **52.94%**. The university has **10.K YouTube subscribers, and 3.9 million life time views** on this social media platform. Their YouTube content is designed to target several different audiences, with channels including: Research and Innovation, Undergraduate admissions, Student Life, Visitors to NTU, Beautiful Campus and Virtual Tour.

4,700

PPC: Display ads (global): The number of banners, text, images, flash, video, and audio ads placed on internet websites and apps

8,600

Content analytics: Referral domains: The number of domains that put the link to their most popular piece of content in the last year

$108,000 USD

SEO: estimated monthly organic search saving: The estimated cost of organic traffic if they would need to pay for it in Google Ads

7,000

Social analytics: Tweets Article Shares From Website (1 year): The number of articles shared by website visitors via Twitter plugin directly on the website

THE WORLD UNIVERSITY RANK 2021

47TH

THE WORLD REPUTATION UNIVERSITY RANK 2020

51-61TH

Total website visits (last 3 months)
9.3 million

Total monthly website visits
800 million

HOW TO COMMUNICATE A WORLD CLASS UNIVERSITY

■ Research carried out by Times Higher Education consultancy team, via our global panel of prospective international students THE Student Pulse, shows that your university website remains your most important communications tool when disseminating information to one of your most important stakeholder audiences, students.

■ Global powerhouse university brands attract consistently large volumes of traffic to their institutional websites, university brands selected for analysis in this report attract between one and 58 million total visits to their websites in a 12-month period.

■ Direct and organic traffic are the largest sources of website views, highlighting the importance of investment in improving SEO functionality. The largest estimated financial saving via SEO increased organic traffic if funded by Google Ads was estimated at $11.1 million (USD).

■ The percentage of website traffic from social media sources ranged from 0.2% to 4.7%. The institutions with the largest volume of social media generated web traffic employ strategic connectivity between a diverse range of social media channels used.

■ Our global powerhouse brands also engage with significant quantities of external digital sources, culminating in extremely high link velocity. A fundamental SEO technique that provides significant benefits.

Interested in the data presented in this report?
THE Consultancy team can conduct this analysis for any university in the world.

If you would like to enquire about the Digital Brand Diagnostic tool, please contact us at
consultancy@timeshighereducation.com