

# PRESTIGE IN PARTNERSHIP: A CASE STUDY IN LEVERAGING UNIVERSITY EXCELLENCE TO ELEVATE BRAND SUCCESS

**PRESTIŻ W PARTNERSTWIE: WYKORZYSTANIE DOSKONAŁOŚCI UNIwersYTECKIEJ  
W CELU ZWIĘKSZENIA SUKCESU MARKI – ANALIZA STUDIUM PRZYPADKU**

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## ABSTRACT

As global competition in research continues to grow, universities are becoming key centres of innovation and knowledge generation. One of the most important factors attracting research institutions to a university is its brand. This article examines how universities can collaboratively establish and achieve research goals with research institutes, using a case study of Coventry University's partnership with the Łukasiewicz Research Network – Institute for Sustainable Technologies (Łukasiewicz–ITEE). The analysis highlights the significance of a strong brand in fostering sustainable relationships with other academic, research, and industrial partners. The practical implementation of Coventry University's strategies, including promoting research achievements and investing in relationship development, is explored. The study demonstrates that a university's reputation significantly enhances its appeal to potential research partners, thereby facilitating joint research projects and the commercialization of research outcomes.

**Key words: university brand, research partnerships, joint initiatives, university reputation**

## ABSTRAKT

W miarę jak globalna konkurencja w dziedzinie badań naukowych stale rośnie, uczelnie wyższe stają się kluczowymi ośrodkami innowacji i generowania wiedzy. Jednym z najważniejszych czynników przyciągających instytucje badawcze do uczelni jest jej marka i doskonałość naukowa. W niniejszym artykule autor koncentruje się na analizie, w jaki sposób uczelnia może z instytutem badawczym wytyczać wspólne cele na rzecz osiągnięcia sukcesu na płaszczyźnie naukowo-badawczej. W artykule dokonano przeglądu literatury na temat istoty marki instytucji oraz jej wpływu na pozyskiwanie partnerów. Zidentyfikowano przykłady uczelni o globalnej renomie, które osiągnęły sukces w budowaniu trwałych relacji z innymi uczelniami, instytutami badawczymi oraz partnerami przemysłowymi dzięki swojej silnej marce.

W dalszej części artykułu skupiono się na aspekcie praktycznym i omówiono strategię, która została zastosowana przez Coventry University w celu nawiązania długofalowej współpracy z badaczami z Sieci Badawczej Łukasiewicz – Instytutu Technologii Eksploatacji oraz jakie rezultaty uzyskano w wyniku zastosowania tej strategii. Wskazano między innymi na działania związane z promocją osiągnięć naukowych oraz inwestowaniem w rozwijanie relacji z instytutem badawczym. Przeprowadzona analiza pokazuje, że renomata uczelni może pełnić kluczową rolę w budowaniu relacji pomiędzy światem nauki, a innymi instytucjami badawczymi. Uczelnie o silnej marce są bardziej atrakcyjne dla potencjalnych partnerów badawczych, co zwiększa szanse na realizację wspólnych projektów badawczych i komercjalizację uzyskanych wyników badań.

**Słowa kluczowe:** marka uniwersytetu, partnerstwa badawcze, wspólne inicjatywy, reputacja uniwersytetu

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Type of the work: case study

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## Introduction

Many organisations are strengthening their brands nowadays, in response to increasing competition and the intensifying struggle for customers resulting from recent changes related to socioeconomic development and technological advances (see, e.g., Mardhiyah, & Azizah, 2018; Cvetanović & Grujić, 2021; Vesal, Siahtiri & O’Cass, 2021). Brand strategy should therefore focus on building a competitive advantage that can be sustained over time (Morgan & Hunt, 1999; Chailan, 2008; Farida & Setiawan, 2022). To prosper in today’s globalised and competitive marketplace, organisations must look for new ways to differentiate themselves from the competition and increase their market share.

Organisations can meet the challenge of competition through a number of means. One of them is building a strong brand to stand out in the market and gain the trust of customers (Kall, 2006; Supiyandi, Hastjarjo & Slamet, 2022). A good brand allows them to attract new customers and increase the loyalty of existing ones. Another factor is the ability to adapt to changing market conditions (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2022). Organisations that are able to react quickly to changes and adapt their strategy to new conditions have a better chance of surviving and growing in the market.

One type of organisation operating in the market is the university. Despite the fact that the basic activity of a university lies in the non-profit fields of providing education, conducting research and serving the academic community and society at large, they also seek customers for services that should come at a fee (Gillespie & Zachary, 2010), in line with other scientific and research organisations and businesses (Etzkowitz, 1983; Ankrah & Omar, 2015). The activities carried out by universities are very diverse, ranging from traditional teaching activities which are dedicated to students, to scientific research activities in cooperation with other universities and scientific research units, and to collaboration with enterprises (Abramo et al., 2017; Mascarenhas et al., 2018; Bezrukova et al., 2019; Figueiredo & Ferreira, 2022). In the case of cooperation with enterprises, this can range from research work to various types of construction work.

The foundation for a university's cooperation with other units is the recognition and prestige that it enjoys (Crane, 1965; Kall, 2001; Kuenzel & Halliday, 2010; Fazli-Salehi et al., 2019). Stronger partners, after all, will be preferred over weaker institutions. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to identify and analyse how a university's reputation and brand can be beneficial for its collaboration with other research units. The analysis will concentrate on how prestigious universities successfully collaborate with research institutes and identify the reasons why they may do so even in many situations they do not receive any financial gains.

## **Theoretical background**

Branding is one of the key concepts in the field of marketing, which is inextricably linked to a company's recognition and image (Dinnie, 2022). A brand can be defined in many ways, but in the simplest terms it is *a name, symbol or other graphic element that identifies a specific product or service and*

*differentiates it from other offerings on the market.* Branding helps build customer awareness, trust and loyalty, as well as differentiating products and services from those of competitors.

The essence of a brand, however, is not just a name or logo; it also represents the values that a company wants to convey to its customers. A brand can be associated with product quality, prestige, fashion or other factors that translate into consumer preferences and decisions. This is why building and maintaining a strong brand is so important for companies that want to succeed in the market.

Kapferer (1986) developed a model called the '*Brand Identity Prism*,' which reflects various aspects of brand identity building. The model is very extensive, with key factors including: individual construction, personality, culture, relationships, reflection, and self-image. The Brand Identity Prism underscores the importance of communication in establishing a brand, as brands can only exist through communication.

For a brand identity to be successful, it must fulfil three essential functions. Firstly, it must be in tune with customers' expectations; secondly, it must differentiate the brand from the competition, and thirdly, it must correspond to what the company can and will do in the near or distant future. While brand identity is how brand owners or marketers want the brand to be perceived, brand image is how the customer actually interprets the brand. The brand message disseminated through various media channels often encounters competing brand messages, leading to discrepancies between brand identity and brand image (De Chernatony, 1999).

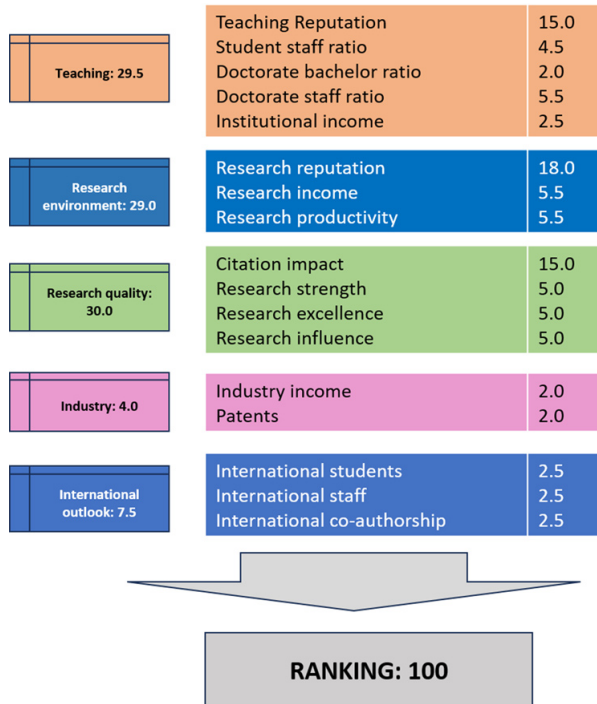
**Table 1.** Differentiation between terms: identity, image, reputation, and brand

Term	Key question
Identity	Who are we as an organisation?
(Desired) Image	How does the organisation be perceived by the others?
(Anticipated) Image	In the opinion of the organisation, what do others think about it?
Reputation	What do people think about the organisation in reality?
Brand	Which attributes and images should be related to individual products/services?

Based on Humphreys and Brown (2002).

Table 1 clarifies important distinctions between the key terms: identity, image, reputation, and brand (Stock, 2009; Da Camara, 2011; Hemsley Brown et al., 2016). The multifaceted nature of these terms often leads to confusion (Srivastava, 2011; Radomir et al., 2014), but understanding their subtle differences is fundamental to effectively managing a company and building a lasting relationship with customers (Manzie, 2003; Eisingerich & Bell, 2007; Le Ray & Pinson, 2020).

There are numerous universities that have successfully built their relationships with scientific institutions as well as industry partners thanks to their strong brand. Forbes (2023) has indicated the world best universities, including: the University of Oxford, Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, University of Cambridge (UK), Princeton University, California Institute of Technology, Imperial College London, University of California, Berkeley and Yale University. The methodology by which these top universities were selected (the selection criteria) is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Selection criteria for the best world universities. Based on Times Higher Education (2023).

As illustrated, reputation plays a crucial role in such rankings – both teaching reputation as well as research reputation. The most recent Academic Reputation Survey that underpins this category was carried out between October 2022 and January 2023. It examined the perceived prestige of institutions in research. This metric is the total number of votes obtained from the reputation survey from the last two years (Times Higher Education, 2023).

## Research method

The present study used two research methods: an Internet-based research method (a university website review) in order to present the significant aspects of the institution (Kranz, 2020), followed by a case study analysis of a specific university that is known worldwide – namely, Coventry University (in the United Kingdom). This university was selected because the author has had direct contact to this institution for many years and in the last part of the article a practical example of such cooperation is shown.

The analysis of the selected university's 'prestige commissioning strategy' took the following criteria into consideration:

- Establishing a strong research culture;
- Highlighting research facilities and infrastructure;
- Promoting faculty expertise;
- Building a strong online presence;
- Engaging in collaborative initiatives;
- Networking and organising conferences;
- Providing support for grant applications;
- Emphasising interdisciplinary research;
- Maintaining a transparent and efficient process.

## Case study analysis

### *Coventry University*

Coventry University has been a public research university since 1992. It is a global organisation with more than 29,000 undergraduate and almost 6,000 postgraduate students in 2021. It is the UK's fastest-growing university and the country's sixth-largest overall. This is a forward-looking, modern university with a tradition as a provider of high-quality education and a

focus on applied research. Coventry University has been chosen to host three national Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning, which has enabled the University to invest substantial sums of money in health, design, and mathematics. Quality teaching and learning gives graduates the skills they need to find work across the world. Coventry University aims to inspire students with teaching and learning and to support and develop them to achieve their career goals. Internationally, Coventry University is ranked within the top 531–540 universities in the world by the 2020 QS World University Rankings. There are also some more highlights needed to be considered:

- Shortlisted for University of the Year (The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2021).
- No 1 Modern University in the Midlands (Guardian University Guide 2022).
- Joint top modern university for career prospects (Guardian University Guide 2022).
- Seven subject areas rank in the top 10 (Guardian University Guide 2021).
- 1st for overseas student experiences 6 years running (Based on student trips abroad from HESA 2014/15-2019/20 UK data).
- 76% of students are satisfied with the teaching on their course (National Student Survey 2021).
- 92% of research at Coventry University was rated as ‘world-leading,’ ‘internationally excellent,’ or ‘recognised internationally.’

The above information clearly demonstrates that Coventry University places significant emphasis on its standing at national and international levels. The strategic aims of the university include:

- Increasing the scale and quality of research;
- Addressing global economic and societal challenges;
- Delivering high-quality transdisciplinary and challenge-led research;
- Enriching teaching and learning by integrating research within the curriculum;
- Delivering solutions to enterprise and innovation challenges and develop future technologies.

In line with these strategic aims, the university has developed its 2030 Strategy, which is focused on:

- Being a leading university recognised for educational pathways and delivery at scale of innovative approaches to learning;
- Being recognised internationally for its focus on challenge-led research and for the excellence of its research themes;
- Being recognised internationally for the scale and impact of its innovation ecosystem;
- Being recognised for its global presence, profile and reputation.

To attain these strategic objectives, Coventry University develops partnerships with leading organisations at local, national, and international levels. The university's scientists extend the profile and reputation of their international research, innovation and knowledge exchange efforts by augmenting their joint projects and programmes, working with new partners on a global basis. International cooperation and networking with different partners are crucial for developing the excellence of the research programmes and projects.

To expand these partnerships, Coventry University must employ top-leading scientists. These include experts from different countries, not only the United Kingdom. They exchange knowledge with scientists from other countries, implement research projects of diverse types, cooperate with enterprises, and offer innovation support services resulting in multiple outputs, outcomes and research impacts and directly responding to regional, national, and wider economic needs.

Considering the elements in the methodology important for developing a robust '*prestige commissioning strategy*', the approaches to achieving individual elements are described in Table 2.



**Table 2.** 'Prestige commissioning' activities at Coventry University

What to promote	How to promote to the partners
A strong research culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Promote a culture that values and supports research excellence.</li> <li>● Encourage students to actively engage in cutting-edge research projects.</li> <li>● Develop successful research outcomes and publications.</li> </ul>
Research facilities and infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Offer state-of-the-art research facilities, laboratories, and equipment.</li> <li>● Provide the necessary resources for impactful research.</li> </ul>
Faculty expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Highlight the expertise and achievements of faculty members.</li> <li>● Showcase their contributions through publications, awards, and collaborative projects.</li> </ul>
A strong online presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Maintain a user-friendly university website.</li> <li>● Create a dedicated section for research activities, projects, and partnerships.</li> <li>● Use social media platforms to share research highlights, collaborations, and success stories.</li> </ul>
Collaborative initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Actively seek collaboration with industry partners, other universities, research institutions, and government agencies.</li> <li>● Participate in joint research projects and consortiums.</li> </ul>
Networking and organising conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Encourage faculty and researchers to attend conferences and workshops.</li> <li>● Actively participate in networking opportunities to establish connections with potential research partners.</li> </ul>
Support for grant applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Offer support services for researchers applying for grants.</li> <li>● Develop a system to facilitate the grant application process and increase the chances of securing funding.</li> </ul>
Interdisciplinary research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Promote interdisciplinary research initiatives that bring together experts from various fields.</li> <li>● Highlight the university's commitment to addressing complex problems through a multidisciplinary approach.</li> </ul>
Transparent and efficient process for project management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure transparent and efficient administrative processes for initiating and managing research partnerships.</li> <li>● Make it easy for potential partners to navigate collaboration opportunities.</li> </ul>

Based on Coventry University website.

By strategically implementing these measures, the university can promote its brand as a research powerhouse and attract valuable partnerships that contribute to the advancement of knowledge and innovation.

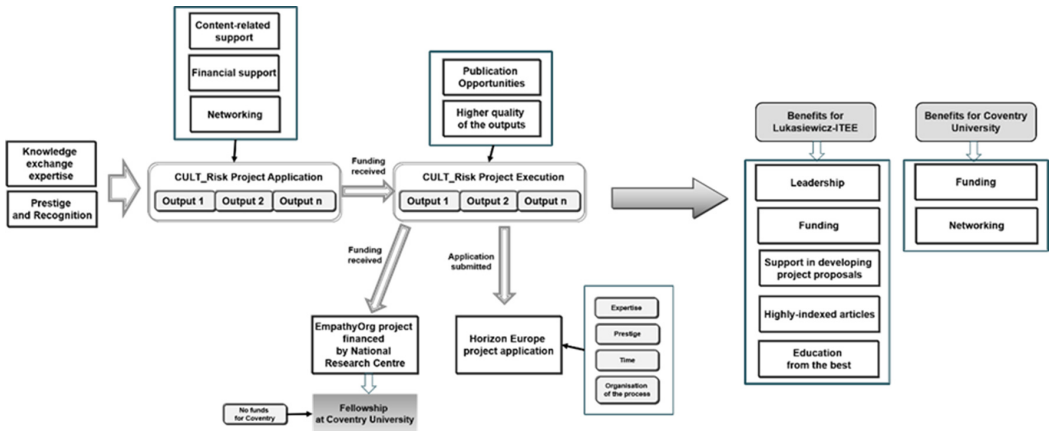
## **Discussion of a Case Study: The collaboration between the Lukasiewicz Institute for Sustainable technologies and Coventry University**

The literature highlights several reasons why research institutions wish to collaborate with top-leading institutions. These include enhanced research opportunities, increased funding opportunities, knowledge exchange and expertise, access to specialised facilities and equipment, publication opportunities, talent pool development, networking, prestige and recognition.

The collaboration between the Lukasiewicz Institute for Sustainable Technologies (Lukasiewicz–ITEE) in Radom, Poland, and Coventry University in the United Kingdom began in 2018, when the Lukasiewicz–ITEE was searching for partners for a new Erasmus+ project. Thanks to previous contacts with various European institutions, the staff made first contact with the staff from Coventry University. The collaboration was very good from the very beginning. The British staff shared their knowledge on content-related issues important for the project which were related to the gamification in education; they also supported the Lukasiewicz–ITEE team in understanding the financial aspects of the proposed project. As a result, the project application was approved by the National Agency and the Lukasiewicz–ITEE had the opportunity to collaborate with Coventry University for the next 2.5 years.

During that time, the Polish staff received substantial support from the UK institution. The project outputs were of a high quality. What is more, the project team succeeded in submitting and publishing a scientific article in a JCR journal. This was a new experience for the team at Lukasiewicz–ITEE, but in fact the staff were learning a lot more than this from the British team. In fact, the Coventry University team did not gain a great deal from this project – small amount of funding and one good publication. However, given that the British team had previously published in similar journals, the publication did not represent significant added value for them.

Figure 2 illustrates the benefits received from Coventry University during the first joint project application and subsequent project execution.



**Figure 2.** Collaboration of Coventry University with Lukasiewicz-ITEE

Surprisingly, the collaboration did not finish after the end of the Cult\_Risk project, like in many other partnerships. The British team remained interested in collaborating, although the scientific level of the Polish team was lower than the British one. The British scientists behaved like mentors and coaches for the Polish team, fostering a supportive and educational relationship.

Another example of this ongoing fruitful cooperation involved the submission of a small project to Poland’s National Research Centre in which one of the Polish team members applied for a short fellowship to Coventry University. The British team supported her in preparing a good project application, although they did not receive any funds from this project and this was fully out-of-cost work for the British team. Clearly, the standing of Coventry University is something more than just a name. The British scientists, despite having a high number of citations and high Hirsch numbers, remained interested in the cooperation with less experienced institutions.

Another initiative involved supporting the application for a long-term fellowship financed by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange. In this initiative the British team received a small amount of money, but the crucial aspect was their support for the preparation of the application.

In the next stage of the collaboration, the two teams jointly prepared a Horizon Europe application, with Lukasiewicz–ITEE as the lead institution. The Coventry University staff undertook to teach the Lukasiewicz staff how to write high-quality articles to submit to highly-indexed journals and

how to write good project applications. The British scientists were fully committed to ensuring the project's success, underscoring the collaborative spirit of the relationship.

**Table 3.** 'Prestige commissioning' activities at Coventry University focused on Lukasiwicz-ITEE

What to promote	How to promote the prestige/brand to Lukasiwicz-ITEE
A strong research culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The partnership achieved mutually successful research outcomes in the Cult_Risk project and three publications, one of which was published in a journal included in the Journal Citation Report.</li> </ul>
Faculty expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The British scientists shared their knowledge and expertise during different activities, such as writing publications, preparing grants, developing project outcomes, assessing project outcomes, focusing on a high quality.</li> </ul>
Different collaborative initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although Coventry University participated as a partner in the Cult_Risk project, the scientists were continually seeking new opportunities for further collaboration. This resulted in new projects and project applications in further years.</li> </ul>
Networking and organising conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In order to prepare excellent project applications, the Coventry University representatives have invited Lukasiwicz-ITEE into consortia with other outstanding institutions with great experience in different kinds of projects, such as Tampere University (Finland) and National Research Council – Institute for Educational Technology (Italy).</li> </ul>
Support for grant applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The scientists offered support services, completely unpaid, for the Polish researchers applying for grants. Coventry University was treated as a partner, but their knowledge and experience were invaluable. They led the project writing process in order to secure excellent outcomes.</li> </ul>
Interdisciplinary research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coventry University promoted interdisciplinary research in projects, such as the use of gamification in education and technological areas as well as the project management aspects, for example how to write a project application for a high-budgeted call such as Horizon Europe.</li> </ul>

In summary, the collaboration with Coventry University extends beyond financial considerations. Rather, the partnership emphasizes networking, tackling new challenges, and supporting each other's growth and development. This approach is encapsulated in several key aspects listed in Table 3.

In sum, such collaboration has yielded a lot of benefits to the team from Lukasiwicz–ITEE, including being a leader on joint projects, acquiring funding from the European Commission, developing project proposals a truly high quality, being engaged in writing scientific articles submitted to highly-indexed journals, and especially education from the top leading scientists.

## Conclusion

Coventry University is a kind of '*magnet*' for Lukasiwicz–ITEE in the realm of research excellence. Thanks to the support of this esteemed British institution, the Polish institute has successfully executed several successful projects and further projects are under development. As is demonstrated by this case study, which can be treated as an example of best practice, there are several advantages and profits from such collaborations:

- *Enhanced Research Opportunities*: Collaboration with renowned research institutions provides access to a broader range of research opportunities leading to more substantial and impactful research projects, as well as exposure to cutting-edge methodologies and technologies.
- *Increased Funding Opportunities*: Partnerships with prestigious research institutions often open doors to additional funding sources. Joint research initiatives and projects may attract grants, sponsorships, or investments from governmental bodies, private organisations, or philanthropic foundations.
- *Knowledge Exchange and Expertise*: Collaboration allows for the exchange of knowledge and expertise between researchers and institutions. This can lead to a deeper understanding of various subject areas, fostering intellectual growth and innovation.
- *Publication Opportunities*: Joint research projects often result in high-quality publications. Collaborating with renowned institutions can enhance the visibility and impact of research findings, contributing to the academic reputation of the institutions and researchers involved.

- *Global Networking*: Partnering with outstanding research institutions expands a university's global network. This can lead to further collaborations, invitations to international conferences, and participation in global research initiatives, enhancing the institution's international reputation.
- *Prestige and Recognition*: Partnerships with outstanding research institutions can enhance the overall prestige and recognition of a university. Being associated with respected collaborators can positively impact rankings, attract top talent, and strengthen the institution's position in the academic landscape.

Although this article has highlighted the supportive activities provided by Coventry University, it has not addressed the specific behaviours necessary to sustain such collaborations. Understanding how to maintain and nurture these partnerships is crucial to avoid losing valuable partners. While this may seem trivial, the multicultural aspects involved in these collaborations can be challenging to navigate. Future research should focus on these aspects to provide deeper insights into successful international collaboration strategies.

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