How do US universities want to be perceived? Factors affecting the (inter)national identity claims in mission statements

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Abstract

Higher education institutions (HEIs) often function in an environment where various institutional pressures force them to position themselves on a national-international orientation scale in order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of different constituents with different expectations. Empirical insights, however, on how HEIs respond to these forces and position themselves within this debate are largely lacking. Hence, this study builds on organizational identity theory and institutional theory to assess the national and international identity claims expressed by the mission statements, a dominant organizational identity narrative, of HEIs as well as institutional factors affecting the selected position. A mixed methods analysis of the mission statements of 120 US universities indicates that universities' identity claims can be classified in five categories of national claims and five of international claims. The findings suggest that institutional forces affect the position of universities on the national/international continuum but that universities' attempts to reconcile these pressures are much more refined than expected as universities try to strike a subtle balance between being similar and different.

Keywords: Mission statements; identity narratives; ranking; institutional control, legitimacy; internationalization

Introduction

Higher education is ever more infused with multiple expectations stemming from their different groups of constituents (Kraatz 2009; Seeber et al. 2017; Seiffert-Brockmann and Thummes 2016). For many higher education systems, globalization, rankings and the decrease of public funding combined with an increasing demand for better results in term of research, teaching, knowledge transfer, employability, and community outreach has created a highly competitive environment that forces universities to distinguish themselves and explain to their constituents for whom and how they create value in order to strengthen their legitimacy in an

ever evolving landscape (Miotto et al. 2020). This demand has proven to be challenging as constituents support universities for different reasons and infuse them with different values (Kraatz 2009). This implies that universities are confronted with the challenging task to identify which expectations they should best address and how to balance various positions in order to avoid reputational harm and loss of legitimacy (Seiffert-Brockmann and Thummes 2016).One potential source of heterogeneity is the increasing internationalization of HE and the resulting fact that universities nowadays often operate in a complex multi-level environment whereby constituents are situated at the national and international level (Marginson 2006). For example, US universities strongly embedded in academic research (i.e., the R1 group of the Carnegie classification, "Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity") are confronted with heterogeneous expectatations from constituents at the different levels whereby some advocate a national focus and others an international focus. Due to their intensive research activities, R1 universities may be more likely open to international staff and students and engagement in international activities, but these universities are, at the same time, facing new policy challenges to improve their social value and national/regional impact (Lim 2018). Consequently, Buckner and Stein (2020) raised the question of who universities invite to their table? Do universities primarily focus on beneficiaries situated at the national level or rather at the international level? Or do universities strive for a careful balance between both types of beneficiaries?

The issue of balancing a national and international focus is not new for universities but evidence suggests that in its contemporary form the issue has become more prominent (Bond and Paterson 2005). Specifically, the internationally-oriented perspective argues that universities are, given their commitment to advancing universal knowledge, by default international institutions and that an international focus will improve the quality and relevance of education, and lead to necessary path-breaking innovations as well as the creation of 'global human resources' which drive economic growth and foster competitiveness (and as such can

also contribute to national goals) (e.g., *Buckner 2019*). On the other hand, forces stressing the importance of a universities' domestic market are pressing (Yonezawa et al. 2017). Adherents of this perspective call on universities for more engagement with their local and regional communities, and encourage universities to become more responsive to the social and economic needs of the local, regional and national constituents (Comunian and Ooi 2016). Moreover, Nelson and Wei (2012, p. 21) posit that the formation of international markets as well as globalization has made elite universities "even more national [as they are] expected to secure the competitive advantage of the nation-state" while Bond and Paterson (2005) state that a local orientation is of great importance at a time when HE becomes a more obvious object of political scrutiny, both in terms of its use of public funds and its more general social/economic purpose.

However, despite the claims that universities are pressured towards focusing on the global and the national/local (Hong 2020), insights on how universities position themselves on the national-international continuum and how they want to be perceived by their constituents are lacking. Do universities present themselves as nationally oriented institutions or do they stress an international focus? Or, alternatively, do universities opt for a third approach and define themselves in global–local terms (Schriewer 2012) and position themselves as 'glonacal agencies' (Marginson and Rhoades 2002)? Consequently, the first goal of this study is to examine the extent to which universities emphasize a national and/or international orientation. Second, drawing on institutional theory, we also examine how institutional forces are related to a university's position on the national-international continuum. We expect that a university's type of control (i.e., public vs. private) is indicative of a path dependent-historical legacy, whereby the legitimacy of public universities is rooted more strongly in a national-historical perspective given their origin and reliance on state legislators for resources (financial and others). Hence, this would lead public universities to stress serving local communities and addressing domestic issues in their quest for legitimacy (Dobbins and Knill 2017).

Building on institutional isomorphism, we also expect that internationally ranked universities will be more inclined to emphasize international value creation in an attempt to signal that they have embraced an international focus and are attuned with the demands of global HE systems often preferred by international ranking systems (Dobbins and Knill 2017; Hong 2020).

To shed light on these research questions, we analysed the national-international identity claims expressed in the mission statements of 120 US R1 universities using both a quantitative analysis (generalized linear modelling) to test the hypotheses as well as a qualitative analysis which allows to show the linguistic variations and communalities across the national and international claims. Mission statements were selected for analysis because mission statements can be defined, according to the organizational identity literature, as management-initiated communication whereby an explicit narrative is used to address and influence constituents' perceptions of an organization's central, enduring and distinctive features (Ravasi and Schultz 2006). Defining mission statements as persuasive identity narratives allows us to benefit from the work of institutional theorists who view organizational artefacts, like mission statements, as legitimating tools (Meyer et al. 1980; Meyer and Rowan 1977) as well as the HE literature which states that universities use mission statements to signal to key constituencies that the university shares these groups' values and goals (Huisman and Mampaey 2018; Morphew and Hartley 2006; Seeber et al. 2019). Although mission statements could, in practice, be used as an instrument of (self-)deception which decouples symbolically adopted policies from actual organizational behaviour (see e.g. Pache and Santos 2013), this does not detract from the suitability of mission statements as a study object as this study analyses how universities present themselves to their constituents via organizational narratives. Hence, even if mission statements are aspirational or symbolic, and thus potentially detached from organizational reality, they are

still deliberately developed organizational profile-building tools and consequently relevant from an academic point of view (e.g., Flavin et al. 2020).

The main contribution of our study is twofold. First, while the debate about the national/international orientation of HEIs has gained momentum and even resulted, in some cases, in opposing stances (Bowl 2016; Buckner and Stein 2020; Pusser and Marginson 2013), empirical evidence on how HEIs actually deal with these institutional pressures is limited. Moreover, the option of 'glonacal agencies' or hybrid organisations has received scant empirical attention. This study addresses these research gaps and is, as such, one of the first to empirically examine universities' expressed position on a national-international continuum whilest taken into account the notion of hybridity (Tran et al. 2017). Second, the study further contributes to the methodological issue of a quantitative versus qualitative approach to analysing mission statements (or other university communications) by combining both approaches and demonstrating how an inductively developed classification forms the basis for both approaches. While previous qualitative small scale investigations on mission statements can offer rich insights (Kosmützky and Krücken 2015; Morphew and Hartley 2006), and large-scale quantitative analysis can theorize similarities and differences and test whether patterns are significant or not (Oertel and Söll 2017; Seeber et al. 2017), studies combining both approaches are yet lacking. Such combination can serve for the mutual validation of data and findings as well as for the production of a more coherent and complete picture of the investigated domain than monomethod research can yield (Kelle 2006).

Hypotheses

Institutional theory argues that organizations adapt themselves to the institutional environment and conform to external expectations in order to gain legitimacy (Meyer et al. 1980). A dominant source of such external expectations are social evaluations such as normative

standards, the endorsement of professional agencies, public opinion, and social prestige (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Within the context of HE, prominent sources of external social evaluations and prestige are international rankings. Although controversial, international rankings influence how universities present themselves through organizational identity narratives (Allen 2019). Despite pretending to be an objective measurement of universities' performance and identity, international rankings have a relatively narrow focus favoring an international orientation and neglecting the different local contexts to which institutions must respond which, in turn, drives universities to focus in a narrow set of identity attributes (Pusser and Marginson 2013). Allen (2019), for example, discusses how Chinese universities' research agendas have been strategically altered to align with international ranking metrics. Furthermore, in a study of HE systems in England and New Zealand, Bowl (2016) finds that while lower ranked universities tend to mirror national economic and business-responsive policies, higher ranked universities appear more able to distance themselves from or even resist economic instrumentalism. Indeed, it could be deemed unwise, from a positioning perspective, for higher ranked universities to associate themselves too closely with policies which might undermine a more traditional and prestigious 'ivory tower' academic image (Bowl 2016). High ranked universities are thus expected to feel less pressure to acquiesce to national/local pressures but are expected to mimic in their organizational narratives the internationally oriented expectations of international rankings. Consequently, we hypothesize that:

H1: The mission statements of unranked universities will emphasise nationally oriented identity claims more than the mission statements of top ranked universities.

H2: The mission statements of top ranked universities will emphasise internationally oriented identity claims more than the mission statements of unranked universities.

Another important institutional force relates to the type of governmental control on universities. Most of the discussion recognizes public funding as a main pressure for a more

national orientation (Bond and Paterson 2005). Although all US higher education institutions (private, private-not-for-profit, or public) face the challenge of securing funds from federal and state governments, and (domestic and international) students, the specific mix of these sources differ by type of HEI with private universities being more dependent on tuition fees than public universities while the latter rely more on state and local funding (Ward et al. 2020). Although patterns differ significantly from state to state (Pew 2019) and change over time (Mitchell et al. 2019), their (on average) relatively larger dependence on state and local funding exposes public universities more to pressures emanating from nationally-oriented stakeholders than private universities (Miller et al. 2018). Moreover, in an educational landscape where public spending is under increasing scrutiny and notions as value for money and accountability have become omnipresent (Huisman and Mampaey 2018), public universities are expected to conform more to national considerations than their private counterparts. In contrast, private universities are more dependent on student fees and hence will more likely try to target international students (without necessarily neglecting the domestic market). Contrary to the domestic market being relatively stable, the international market is expanding with the share of international students in the US almost doubling from 3% in 1990 to 5.5% in 2020 (IIE 2020). Hence, we hypothesize:

H3: The mission statements of public universities will emphasise more nationally oriented identity claims than the mission statements of private universities.

H4: The mission statements of private universities will emphasise more internationally oriented identity claims than the mission statements of public universities.

Data and Methods

The US HE system was selected because it has a large number of universities with variation in institutional control (public and private) as well as a strong representation in international rankings. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (a classification

including all accredited, degree-granting colleges and universities in the US) was used as a sampling framework. More specifically, we focused on the universities listed in the R1 group (i.e., Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity), 131 universities). Universities within this subgroup are expected to be confronted with heterogeneous pressures towards a national focus and an international focus (Lim 2018).

Dependent variables: ten categories of claims extracted from mission statements

The mission statements in this study were extracted from the universities' websites in April 2019. The mission statements of 11 universities in our initial sample of 131 R1 universities were not found. The identified 120 mission statements were subjected to a conventional content analysis which is an appropriate approach when existing theorical insights are limited (Braun and Clarke 2006). Hence, an inductive approach was employed whereby classification categories emerged from the data (Hamad et al. 2016). We used quasi-sentences as units of coding as these are able "to provide complete, reliable and meaningful data for further analysis" (Milne and Adler 1999, p. 243). In the first step of the coding process, the authors independently coded a subsample of fifteen mission statements and listed all text fragments which referred to creating value for (inter)national beneficiaries. In the second step, the authors compared the results of the individual coding process and aggregated the identified codes into meaningful clusters. This involved an iterative process whereby the authors determined, by consensus, the suitability of codes, their fit with a specific cluster as well as the labelling of the identified clusters. This step resulted in the identification of five types of value creation which can be directed at either national or international beneficiaries (i.e., a total of ten content clusters). Table 1 lists and defines these clusters.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Using the developed classification scheme, one of the authors coded the mission statements of the selected population while the other two authors reviewed the results. This coding approach was selected instead of the more conventional approach as such approach is deemed more relevant for a coding process that focuses on analysing the meaning of specific expressions, instead of analysing word frequencies, and thus requires interpretive insights (Jungblut and Jungblut 2017). The selected approach can be viewed as a hybrid approach whereby elements of a one- and multiple-coder perspective are combined in order to find a balance between efficiency and effectiveness. In the initial stage there was a close collaboration between multiple coders to collectively make sense of the data and to develop a coding scheme. Once the coding scheme was clear, one coder coded the remaining mission statements. As a quality control measure, every coded expression was included in a database which was regularly discussed with all authors of the study during the analytic process which allowed to increase the quality of the coding process iteratively over time. The employed approach provides the opportunity for an iterative process whereby codes, or their assignment to data excerpts, are thoroughly discussed before moving on to an efficient coding process.

The coding process resulted in a frequency matrix which lists per university a frequency score for each of the clusters. These numbers, however, neither take into account the length of mission statements (longer mission statements will probably include more identity claims) nor do they reflect the popularity of claims across mission statements. This makes it difficult to assess the importance of a cluster as for a high average frequency score might be due to the fact that almost all universities express identity claims related to a specific thematic content cluster and thus has limited discriminatory value. Hence, we recoded the data in three steps. First, we standardized the data to account for variation in the length of mission statements by adjusting the frequency score of a thematic content cluster for the length of the text (i.e. number of words in the mission statement). Second, the length-corrected frequencies were rescaled by adjusting them for the

frequency of occurrence of a thematic content cluster within the sample. Specifically, the minimum and maximum frequency of a thematic content cluster were incorporated in the following formula:

$$X' = \frac{x - \min(x)}{\max(x) - \min(x)}$$

Due to the calculations in the second step, certain universities displayed a non-zero score for some thematic content clusters even if their mission statement did not contain text on this theme. Hence, in a third step, we created a dummy for each thematic content cluster and multiplied it by the variable created in the second step. The result is treated as a continuous variable. This three-step procedure was applied to all thematic content clusters. In addition, we calculated an overall national score and international score for each university following the same three steps with the difference that in the first step the frequency of identity claims consists of the summation of the scores of the five national and international subcategories, respectively.

Independent variables

Ranking

The US universities listed as Carnegie Classification R1 were cross-referenced with the Shanghai top 1000 (data from 2018) in order to assign every university in our sample a ranking score. Specifically, we dummy-coded the R1-universities into three groups: (1) top ranked universities (ranked between 1-100, 41 universities), (2) ranked universities (universities ranked between 101-1000, 68 universities), and (3) unranked universities (universities that are not ranked in the Shanghai top 1000, i.e., 22 universities). Our choice for the Shanghai ranking was based on its relative objectivity compared to other ranking systems (Uslu 2020) and its ability to differentiate highly extraordinary research universities (Huang 2011). In addition, R1 universities display a large variety in ranking positions in the Shanghai top 1000.

Institutional control

Information about universities' institutional control was derived from the Carnegie Classification and allowed to make a distinction between public (93) and private (not-for-profit) (37) universities. One R1 university is a private/public hybrid and was therefore excluded from the analysis.

Control variables

Given the influence of university age on universities' identity claims (Huisman and Mampaey 2018), university age was included in the analysis as a control variable based on data extracted from the universities' websites and from Wikipedia (ages range between 13 and 383 years). We also controlled for university size as prior research indicates that size is positively related with internationalization activities (Javalgi et al. 2003). University size was operationalized by the number of students enrolled in 2019 (data from Shanghai ranking website) and ranged between 2,130 and 49,211 students (log transformation was used to make the slightly skewed data closer to a normal distribution). Besides the absolute number of students, we also controlled for a university's relative number of international students as the proportion of enrolled international students could be related with a university's international orientation and thus its expressed identity claims. Data to calculate the proportion of international students was derived from the Shanghai ranking (based on the number of students in 2019) and ranges between 2 and 30 per cent.

Descriptive statistics and analysis

Descriptive statistics

Table 2 displays the characteristics of the universities and their missions. The 120 analyzed mission statements include a total of 598 claims: 362 national and 236 international.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Findings: quantitative content analysis

The generalized linear modelling results indicate that ranking is neither significantly related to national orientation (rejection of H1) nor with international orientation (rejection of H2). Whether a university is top ranked, ranked, or unranked is not significantly related to the extent to which a university emphasizes a national or international orientation in its mission statement. The second determinant, institutional control, is significantly related to the extent to which a national orientation (H3 accepted) is expressed but not to international orientation (rejection of H4). These results indicate that public universities put significantly more emphasis on serving the local community, national linkages and national research in their mission statements than private universities while private and public do not differ significantly with respect to the international-orientation of their mission statement. Detailed results are listed in Table 3.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Findings: qualitative content analysis

We now turn to a qualitative content analysis to discuss the content of the mission statements in detail. With respect to ranking, we find different emphases in the categories of national education, international education and national linkages. Table 4 provides examples of qualitative differences within claims.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Regarding the claims of national linkages of top ranked, ranked, and unranked universities, we found that despite the absence of differences in the frequency of claims, the subgroups use divergent formulations. While most of the claims of unranked universities are general and relate to their locations, ranked universities express more developed and established linkages (see examples in the third column of table 4). However, top ranked universities communicate short and general claims of national linkages, and appear to consider those as ‘for granted’ merits.

National education and international education are among the categories that have – in our quantitative analysis – comparable frequencies of claims across top ranked, ranked, and unranked universities but Table 4 illustrates that the claims are framed differently. With respect to national education, while unranked universities emphasize providing opportunities and access for a wide range of citizens, ranked universities appear to have a greater focus on competitiveness. In contrast, top ranked universities appear less competitive and claim a more comprehensive contribution of HE. With respect to international education, top ranked and unranked universities stress attracting international students and staff when claiming while, ranked universities elicit their leadership in learning (see second and fourth column in table 4).

That said, when it comes to the clusters of serving local community, national recognition, national research, serving global community, international linkages, international recognition, and international research, top ranked, ranked, and unranked universities make similar claims. For instance, when claiming international recognition, most universities claim to belong to the top universities in the world, especially in research. Moreover, the three categories of universities have also similar claims of enhancing quality of life; advancing engagement; and promoting economic, social, cultural, and environmental progress, when crafting their messages related to serving local and global communities. For example, one university in our sample states "...advancing outreach, engagement, and economic development activities that are innovative, research-driven, and lead to a better quality of life for individuals and communities, at home and around the world".

Turning to the qualitative similarities and differences between elements of mission statements of public and private universities, no obvious qualitative differences in the content of those statements are found. Both groups phrase their claims in similar ways. For instance, messages on national research of both public and private universities revolve around preserving, expanding, and disseminating knowledge for the sake of meeting national needs and challenges.

For example, a public university claims "enriching the lives of people in the region, state, nation and world through discovery" and a private university claims "conducting research ... that seeks to answer questions and create solutions ..., both locally and globally". Further, when crafting messages related to national education, universities choose the claims of comprehensive access and opportunities or the claims of competitiveness of opportunities regardless of their type of control. For example, both the public and private universities quoted above, also claim that HE should be accessible to all.

Discussion and conclusions

This article analysed how US R1 universities position themselves on the national-international orientation dimension in relation to their international ranking and their type of institutional control by exploring the identity claims expressed in mission statements. In this section, we reflect on the findings and our contribution to the field.

Ranking position and homogeneity in fields and subfields

A quantitative test of the impact of international ranking (H1 and H2) indicated that international ranking is not related to the national/international orientation of mission statements. One explanation is that apparently the urge to be different may apply to many dimensions of university missions (see for example Bowl (2016) on economic instrumentalism and Huisman and Mampaey (2016) on the communication style in UK universities' welcome addresses), but not the national/international dimension. Another explanation goes back to an underestimation of the internal homogeneity of the R1 universities. This leads to two conceptual reflections. First, a closer inspection of our data revealed that the missions in our sample quite often contain national *and* international claims. We offer further empirical insight on this issue. We think it would be reasonable to claim that if the ratio between international and national

claims in a mission statement is between 0.5 and 1.5 (so maximum 50% more claims in one category), this signifies a considerable level of hybridity. Accordingly, we found that 40.7 per cent of the sample can be classified as hybrid. Interestingly, among the non-hybrids that focus primarily on international claims, there are far more ranked institutions while within the group stressing national claims, there are significantly more unranked institutions. It appears that institutions with a hybrid approach, avoid, by addressing both international and national elements in their missions, conflict between different expectations. This resonates with other studies that found that universities can claim to be both accessible and excellent (Seeber et al. 2019), use seemingly contradictory messages but in fact speak to different stakeholders (Morphew and Hartley 2006) and studies that argue that universities position themselves in "glonacal" contexts (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002). A second reflection on the homogeneity across R1 universities is that other studies on stratified systems have shown sub-field homogeneity (see for example James and Huisman (2009) on status of Welsh universities, Seeber et al. (2017) on the differences related to the membership of UK universities to different associations and Morphew and Hartley (2006) on differences related to types of HEIs along the Carnegie Classification). Within stratified organisational fields, organisations may align with (assumed) institutional norms and values of certain subfields while at the same time distinguishing themselves from other groups (Morphew and Hartley 2006; Seeber et al. 2017). With hindsight, our study missed an opportunity to gain insight in this, but a suggestion for further research in stratified systems would be to look at more than one subfield to detect both field and sub-field dynamics (see also Hüther and Krücken 2016, on nested organisational fields).

Quantitatively homogeneous but qualitatively heterogeneous?

Despite the homogeneity within missions, the qualitative analysis showed that the language used differed markedly. This echoes Huisman and Mampaey's (2018) findings. They found considerable homogeneity in UK university welcome addresses, but behind the generic labels, universities used different wordings and styles. We realise our study is not able to solve this paradox, but we do stress the importance of both robust coding for quantitative analyses, while at the same time keeping an eye on the qualitative nuances (Kelle 2006). The latter signal the important role of discourse and framing in organisational communications (see also Lam, 2020).

Public versus private HEIs

We found a positive relationship between public status and attention to national identity claims. This resonates with Morphew and Hartley's (2006) argument that if public colleges ignore this element, this might call into question their very 'publicness'. The qualitative analysis indicates that there are no apparent differences in the wording between public and private universities. In this respect, we follow Hartley (2002) in that the language, with respect to this dimension, in mission statements is rather vague and generic and hence at face value the phrases are interchangeable. We can also interpret the similarity of wording and the lack of a confirmation for H4 as signs of (gradually) evaporating boundaries between public and private universities (Paradeise and Thoenig 2013). Public universities in many countries receive decreasing unconditional financial support from their governments and have to find other resources. In that sense, the public R1 universities increasingly become dependent on other resources, including fee-paying domestic *and* international students and in that respect become more similar to private R1 universities. The findings regarding hypotheses 3 and 4 suggest – but do not unambiguously demonstrate – that universities opt for a position whereby they express identity claims related to both sides of the spectrum, similar to our explanations for the

lack of support for H1 and H2. That said, when controlling for the share of international students, we found a positive relationship between being private and international identity claims. That result is consistent with the argument that mission statements are means of telling important constituents that "we understand what you want and we're going to deliver it to you." (Morphew and Hartley 2016, p. 469).

Contribution to our understanding of identity claims

In all, we think our study contributes to understanding field and sub-field dynamics in the ways universities include identity claims in their mission statements. In general, the study confirms what many other studies found concerning universities trying to strike a balance between being similar *and* being different. Universities are under the pressure of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), but there is also considerable agency to be different (Fumasoli and Huisman 2013). What we add to this is, first, that the notion of hybridity (Marginson and Rhoades 2002; Tran et al. 2017; Yonezawa et al. 2017) helps explaining the homogeneity of R1 identity claims regarding being both national and international. Hybrid institutions avoid conflict between different expectations by addressing both elements in their missions. Second, the study offered food for thought on the possibility of sub-field homogeneity in stratified – and by extension: nested – systems. Within such systems, it may very well be that universities stress intra-group similarity, but differentiate themselves from other sub-fields. Although our data do not offer insight in differentiation of R1 universities versus other Carnegie groups, other studies (e.g., Seeber et al. 2017) lend support for this notion. Third, the study revealed the relevance of complementary quantitative and qualitative analyses. Both approaches are valid and yield important insights – larger samples in quantitative research allowing for generalisation versus

in-depth qualitative analyses showing fine-grained contextualisations – but the combination brings additional nuance (Huisman and Mampaey 2018 and Seeber et al. 2019).

Limitations

Although our study contributes to the literature, we acknowledge its limitations. First, our empirical analysis focuses on US universities listed in the R1 group, which may reduce the external validity of the findings. The findings are probably most relevant for research universities in other countries, which have a prominent position in the international HE market and are concomitantly experiencing institutional national pressures. However, additional research is needed to assess the impact of diverging institutional forces and their interplay with universities' identity claims. As suggested, comparing sub-fields would also likely show additional insights in being similar and/or different in identity claims. Additionally, it would be appealing to carry out comparisons between western universities and universities that operate in countries with different socio-cultural traditions, like China. Such comparison can broaden our understanding on how cultural expectations shape the identity and legitimacy of universities. Second, we argued that mission statements are highly relevant as identity claims for they can be viewed as explicit management-initiated persuasive narratives developed to influence constituents' perceptions of an organization's central, enduring and distinctive features (Ravasi and Schultz 2006). However, this does not imply that the mission statement paints an accurate description of the organizational status quo. Collins and Porras (1997), for example, argued that mission statements are often aspirational narratives about an envisioned future. Hence, future research could adopt a broader scope and analyze to what extent organizational priorities and policies are aligned with the identity claims in order to assess the level of congruity between espoused and enacted values. Third, the study analyzes the mission statements of universities but does not take into account the idiosyncrasies of mission statement

development processes. Hence, the analyses are not able to provide information on how specific constituents (e.g., specific representatives seating on the universities' governing board) have impacted the content of the mission statement or to what extent universities have been 'compelled' to include specific content components. Especially in the case of public universities, it would be interesting to examine the degree of autonomy universities have in drafting a mission statement. In this respect, it would also be interesting to look at how US states differ in their expectations regarding their public HEIs and how this may impact the formulation of mission statements.

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Table 1. Ten categories of (inter)national claims that appear in the mission statements

	Label	Definition and example
National	Serving local community	The advancement of intellectual, social, cultural, and economic conditions of the residents of a state or country (e.g. 'contributes to the economic development and quality of life within Kentucky's borders').
	National education	Education with an emphasis on national concerns (Hill 2007), in terms of who the university serves (e.g. 'provide higher education to a much broader segment of American citizenry') and why (e.g. 'a comprehensive offering of continuing education designed to meet the needs of Georgia's citizens').
	National linkages	The action of linking or the state of being linked with the constituents in the US (e.g. 'holds land-grant, sea-grant and space-grant charters').
	National recognition	Appreciation or acclaim for an achievement, service, or ability, acknowledged by constituents in the US (e.g. 'one of 63 members of the Association of American Universities').
	National research	Conducting research that brings benefits to the nation (e.g. 'teaching, research, and service that develop a highly skilled and educated citizenry').
International	Serving global community	The advancement of intellectual, social, cultural, and economic conditions of the people of the world (e.g. 'one of the most networked and extensive worldwide platforms for learning, teaching, researching, building knowledge, and inventing new ways to meet humanity's challenges').
	International education	Education that goes beyond the borders of countries (Hill 2007), in terms of who (e.g. 'attracting more international students over the years than any other American university') the university serves and why (e.g. 'prepare students to think broadly, deeply and critically, and to contribute to the world').
	International linkages	The action of linking or the state of being linked with constituents outside of the US (e.g. 'we engage in collaborative activities with private sector, educational, and governmental partners worldwide').
	International recognition	Appreciation or acclaim for an achievement, service, or ability, acknowledged by constituents outside of the US (e.g. 'one of the world's most important centers of research').
	International research	Conducting research that brings benefits to the world (e.g. 'to create knowledge that transforms our views of the world and, through sharing and application, transforms the world').

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of missions statements and organizational attributes

	Mean	Median	Maximum	Minimum	Standard Deviation
Number of claims	4.6	4	19	0	3.9
Number of national claims	2.8	2	13	0	2.9
Number of internat. claims	1.9	1	9	0	1.8
Age (years)	150	150	383	13	57.3
Size (number of students)	22,852.93	21,835	49,211	2,130	10,717.767
Share international students	9.8%	8.2%	29.7%	1.7%	6.0%

Table 3. Generalized linear models

	National focus (composite measure)	Serving local community	National education	National linkages	National recognition	National research	**Inter-national focus (composite measure)**	Serving global community	Inter-national education	Inter-national linkages	Inter-national recognition	Inter-national research
Intercept	-.377	-.149	-.193	.019	-.187	.090	-1.612	.087	-1.062*	-.625*	-.443	.433
	(.742)	(.798)	(.663)	(.926)	(.507)	(.831)	(.147)	(.838)	(.028)	(.028)	(.061)	(.354)
Ranking (unranked is reference category)												
Top ranked	.114	.051	.025	-.011	.015	.009	-.003	-.036	-.062	.020	-.007	.084
	(.565)	(.611)	(.745)	(.748)	(.757)	(.898)	(.986)	(.623)	(.453)	(.687)	(.856)	(.296)
Ranked	.1122	.070	.008	-.027	.018	.031	.036	.042	-.092	.021	.005	.061
	(.501)	(.412)	(.904)	(.381)	(.671)	(.611)	(.827)	(.500)	(.196)	(.624)	(.895)	(.370)
Institutional control (Private is reference category)	.533**	.179*	.073	.068*	.025	.178**	.131	.063	-.057	-.039	.029	.136*
	(.000)	(.019)	(.209)	(.013)	(.508)	(.001)	(.372)	(.267)	(.374)	(.297)	(.356)	(.028)
Size (logged)	.058	.056	.045	-.014	.038	-.056	.346	-.027	.272*	.151*	.081	-.130
	(.832)	(.683)	(.667)	(.775)	(.570)	(.575)	(.191)	(.789)	(.018)	(.027)	(.149)	(.240)
Share of international students	1.894	.591	.500	.123	-.207	1.034*	3.056*	1.019*	.760	-.053	.475*	.860
	(.092)	(.302)	(.250)	(.546)	(.454)	(.012)	(.005)	(.015)	(.108)	(.851)	(.040)	(.060)
Age	.000	-.001	.000	.000	.000	-9.278E-5	.001	-8.536E-6	.000	.000	.000	-8.584E-5
	(.667)	(.104)	(.498)	(.064)	(.131)	(.786)	(.525)	(.980)	(.658)	(.510)	(.073)	(.818)

*P < .05, **P < .005

Significance between brackets

Table 4. Examples of qualitative differences in the claims of the national and international focus found in the mission statements of universities

Ranking	National education	National linkages	International education
Unranked	We provide unparalleled access to education.	…located in the heart of... …holds land-grant, sea-grant and space-grant charters.	…to attract a diverse and international faculty and student body.
Ranked	...nationally competitive and internationally recognized opportunities for learning.	…relationships with industry, community organizations, and government entities. …establishes partnerships locally and globally.	…education to promising, qualified students in order to prepare them to contribute fully to society as globally engaged citizen leaders.
Top ranked	… higher education should be accessible to all.	… a land-grant and sea-grant university.	...to attract a diverse and international faculty and student body. ...educating students to be reflective, resourceful individuals ready to live, adapt, and lead in an interconnected world.