



The Business of Ranking, Publishing, and Data Analytics in Higher Education

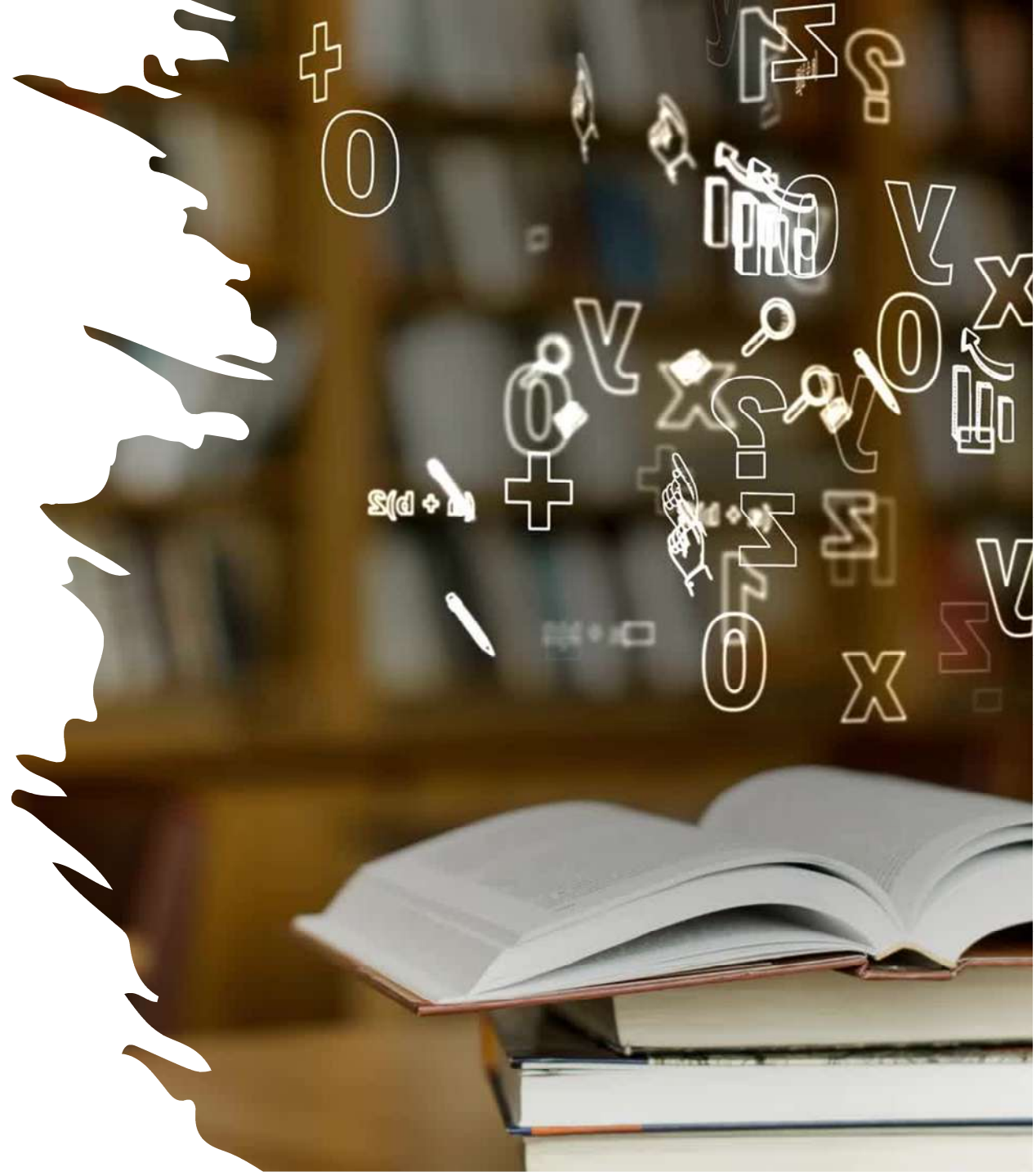
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Outline

- Contexts of the research/chapter
- Conceptual frameworks
- A case study: The relationship of Elsevier and Times Higher Education's World University Rankings
- Implications for HE and areas for further critical inquiry



Contexts of the research/chapter

Understanding the geopolitics and globalization of knowledge production and the inequalities being embedded and reproduced

Impact of Open Access on knowledge in/equity – entrenchment of legacy power and structure

Roles of the publishers in reconfiguring HE – structural power through market power – HE in service of an industry

Growing trend of public universities outsourcing core academic and research work and **infrastructure** to private corporations (often involved in finances, such as private equity firms)

Conceptual Frameworks

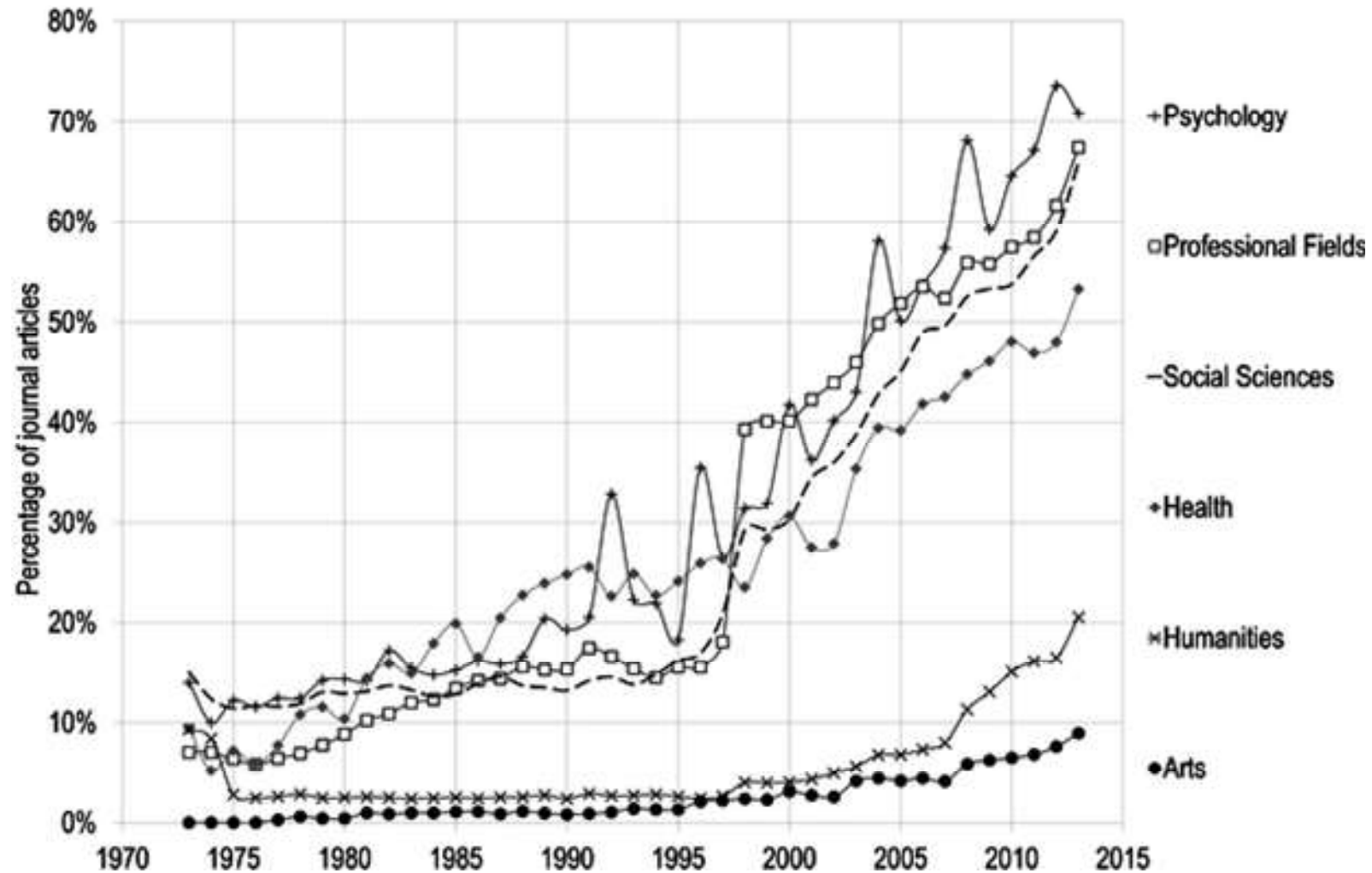
Corporate Concentration and Structural
Power – Mergers and Acquisition

Surveillance Capitalism and new forms of
Rent Seeking

Rankings as a tool of Algorithmic
Governance

Rise of the Data Cartels (Lamdan, S
forthcoming)

Fig 4. Percentage of papers published by the five major publishers, by discipline of Social Sciences and Humanities, 1973–2013.

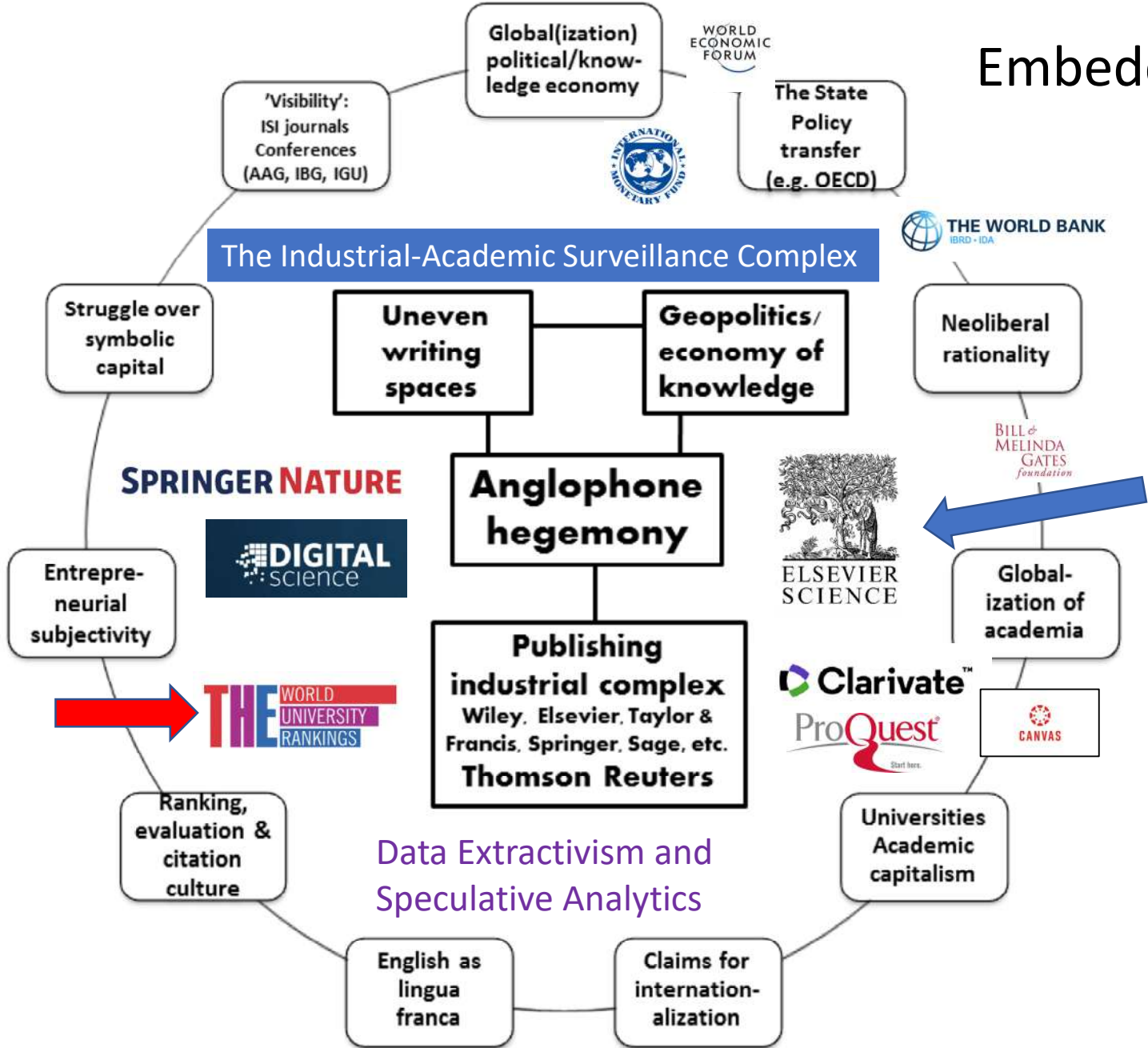


Larivière V, Haustein S, Mongeon P (2015) The Oligopoly of Academic Publishers in the Digital Era. PLOS ONE 10(6): e0127502.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0127502>

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0127502>

Embedding Structural Power



- Surveillance Capitalism and a Technocratic System of Enclosure
- HE as sites of capital accumulation and labour exploitation

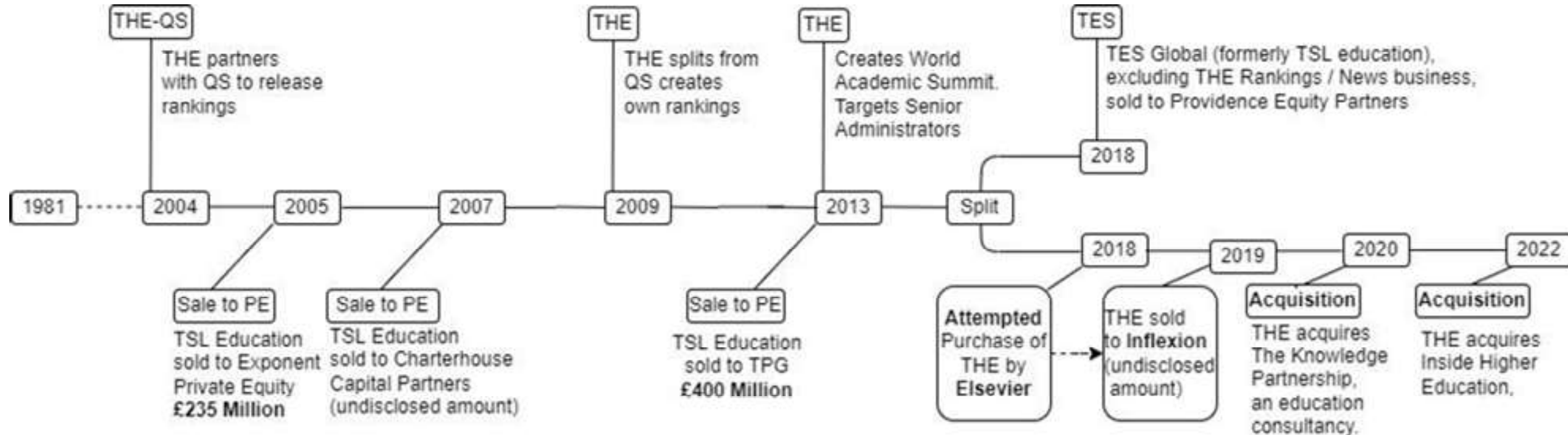
“Uberfication” of Academic Labour & Algorithmic Governance

Wheel of power: a conceptual framework for understanding the Anglophone hegemony

From Paasi, A. (2015). Academic Capitalism and the Geopolitics of Knowledge. In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Geography* (pp. 507–523). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118725771.ch37>

Timeline THE Rankings Acquisitions (2022)



Note: TES / TSL had made classroom learning related acquisitions (Wikispaces, EduKey, Blendspace, etc) that were ultimately sold to Providence as a part of the split.

Times Higher Education Recent Acquisitions

The Knowledge Partnership

Paul Howarth, CEO at THE: “We look forward to working with Louise, David and the wider TKP team to [provide an unparalleled global data insight service for higher education.](#)”

TKP’s Ms Simpson said that the two firms “already have a long history of collaboration through research, events and sharing platforms”.

“By bringing our two companies together under the THE brand, we’re able to [share our rich depositories of data and experience of the higher education](#) sector to take that relationship to the next level. With our combined expertise, we will provide even deeper insights for universities across the globe,”

Inside Higher Ed

IHE Press Release: “... *Inside Higher Ed* will continue to operate independently under our existing brand. We’ll benefit from THE’s strategic support and financial resources, as well as its five decades’ experience dedicated to higher education, [including the extensive data points collected from universities globally.](#)”

Paul Howarth, CEO at THE: “The rapid organic growth that THE has seen in recent years has been [driven by its evolution into a powerful, global data business.](#) Now, with the backing of our investors at Inflexion Private Equity, we are in a position to further strengthen our position in the market through strategic acquisitions.”

Further emphasis on data

QS Recent Acquisitions Focus on International Students

Hobsons Solutions (2017)

“The division’s research, strategy, enquiry management and enrolment services provide hands-on experience of the obstacles and opportunities within specific countries and regions, helping clients/students mitigate risk, benefit from existing relationships, and build sustainable [recruitment strategies](#) in an increasingly complex marketplace.

Hobsons Solutions also manages [one of the world’s largest international student research initiatives, the International Student Survey \(ISS\)](#), which enables clients to better compete globally and maximize student recruitment and enrolment.”

StudentApply (2021)

“QS and StudentApply will [make available our unique data insights to a network of partners](#): scholarship bodies, government agencies, high school counsellors, qualified recruitment agents, and advisors, enabling them to better support their students.

StudentApply perfectly complements QS’s market-leading student insight, engagement solutions and machine learning-enabled global counselling capabilities, providing more than 300 university partners with an [unparalleled end-to-end value proposition to meet their recruitment goals . . .](#)”

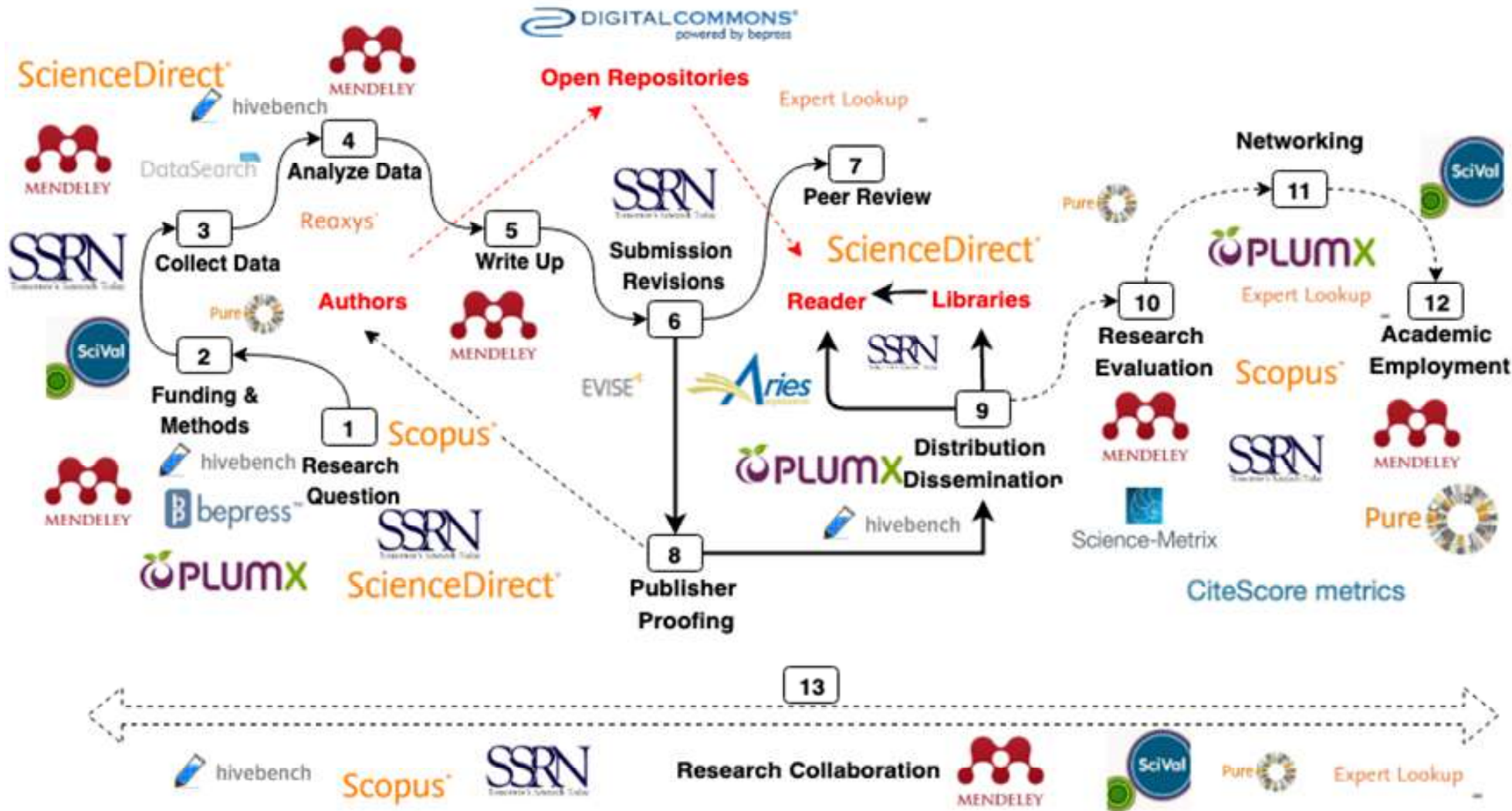
Emphasizing recruitment, data is also involved.

The Academic Knowledge Research Production Process

The Research Process

The Publishing Process

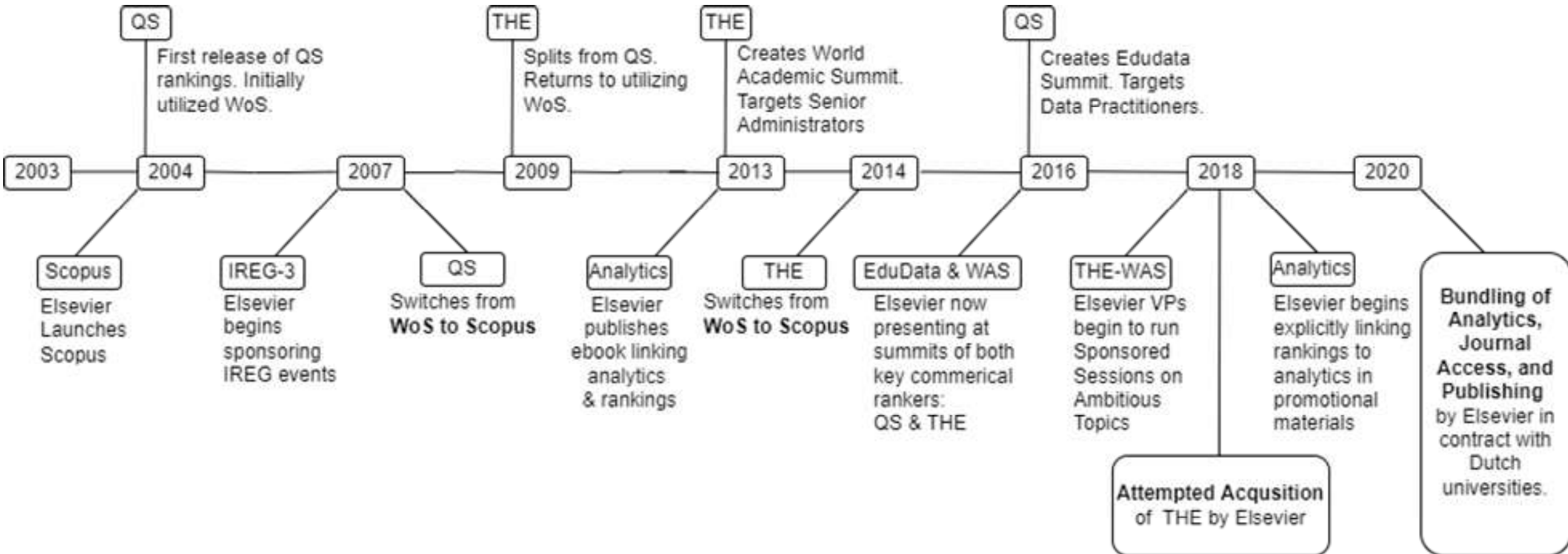
The Evaluation Process



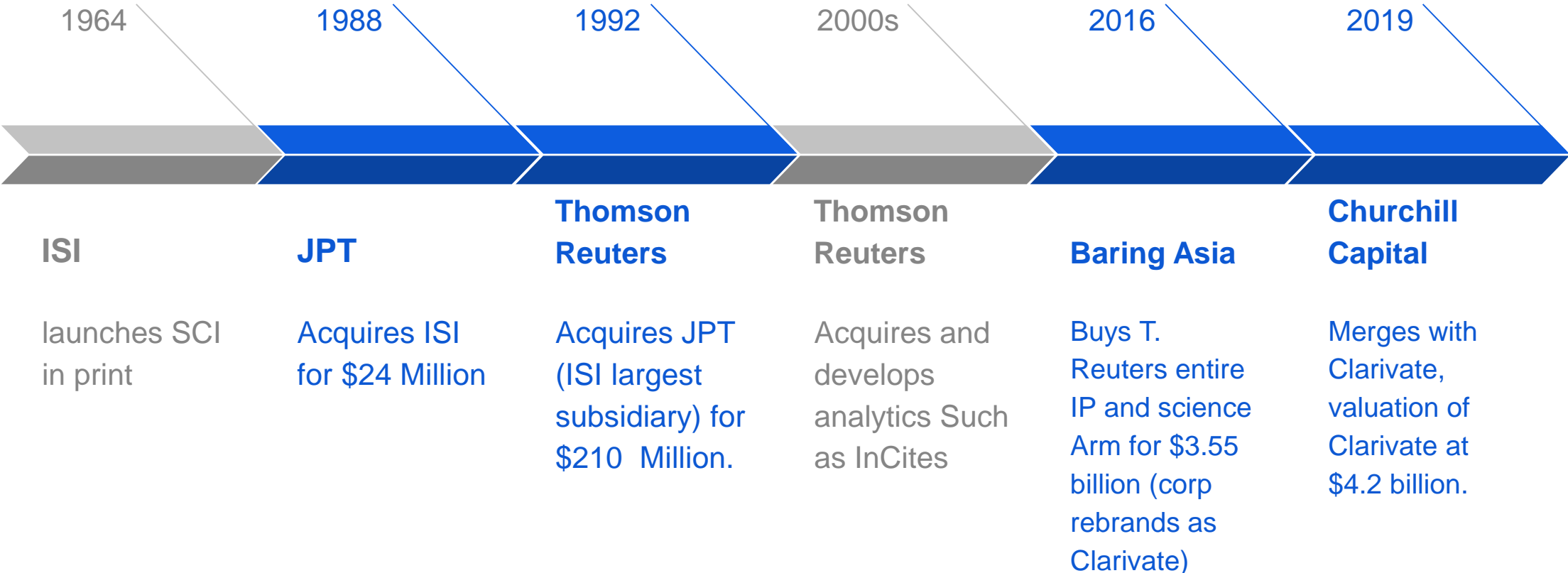
More recent acquisitions in health education, life sciences:

- 3D4Medical
- Cengage Learning
- Shadow Health
- **SciBite** (Semantic Analytics)

Timeline Elsevier Rankings Involvement (2020)



Web of Science Ownership Timeline



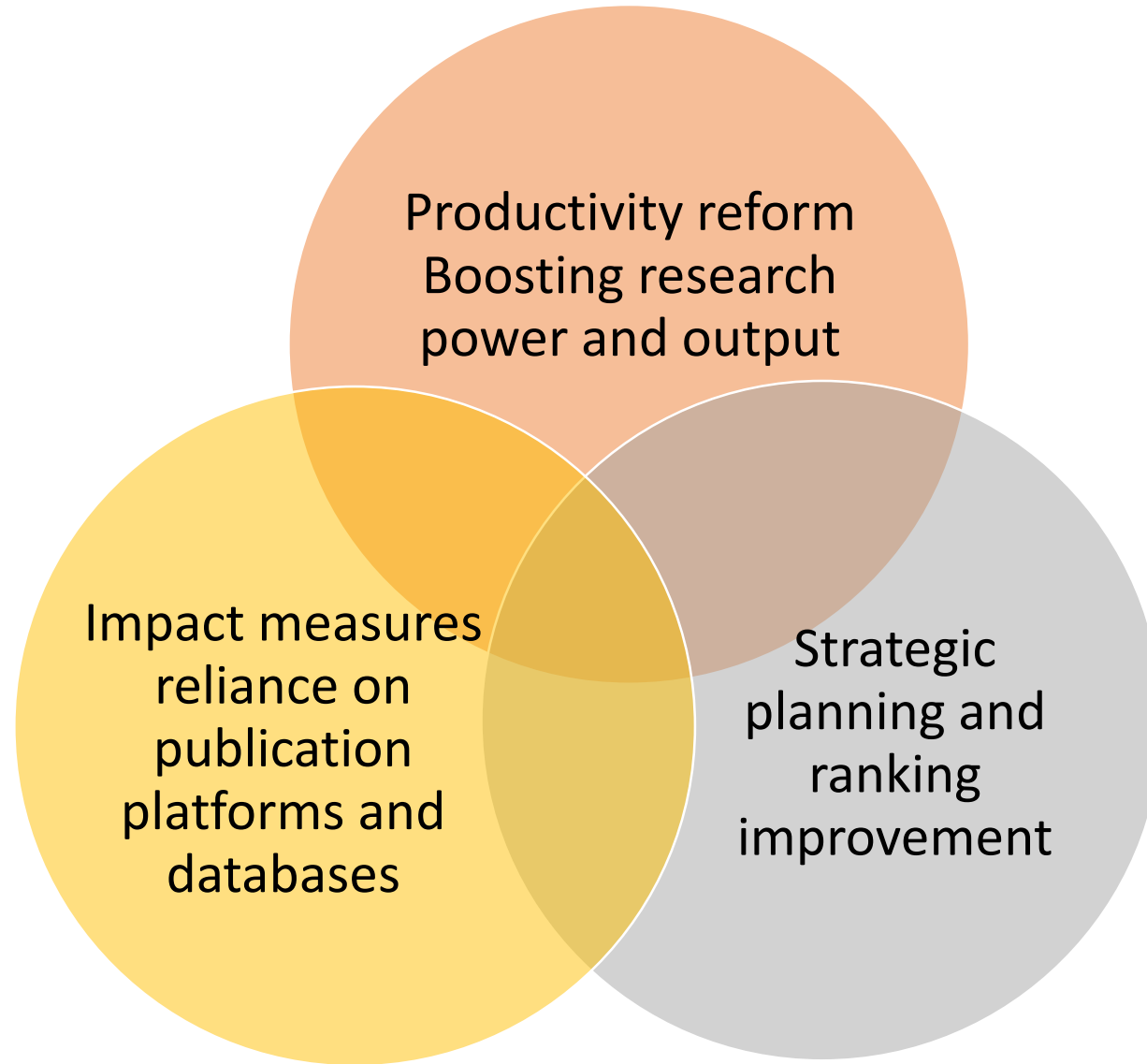
Clarivate Acquires ProQuest (2021)

Clarivate Press Release: “Content aggregation, along with solutions to connect and filter disparate information is critical in a world of information overload. The joining of these two gold-standard organizations will provide a [gateway to one of the world’s largest collections of interoperable, expertly curated content for science and intellectual property, along with technologies that enhance its discovery, sharing and management.](#) Customers will be able to reveal connections across the innovation lifecycle.

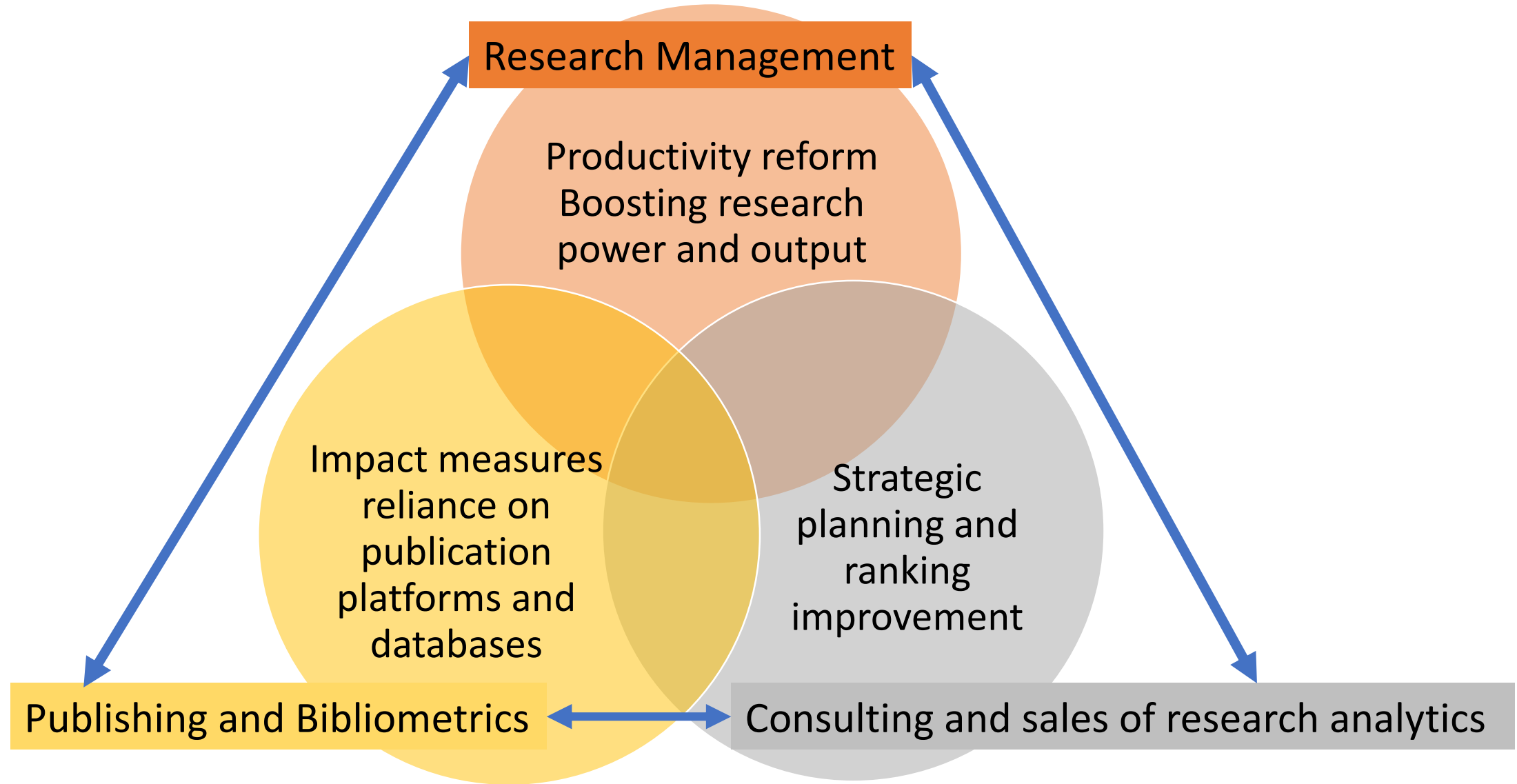
Future-focused organizations will be able to respond to their users’ needs more effectively with the delivery of multiple resources, fulfilling the demand for more cross-disciplinary research and thereby improving research, teaching and learning outcomes at their institutions. This is demonstrated by our [Research Intelligence Cloud, which will be enhanced by the addition of full text journal articles, dissertations, news, video and e-books across multiple fields](#) – including science, technology, medicine, law and IP, the arts, literature and humanities and social sciences.”

Improving data and analytics with content and usage – but are they still source neutral?

Growing concerns for HE



Roles of Elsevier and Conflict of Interest?

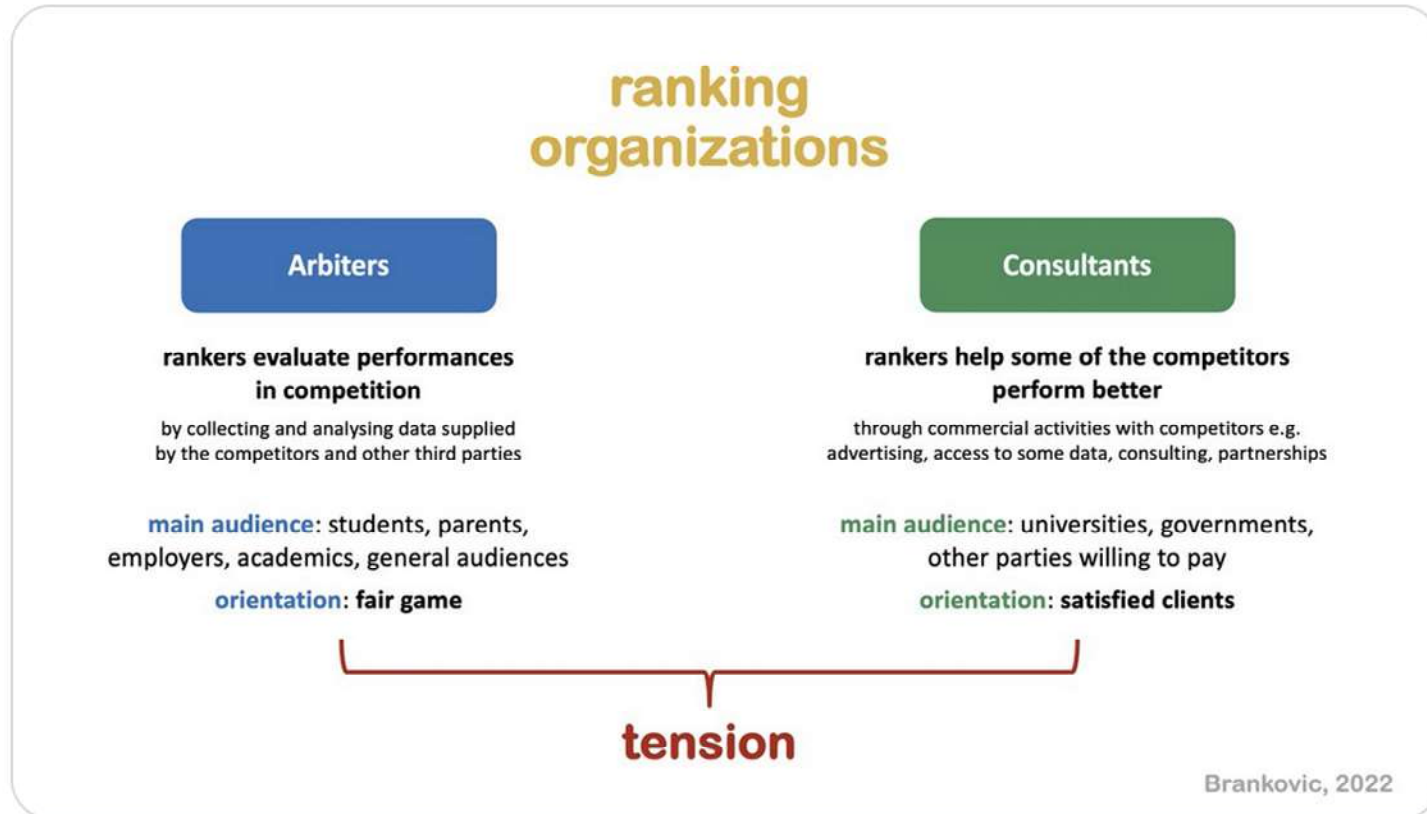




Jelena Brankovic
@jelena3121



Imagine a game of football in which a referee is also the coach of one of the teams playing. Crazy, right? You know what's crazier? The audience believing that a fair game is possible.



<https://twitter.com/jelena3121/status/1514539735074672643>

Implications

"Commercial publishers and data analytics providers today have effectively colonised universities. They provide services universities need and they employ business models and tactics that make universities dependent on them, not only for research communication but also for technologies that underpin key academic functions, such as tracking research activities and evaluating people and programmes. *Their contractual relationships with some universities even give them the right to exploit university-generated content and data for other business purposes.*"

Amy Brand, Director of MIT Press

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/open-access-loses-when-publishers-are-vilified> (April 8, 2022)

Final remarks

- A university's position in a privately own ranking is essentially a rented space. You will lose the position as soon as you stop paying the "rent."
- Once in the space, you are playing by the rules set up by the "landlords."
- Historical inequity and hierarchy are being reinforced by rankings.
- We should be asking questions about the contractual relationships universities are making with the data cartels.
- Who has oversight over the governance of digital platforms and their algorithms and how they impact the public missions of the university?
- Who are the higher education leaders asking these kind of questions?

Thank you !

Preprint and bibliography available on Zenodo

<https://zenodo.org/record/4730593#.YmE20JLMLOQ>