The Impact of Media Coverage on Reputation & Audience Perception

March 2023

Real-world data, real-world results

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Report introduction and objectives

- This report shows how online media coverage about named universities impacts audience perceptions and the reputation of the institutions
- The report's shows how Metricomm can :
    - Illustrate how the size of media audience reading content about a range of themes relating to universities has changed over time
    - Explain how each university is positioned compared to a set of named competitors in coverage about the sector
    - Demonstrate how each university is positioned in coverage where the audience is specifically seeking information about them
    - Evaluate the impact of key issues on reputation and perception
    - Measure the contribution of academic subjects, key spokespeople, topics and issues that shape audience perceptions and understanding of the universities
    - Understand which topics are most likely to generate interest in and response to the universities
- In this report, 'sector analysis' is designed to provide insights into how named competitors are represented in online media coverage that is seen and read by the audience seeking general information about universities in the UK
- 'University-specific analysis', however, is designed to provides insights into how the University is most likely to be perceived by someone with a particular interest in it. Specific analysis is therefore able to provide more detailed information and understanding about deeper association with similar issues, themes, topics, subjects and people
- This represents only a small example of the insights Metricomm is able to provide about the impact of media coverage on universities in the UK and around the world. Other capabilities include:
    - Identification of the named media (national, international, regional and specialist) most likely to have an impact on the University's target audiences and stakeholders
    - Analysis of which media coverage is driving most consideration (Google search) for a named university brand
    - Analysis of which media coverage is increasing visits to the university website
    - Assessing the audience impact of a media crisis affecting an institution

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Our methodology

- Metricomm's approach is very different because it focuses on the *results* generated by communication
- Metricomm is also different in that we use audience data, which is particularly well suited to market-mix modelling and vastly superior to the volume metrics used by our competitors
- It follows directly from this that Metricomm is not a media cuttings agency – our system is designed to capture the coverage most likely to be found, seen and read by audiences in the real world
- This means our numbers are realistic and not the silly ones produced by other methods, which might look good but are meaningless
- Our own research combined with experience gained through work for clients has revealed that online media coverage is a far more powerful communication channel than has been recognised or understood, playing a crucial role in driving business outcomes directly or by amplifying the effects of other marketing activities
- There are a number of reasons for this, which we will now cover very briefly to provide some background to the findings of the report:
    - Online media coverage and TV broadcast are by far the most effective communication channels at driving public interest and attention, with print media and radio playing much more minor roles
    - The reasons for this are down to how the majority of people get information in today's digital world, with over 90% turning immediately to search engines, especially Google
    - National online media attract audiences greater than 20 million per month – typically up to 25 times higher than their print versions – which is why online media coverage is so important for reputation
        - Print media and radio *are* still important, but very much in a supporting role
        - While TV coverage generates a lot of interest, this decays almost immediately after the broadcast finishes
    - Online media coverage, however, generates interest over much longer periods, with stories often remaining on the web indefinitely and appearing frequently in top search results for many different search terms over long periods of time
    - URLs for coverage also play an important role in supporting SEO and other digital activity

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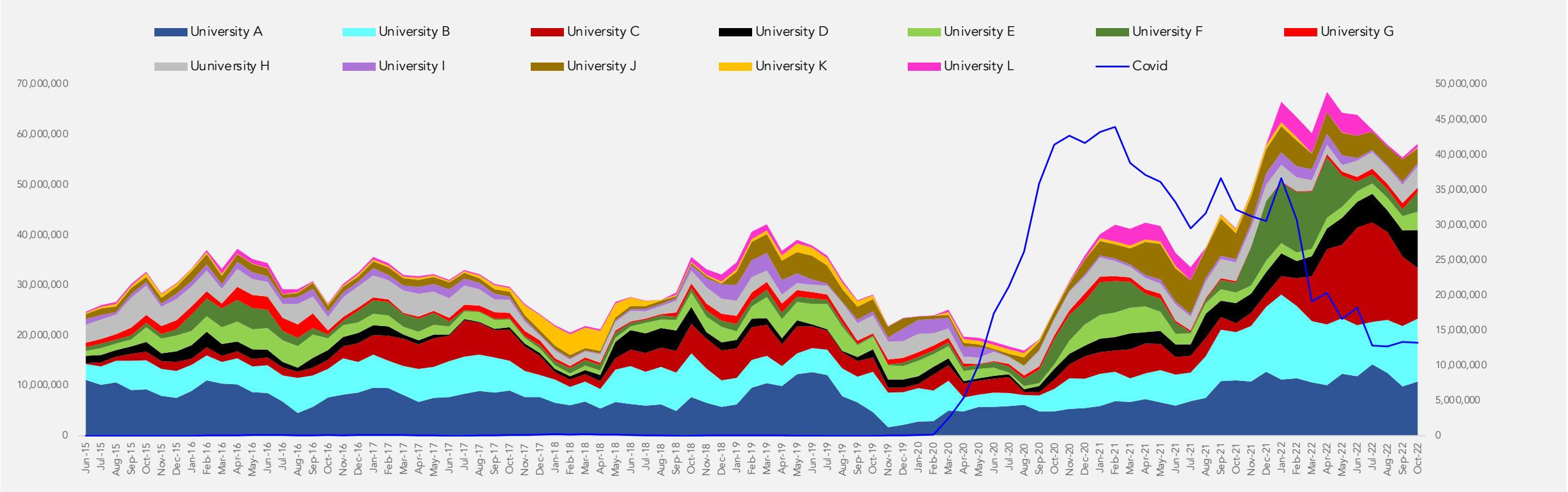
Audience for universities, by month, with audience for Covid also shown: Jun 2015 to Oct 2022



- Since mid-2020, the size of audience for coverage about named UK universities has continued to increase significantly, even as content about the direct consequences of Covid (the blue line on the graph) declined
- The seasonal nature of coverage is less obvious than pre-pandemic, with content about the sector including a wide range of issues that are of ongoing interest to the audience and have little to do with academic pursuits

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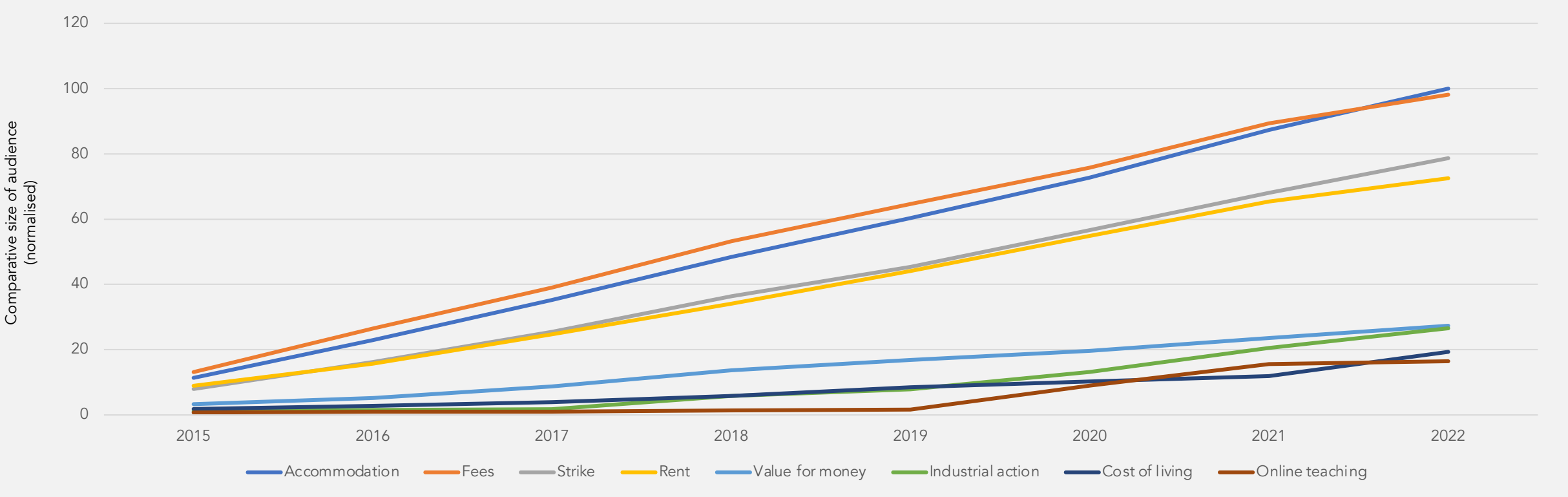
Key service issues over time (cumulative): university sector



- Recent years have seen key aspects of the student experience under the microscope, for example whether students are getting value for money
- The size of audience reading coverage about issues including accommodation shortages, fee levels, lecturer strikes and so on has been steadily increasing
- During Covid, the switch to online teaching was also debated in the media
- More recently, the impact of the rising cost of living on students is a theme which has become more prominent to the engaged audience
- All the above impact the reputation of universities and shape the way their performance is viewed publicly. Metricomm is able to help individual institutions assess the risk posed to reputation by these and other emotive issues

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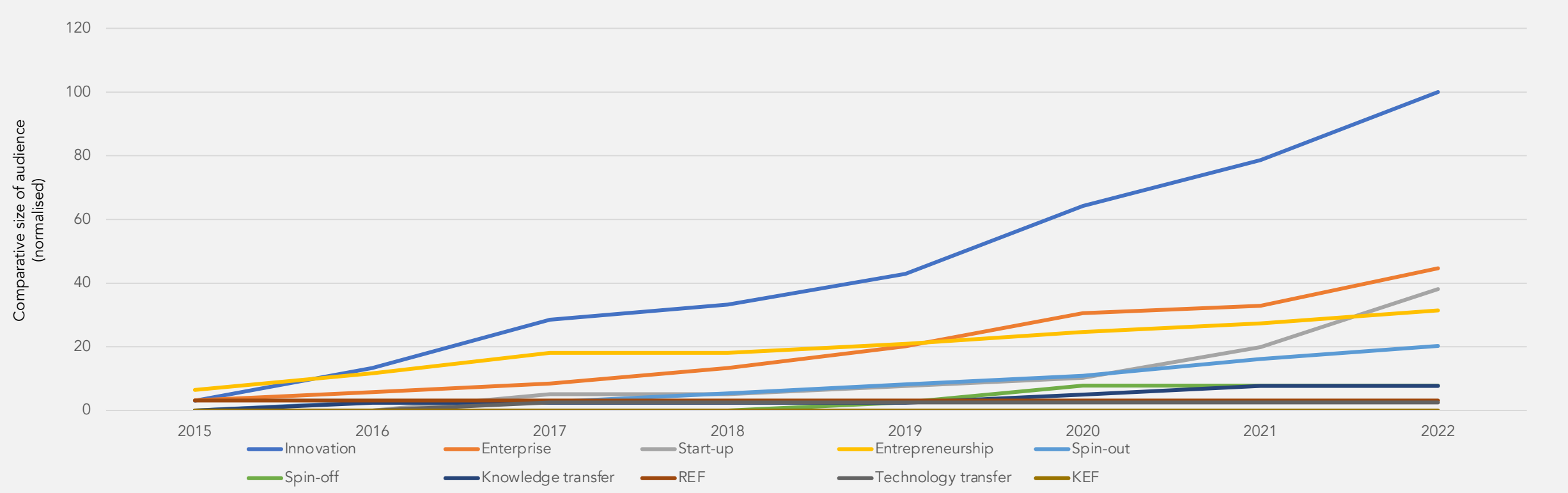
Innovation & enterprise over time (cumulative): University of [.....]



- Association with innovation is important to universities. It helps to attract talent and grant funding, as well as create fruitful partnerships with business
- Over time, the media audience has increasingly been exposed to content about universities and innovation, enterprise and entrepreneurship
- Universities are also keen to be associated with measures of their success in this regard, including the Research Excellence Framework and Knowledge Exchange Framework
- Increasingly, this is a competitive topic, with many institutions vying for recognition. Metricomm can help individual universities understand how they are positioned and perceived in relation to business, next-generation technologies and creating real-world opportunities for academics and students

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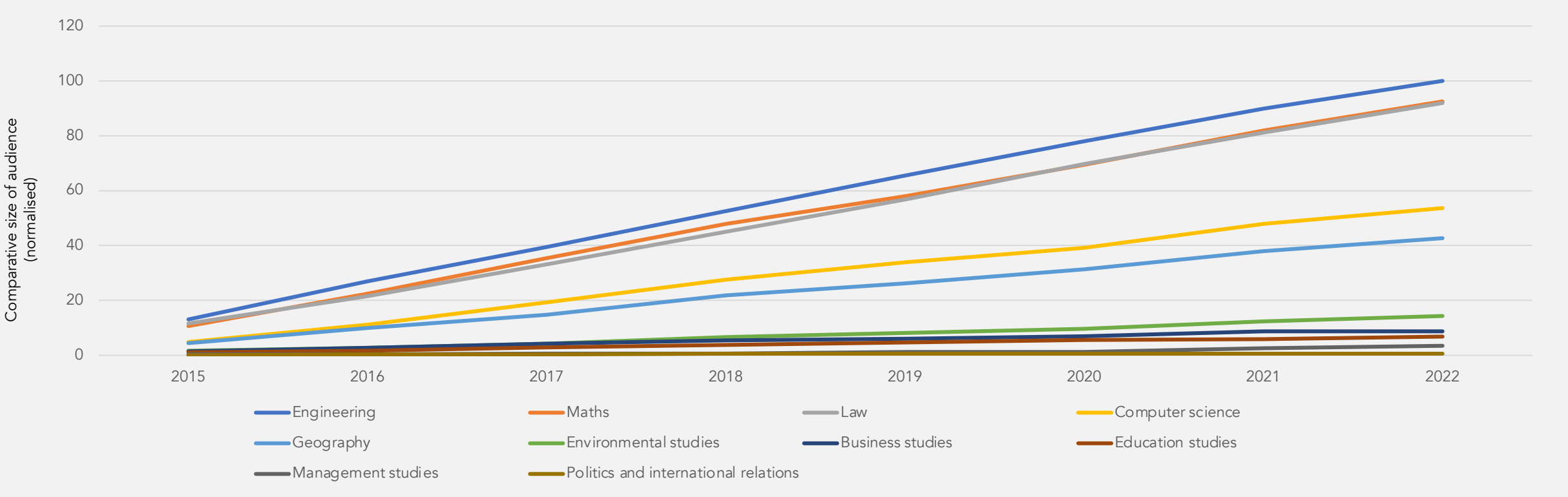
Association with selected academic subjects (cumulative): university sector



- Universities also want to differentiate based on the courses they offer. The challenge is getting media to take an interest in new and exciting subjects on offer
- This chart shows the relative size of UK audience exposed to media content about a selection of academic subjects, over time
- Interestingly, the academic subjects that continue to be most written-about in the media that influence audience perceptions are the traditionally popular Engineering, Maths and Law
- This information assists with communication planning and selection of key messages and stories for distribution to the media – whether a university wants to be associated with the most visible subjects or something entirely different

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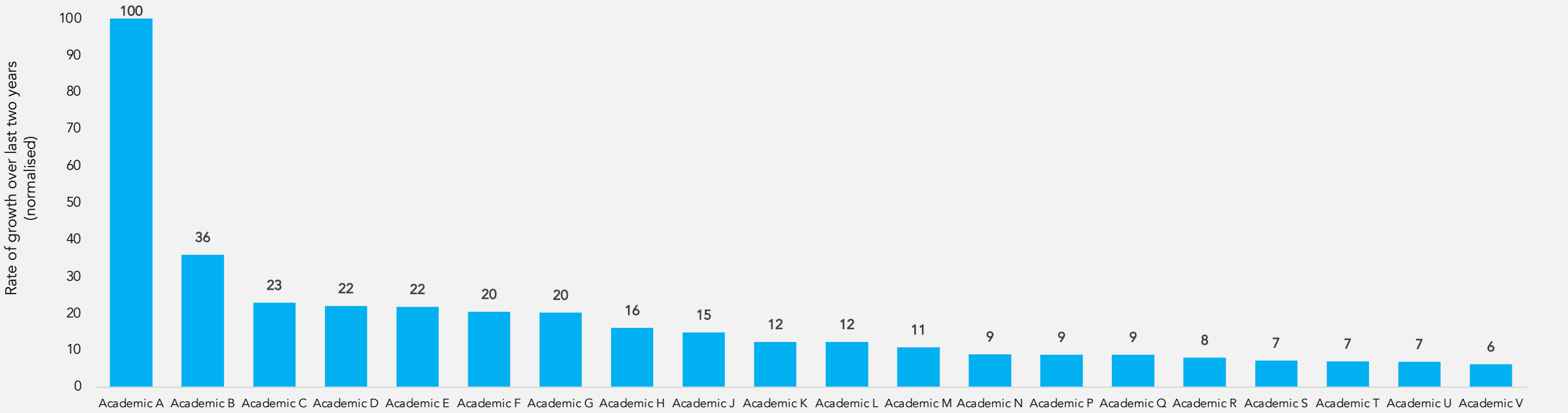
Academic spokespeople with fastest rate of growth in media exposure – last two years



- The impact of spokespeople on any brand should not be underestimated. Metricomm helps universities to understand which key academics, members of the leadership team or influential alumni are most apparent to the audience in media coverage
- This example reveals the leading academics for a particular university who have significantly increased their media exposure – and impact on university reputation – over a two-year period
- This might be due to a successful research project or collaboration. On the other hand, it might be as a result of negative publicity around an issue. Metricomm can illustrate when such publicity starts to affect audience perceptions, and when it erodes

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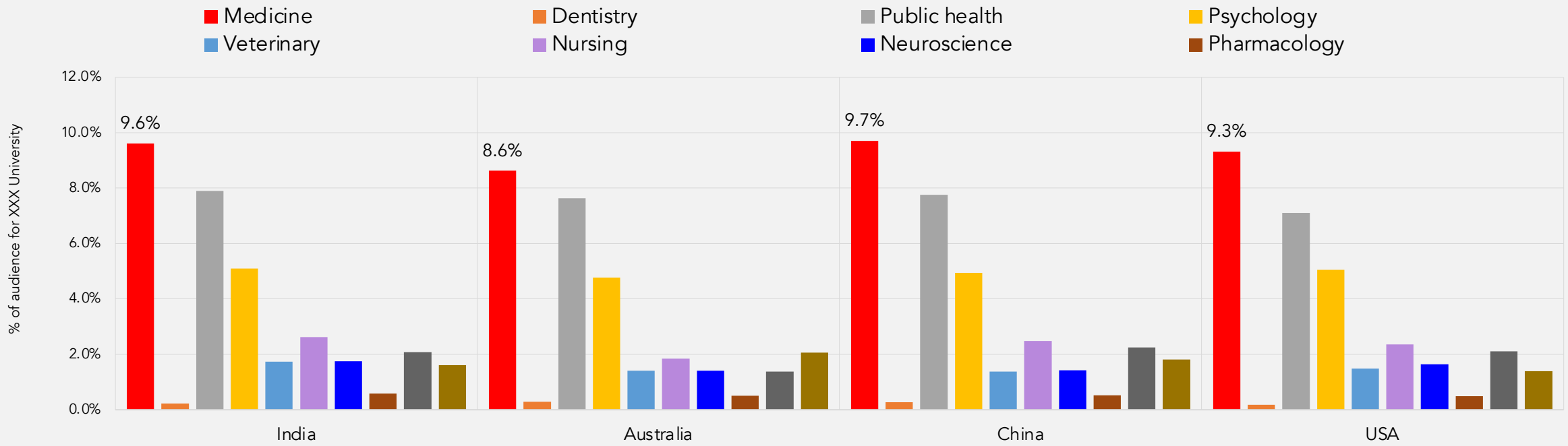
Audience for Medicine and related subjects as a percentage of total audience for University of [….]: mainstream media, by country



- When it comes to medical-related academic subjects, 'Medicine' itself tops the chart internationally, with just less than one in ten readers being exposed to messages about this subject in mainstream media coverage about [University]
- This is not surprising, given the UK's global reputation for medical training. However, it is useful for a university to know which of its flagship courses the international audience is being exposed to. This helps with staff recruitment, generating research collaborations and attracting students

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About Metricomm

- Marketing teams have access to huge amounts of data to prove the success of digital campaigns and advertising, but CMOs and PR teams need reliable information about the powerful role played by media coverage in the marketing mix
- Metricomm makes this insight available. We can also combine it with other independent data sets to evidence value, moving customers along the path to consideration and purchase. Although we can integrate any data set, typically, we identify the impact of online media coverage on
    - Google search
    - Website visits
    - Sales revenue
    - TV viewing audience
    - Reputation
    - Share price
    - Google Shopping
    - Amplifying the impact of advertising and other marketing effects
- Our ability to gather data historically allows us to identify trends and patterns over time, providing consistent, business-centric metrics
- We collect and analyse competitor data at an affordable price point for benchmarking, permitting clients to spot opportunities, gaps and threats
- Robust statistical analysis built into our systems means that we can say with high levels of confidence (usually 99% or higher) that the audience behaviour and business impact we measure cannot be attributed to chance, but is directly related to media coverage

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Thanks!

We hope you found this example report insightful.

Please contact us if you have any questions, and are interested in commissioning analysis of your own customer reviews, or any other 1st or 3rd party data.

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