



## The relationship between Institution Branding, Teaching Quality and Student Satisfaction in Higher Education in Hong Kong

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### Abstract

The rapid expansion of Hong Kong's higher education sector both in the government-funded and self-funded higher education in Hong Kong generated a high competition in this industry. In order to study how institutions increase their competitiveness, this study investigated the relationship between the institution branding, teaching quality and student satisfaction. A quantitative research was conducted to empirically test three hypotheses by employing a questionnaire survey. As the primary customers of higher education, full-time students enrolled in post-secondary programs offered by government-funded and self-funded higher education institutions in Hong Kong were randomly selected as the targeted participants. Two thousand students were sent questionnaires and 1,170 valid responses were received, representing a response rate of 58.5%. Results of the analysis show that the teaching quality has a positive and significant influence on institution branding, institution branding has a positive and significant influence on student satisfaction whilst the mediating effect of institution branding is only considered as a partial mediation between teaching quality and student satisfaction. The study contributes to the higher education debate and provides unique student-perceived insights into institution branding, student satisfaction and the quality of teaching in Hong Kong's higher education sector.

**Key words:** Institution branding, teaching quality, student satisfaction, higher education

## **1. Introduction**

The series of higher education reforms in the 1990s marked the beginning of a “quasi-market” for higher education provision in Hong Kong (Shuen, 2001). By 2009/10, at least 63% of the 17-20 age cohorts were taking full time undergraduate degree or sub-degree programmes offered by one of the following institutions categorized into three major groups by sources of funding (University Grants Committee, 2010), they are University Grants Committee (UGC) Funded Institutions, Self-financing degree-awarding institutions and Public Institutions funded by the government.

Given the extent of expansion of its higher education sector, there are suggestions that higher education provisions in Hong Kong, just like those in other parts of the world, should move closer to market practices in order to compete and survive (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2010). It may soon become apparent that market forces will cause institutions of higher education to see themselves as service providers and students as customers (Vauterin, Linnanen and Marttila, 2011). However, the notion that higher education is a market where institutions and students interact as providers and customers has been mired in controversy from the very beginning (Natale and Doran, 2012).

The rapidly expanding market when combined with growing consumerism in higher education (Law, 2010; Petruzzellis and Romanazzi, 2010) has led to growing competition for students among institutions. Collecting data on and understanding the factors that drive student satisfaction and acting upon feedback on student satisfaction have become an ever more important issue (Gamage, Suwanabroma, Ueyama, Hada and Sekikawa, 2008; Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001).

There has been extensive research on antecedents of customer satisfaction in different fields of business studies (Bennett and Rundle-Thiele, 2004; Oliver, 1980) with service quality having been found to be the key driver of customer satisfaction (Sureshchandar, Rajendran and Anantharaman, 2002). There is a plethora of published research in the business management and marketing literature on the relationship of corporate image and reputation to service quality and customer satisfaction (Balmer and Greyser, 2006; Barich and Kotler, 1991). However, despite the fact that the higher education market is getting more discerning, there is a notable lack of research into the relationship between quality of teaching staff and student satisfaction, let alone whether this relationship is in anyway mediated by institution branding.

In studying college student satisfaction, Guolla (1999) confirmed the primacy of teaching quality in driving student satisfaction. Helgesen (2008) modeled student satisfaction as consequential to institution reputation and image. The roles of the four constructs featured in the research framework, namely quality of teaching staff, student satisfaction, institution branding (reputation and image) are examined one by one alongside the three hypotheses to see whether and how they interact to contribute to higher education provisions.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **2.1 Teaching Quality**

Taylor (2003) identified thirteen important quality enabling capabilities, namely: “engagement locally and globally, engagement with peers and colleagues, equity and pathways, leadership, engagement with learners, entrepreneurship, designing for learning, teaching for learning, assessing for learning, evaluation of teaching and learning, reflective practice and professional development, personal management, and management of teaching and learning” (Henard and Leprince-Ringuet, 2008, p.16).

There is a substantial body of research into students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness (SETs), in particular the use of student feedback questionnaire (SFQ) as a mechanism for collection of student feedback (Law, 2010). [Barrie, Ginns and Symons \(2008\)](#) and [Kember and Leung \(2008\)](#) reviewed the research into SETs and found that despite its popularity some scholars remain skeptical and claim that students may not have the capacity to evaluate teaching effectiveness, that the evaluation criteria are not well defined and validated, and that the questionnaires involved bear greater relevance to transmission models of teaching (Law, 2010). Moreover, there are those who argue that the collection of student feedback via questionnaires may not automatically lead to improved teaching performance (Kember, Leung and Kwan, 2002). Nevertheless, as Law (2010, p.252) asserted "there is evidence that such feedback coupled with consultation, interpretation guides and/or other arrangements for staff development has a great potential for enhancing teaching quality".

In the present study, respondent perception of quality of teaching staff is measured by an 8-item scale developed by Gamage, Suwanabroma, Ueyama, Hada and Sekikawa(2008). The items assessed include academic credentials of the teaching staff, their use of technology in classroom, communication clarity and personal characteristics such as empathy, friendliness and engagement. Research has revealed that student perception of teaching quality is influenced not only by teachers' knowledge and mastery of the subject, but also their teaching and personal characteristics and the manifestation of these characteristics in student-teacher interactions (Benjamin, 2008). Teachers who are skilled in imparting their knowledge and at the same time displaying sensitivity to student needs beyond their teaching role can have a very positive effect on student satisfaction with learning (Jules and Kutnick, 1997).

## **2.2 Student Satisfaction**

Satisfaction in general is defined as the perception of pleasurable fulfillment of a service (Oliver, 1997). Level of satisfaction is determined by a person's perception of "the performance of a product or service in relation to his or her expectations" (Schiffman, Kanuk and Hansen, 2008, p.8). Customer satisfaction can be understood from both economic and psychological perspectives (Becker, Bradley and Zantow, 2012; Johnson and Fornell, 1991).

Over the years, a wide range of measuring systems had been devised to assess student satisfaction and service quality (Elliott and Shin, 2002). Yorke (1994, p.9) proposed an enhancement-led approach through "a greater degree of reliance on self-regulation in the system coupled with a relatively light external monitoring system" to assure quality in higher education. Harvey and Newton (2004) proposed an evidence-based approach to evaluate quality. In North America, the most popular tool to measure student satisfaction is the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfactory Inventory (Richardson, 2005). Among institutions in the UK, numerous models and tools for evaluating student satisfaction are in use (Douglas, McClelland and Davies, 2008). The Student Satisfaction Approach proposed by the University of Central England in Birmingham is among the more prominent ones that has gained considerable popularity across the world (Kane, Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield, 2008).

Though it is important to measure satisfaction with each discrete attribute of an education experience as satisfaction or not with one of the attributes that leads to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the overall experience, it is important to note that satisfaction is sometimes taken as a single entity and measured by a simple yes or no question or a small set of questions assessing the overall evaluation of various experiences (Rust, Zahorik and Keiningham, 1995). Student satisfaction surveys of this kind assess the overall level of satisfaction of a student with regard to his or her learning experience with a programme, a lecture or the institution in which he or she studies in general (Nasser, Khoury and

Abouchedid, 2008; Kreuze and Newell, 2002). The overall satisfaction could be regarded as the cumulative effect of multiple incidents or encounters with an education provider over time. In the present study, student satisfaction is measured by a 6-item scale adapted from Bennett and Rundle-Thiele (2004) and Oliver (1980). The same question, i.e., how satisfied are students with their enrollment decision, is asked in six different ways to gauge their level of satisfaction with the institutions they are currently enrolled in to see if the alternative ways of asking the question produce different responses.

### **2.3 Institution Branding**

Reputation is a collective assessment of an entity's desirability by an external party (Standifird, 2001). An entity's reputation is partly shaped by its interactions with its external parties and partly by the external party's awareness of its identity as communicated by members of the entity assessed (Deephouse, 2000). In the world of business, reputation has been widely recognized as a valuable intangibility, which must be strategically managed to achieve competitive advantage (Sridhar, 2012). Though a firm may attempt to "manage" its reputation by public relations drives, branding or spin (Stopford, 2011), reputation is ultimately determined by the perception of parties external to the firm (Stopford, 2011; Deephouse, 2000). How successful a firm is able to manage its own reputation is subject to "the willingness of parties external to the firm to include these influence attempts in their overall assessment" (Standifird, 2001, p.281).

A positive reputation is the aggregation of favourable perceptions over a period of time (Houser and Wooders, 2006). A strong positive reputation demonstrates a firm's consistently superior levels of quality and competence in product and/or service delivery (Bruwer and Johnson, 2010). Reputation is very fragile and maintenance of it requires constant vigilance (Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001, p.304). Benjamin Franklin said, "It takes many good deeds to build a good reputation, and only one bad one to lose it" (cited in Garoupa and Ginsburg, 2010, p.226). There are many cases in recent history in which firms sustained major business reversals due to tarnished reputation caused by some misguided assumptions or decisions, in particular in incidents which exposed a firm's profound deviation from its core values or ethics (Nikbin, Ismail, Marimuthu, Abu-Jarad, 2011; Stead and Smallman, 1999).

While a tarnished reputation may suggest a lack of credibility, a strong positive reputation leads to perceived credibility (Herbig, Milewicz and Golden, 1994). Credibility of an organization is understood as "the believability of its stated intentions" which is "determined by comparing what an organization does and what it says it will do" (Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001, p.304). These stated intentions may cover a wide spectrum of corporate performance, including the finances, governance, and social responsibility performance over a period of time. To many firms, credibility is the single asset on which everything else it cares about depends on, from the attractiveness of the firm to investors, business partners and creditors, to the attractiveness of the firm's product or service to any potential customers (Puffer and McCarthy, 2011). Reputation of a firm is important to customers as it influences customer choice, customer perception of risk and continued patronage (Loureiro and Kastenholtz, 2011; Gimm, 2010). Customer perception of a firm's reputation will enable a reputable firm to charge a premium for the product or service provided (McWilliams, 2011). From the perspective of more discerning customers, the increased assurance of credibility and reduced risk will more than justify the premium charged (McWilliams, 2011; Kim, 1995). In this study, institution branding is defined as reputation and image.

## **2.4 Hypotheses Development**

### **2.4.1 Teaching quality and institution branding**

In the commercial world, there is a host of different rating and ranking systems to assess corporate reputation, for example the Fortune Most Admired Corporations ranking in the US and numerous country or region specific ratings in the UK, other European countries and Australia (Fombrun, 1998). However, as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2001) report argues, these ratings have fallen short in evaluating “the quality of the formation delivered by the Higher Education institutions they rate” (Henard and Leprince-Ringuet, 2008, p.33). In the marketing literature, image is the ideal impression that the management of an organization or a firm would like outsiders to see them (Hatch and Schultz, 1997).

Some others, such as Wei (2002, p.270), argued that image should be subsumed within reputation because corporate reputation contributes to the making of corporate image and should therefore be considered a “variable within the parameters of image”.

Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) postulated that a firm may possess more than one image, subject to both the image management strategies employed by the firm and the impression gained by each of those who interact with the firm. By contrast, as explained in the previous sub-section, the reputation of a firm is forged beyond the direct sphere of influence of the firm, and hence is less capable of being manipulated (Walker, 2010). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**Hypothesis H1: Teaching quality of staff as perceived by students positively affects their perception of institution branding.**

### **2.4.2 Institution branding and student satisfaction**

Firm reputation, customer satisfaction and the link between the two is a relatively well-researched domain in management studies (Galbreath, 2010; Selnes, 1993). There is an abundance of empirical research, primarily from the perspective of marketing, which demonstrates the casual link between the two concepts (Kapil and Kapil, 2010; Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson and Beatty, 2009). While prior studies on non-education service settings report a positive influence of customer satisfaction on firm reputation (Walsh et al., 2009), some other studies demonstrate that the casual relationship is reserved (Kapil and Kapil, 2010; Hess Jr, 2008; Walsh, Dinnie and Wiedmann, 2006). The contrary findings have led some scholars to conclude that the two concepts are in fact interrelated and mutually interdependent (Mazzei, Russo and Crescentini, 2009; Selnes, 1993).

The relationship between institution reputation and student satisfaction in the higher education market is a relatively understudied area of research, as treating students as customers is, after all, relatively new and controversial (Obermiller and Atwood, 2011). Besides, the student-institution relationship is growing in complexity due to massification and globalization of higher education (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). Nevertheless, as more college aspirants are given access to more choices of institutions nowadays, school reputation is becoming an increasingly important factor in their enrollment decisions. For those who have made it to the best schools, the satisfaction is beyond words. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**Hypothesis H2: The branding of a higher education institution in Hong Kong as perceived by students positively affects student satisfaction.**

### 2.4.3 Mediating role of institution branding

Students' perception of school reputation is the first mediator proposed in the present study. As discussed above, quality of teaching staff is hypothesized to have a positive influence on student perception of school reputation as well as image, and student perception of school reputation and image positively influence student satisfaction. Student perception of school image is the second mediator proposed in the present study. As discussed above, quality of teaching staff is hypothesized to have a positive influence on student perception of school reputation, and student perception of school image is also hypothesized to have a positive influence on student satisfaction. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis H3: Student perception of the branding of a higher education institution in Hong Kong mediates the relationship between teaching quality of staff and student satisfaction.

### 2.5 Research Framework

Three hypotheses have been developed based on the literature on the marketing concepts of quality, satisfaction, reputation and image, and the corresponding concepts in the higher education market, i.e., quality of teaching staff, student satisfaction, institution branding (reputation and image). Based upon the three hypotheses developed, a research framework (Figure 1) was devised by adapting the following sets of constructs from prior studies reported in peer reviewed journals: the construct of quality of teaching staff and the measuring items concerned were adapted from Gamage et al. (2008); the construct of student satisfaction and the measuring items concerned were adapted from Bennett and Rundle-Thiele (2004) and Oliver (1980); and the constructs of institution branding (reputation and image) and the measuring items concerned were adapted from Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001).

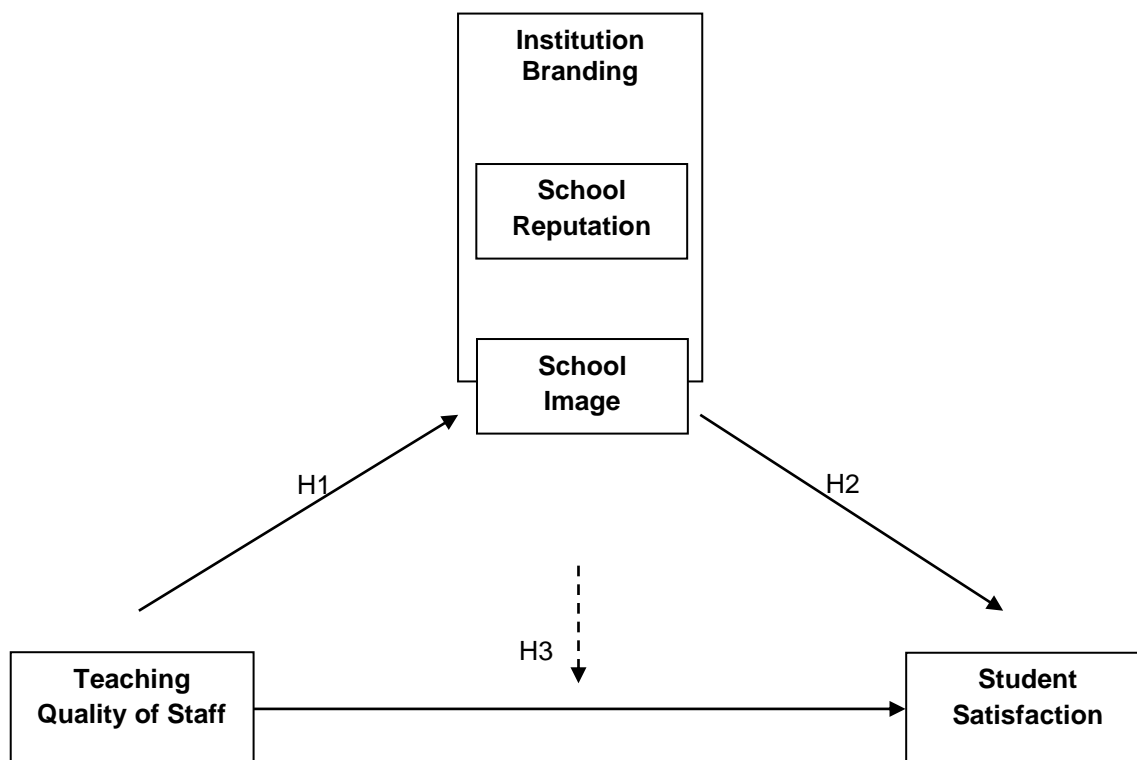


Figure 1: Research Model

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Sample**

Full-time students enrolling in diploma or degree programmes at various levels in all institutions offering post-secondary programmes in Hong Kong were selected as the target population. This population served the purpose of the study, which was to explore the perception of full-time students of higher education on the mediating effects of institution branding on the relationship between quality of teaching staff and student satisfaction. At the end of September 2011, institutions funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) accounted for 60% whereas self-financed institutions accounted for 40% of the total number of higher education institutions in Hong Kong. Although there are far more students enrolled in UGC-funded institutions than in self-financed institution, it was important that all post-secondary institutions were included in the selection.

According to Larson, Björvell, BillingandWredling (2004), a sample size of 10 times more than the number of items of the most complex variable in a questionnaire is needed to provide good quality quantitative research. For this reason, the sample size of this study was determined to be at least 80, as the most complex variable of the proposed study, 'quality of teaching staff', was measured by an 8-item scale. However, to further ensure the quality of research, the minimum sample size of this study was targeted at 300. As there are a substantial number of self-funded and publicly funded higher education institutions in Hong Kong, about 2,000 potential participants (much higher than the minimum sample size) were requested to voluntarily complete a self-administered questionnaire.

#### **3.2 Data Collection**

A self-administered questionnaire survey was used to collect data for this study and students were invited to complete the questionnaire on the spot. This ensured anonymity and confidentiality because participants could complete the questionnaire without disruption from the researcher, thus avoiding interviewer bias. A survey database was developed to include the names of all the institutions in Hong Kong offering post-secondary programmes, including universities. Information on academic department heads and contact persons were identified from public domain websites and typed into a data file and potential contacts were randomly selected from the file by a computer programme. An anonymous questionnaire, together with a letter of invitation and Survey Information Sheet, was sent directly to the selected institutions to obtain their consent for their students to participate. A total of nine institutions were approached and 2,000 copies of the questionnaire were administered by institutional contact persons. The researcher sent email messages and made telephone calls to consenting institutions to ensure the process was duly followed. Individual potential participants (students studying at the consenting institutions) were requested to carefully read the invitation letter and information sheet to ensure that they had a clear understanding of the study as well as their rights. Questionnaires were collected and returned to the researcher by courier post.

#### **3.3 Data Analysis**

The data collected was analysed using linear regression to test the direct influence of teaching quality of staff, institution branding on student satisfaction and the mediating effect of institution branding.

## 4. Analysis of Results

### 4.1 Characteristics of Sample

The characteristics of the sample collected are shown in Table 1 below.

		Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	431	37.9%
	Female	707	62.1%
Age	18 – 21	854	75.0%
	22 – 25	269	23.6%
	26 – 29	15	1.3%
Level of Study	Associate Degree	448	39.4%
	Higher Diploma	409	35.9%
	Undergraduate	262	23.0%
	Others	19	1.7%
Years of Study	1 year or less	377	33.1%
	2 years	394	34.6%
	3 years	280	24.6%
	4 years or above	87	7.6%

**Table 1 Demographic Profile of Valid Respondents (n = 1138)**

### 4.2 Reliability Test

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to confirm the composition of the factors extracted (Coakes, Steed and Price, 2008; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham, 2005). Principle component analysis was used as a confirmatory factor analysis technique and is shown in Table 2 below.

	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3
Teaching Quality (TQ)			
TS1	0.768		
TS2	0.662		
TS3	0.790		
TS4	0.764		
TS5	0.818		
TS6	0.827		
TS7	0.826		
TS8	0.749		
Student Satisfaction (SS)			
SS1		0.824	
SS2		0.866	
SS3		0.873	
SS4		0.896	
SS5		0.904	
SS6		0.895	
Institution Branding (IB)			
IB1			0.723
IB2			0.817
IB3			0.827
IB1			0.818
IB2			0.841
IB3			0.839

**Table 2 Rotated Component Matrix**



### 4.3 Cronbach’s alpha

Cronbach’s alpha tests were conducted to measure the level of consistency among the items in each of the three variables of TQ, SS and IB as well (Hair et al, 2005). Table 3 below shows that the three variables of TQ, SS and IB have a Cronbach’s alpha value ranging from 0.895 to 0.940 while the two subordinate variables of SR and SI have a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.804 and 0.860 respectively, indicating that the measuring scales are reliable and the data have a good internal consistency for further analysis (Hair et al, 2005).

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha	Number of Items
TQ	0.905	8
SS	0.940	6
IB	0.895	6

**Table 3 Cronbach’s Alpha Values of Variables**

The findings above together with the Cronbach’s alpha tests show that the measurement scales in the questionnaire were reliable and the data collected from the nine institutions of higher education were having sufficient reliability and validity for hypothesis testing and further investigation.

### 4.4 Hypothesis testing

The descriptions below report on the tests performed to demonstrate how TQ affects IB, how IB affects SS and how IB mediates the influence of TQ on SS.

#### 4.4.1 Direct Influence of TQ on IB

The regression test results of the direct influence of TQ on IB are shown in Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6. In model 1, only the four control variables of gender, age, level of study and years in current institution were entered into the regression equation, while in model 2, TQ was added to the regression equation.

The multiple regression test results of model 1 reveal that the control variables account for 1.2% (adjusted R Square = 0.012) of the variance in IB. By adding TQ to the regression equation, the explanation power of the regression equation increases significantly (F change = 297.136, df1 = 1, df2 = 1132, p value for F change = 0.000) to 21.7% (adjusted R Square = 0.217). TQ of an institution of higher education is found to have a positive influence on IB with a standardized Beta value of 0.458 (t = 17.238, p = 0.000). So hypothesis H1 is supported.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.125(a)	.016	.012	.9749261	.016	4.474	4	1133	.001
2	.469(b)	.220	.217	.8680603	.205	297.136	1	1132	.000

a Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study

b Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study, TQ

c Dependent Variable: IB

**Table 4 Model Summary - The Impact of TQ on IB**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	17.008	4	4.252	4.474	.001(a)
	Residual	1076.895	1133	.950		
	Total	1093.903	1137			
2	Regression	240.908	5	48.182	63.941	.000(b)
	Residual	852.995	1132	.754		
	Total	1093.903	1137			

a Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study

b Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study, TQ

c Dependent Variable: IB

Table 5 ANOVA - The Impact ofTQ on IB

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.205	.159		26.458	.000
	Gender	.116	.060	.057	1.930	.054
	Age	.049	.062	.023	.785	.433
	Level of Study	.101	.036	.084	2.812	.005
	Years in Current Institution	-.084	.031	-.080	-2.702	.007
2	(Constant)	1.702	.203		8.398	.000
	Gender	.054	.054	.027	1.001	.317
	Age	-.038	.056	-.018	-.673	.501
	Level of Study	.063	.032	.053	1.970	.049
	Years in Current Institution	-.033	.028	-.032	-1.202	.230
	TQ	.529	.031	.458	17.238	.000

a Dependent Variable: IB

Table 6 Coefficients - The Impact ofTQ on IB

#### 4.4.2 Direct Influence of IB on SS

The regression test results of the direct influence of IB on SS are shown in Table 7, Table 8 and Table 9. In model 1, only the four control variables of gender, age, level of study and years in current institution were entered into the regression equation, while in model 2, IB was added to the regression equation. The multiple regression test results of model 1 reveal that the control variables account for 2.5% (adjusted R Square = 0.025) of the variance in SS. By adding IB to the regression equation, the explanation power of the regression equation increases significantly (F change = 994.677,  $df_1 = 1$ ,  $df_2 = 1132$ , p value for F change = 0.000) to 48.0% (adjusted R Square = 0.480). Therefore, IB is found to have a positive influence on SS with a standardized Beta value of 0.680 ( $t = 31.538$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). So hypothesis H2 is also supported.

**Table 4-30(A): Model Summary - The Impact of IB on SS**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.168(a)	.028	.025	1.0367180	.028	8.193	4	1133	.000
2	.695(b)	.483	.480	.7567019	.455	994.677	1	1132	.000

- a Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study
- b Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study, IB
- c Dependent Variable: SS

**Table 7 Coefficients - The Impact of TQ on IB**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	35.221	4	8.805	8.193	.000(a)
	Residual	1217.730	1133	1.075		
	Total	1252.952	1137			
2	Regression	604.771	5	120.954	211.238	.000(b)
	Residual	648.181	1132	.573		
	Total	1252.952	1137			

- a Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study
- b Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study, IB
- c Dependent Variable: SS

**Table 8 ANOVA - The Impact of IB on SS**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.621	.169		27.343	.000
	Gender	.118	.064	.055	1.851	.064
	Age	.155	.066	.069	2.332	.020
	Level of Study	.033	.038	.026	.868	.385
	Years in Current Institution	-.163	.033	-.146	-4.927	.000
2	(Constant)	1.563	.157		9.962	.000
	Gender	.034	.047	.016	.726	.468
	Age	.119	.048	.053	2.459	.014
	Level of Study	-.040	.028	-.031	-1.440	.150
	Years in Current Institution	-.102	.024	-.091	-4.205	.000
	IB	.727	.023	.680	31.538	.000

- a Dependent Variable: SS

**Table 9 Coefficients - The Impact of IB on SS**

#### 4.4.3 Mediating Role of IB

The regression test results of the mediating role of IB are shown in Table 10, Table 11 and Table 12. The dependent variable is SS. In model 1, only the control variables were entered into the regression equation. In model 2, TQ was added to the regression equation. In model 3, IB was added to the regression equation. The multiple regression test results of model 1 reveal that the control variables account for 2.5% (adjusted R Square = 0.025) of the variance in SS. After adding TQ to the regression equation (model 2), the explanation power of the regression equation increases significantly (F change = 404.379, df1 = 1, df2 = 1132, p value for F change = 0.000) to 28.1% (adjusted R Square = 0.281). TQ of an institution of higher education positively affects the satisfaction level of its students with a standardized Beta value of 0.513 (t = 20.109, p = 0.000). By adding IB to the regression equation (model 3), the explanation power of the regression equation increases significantly (F change = 600.814, df1 = 1, df2 = 1131, p value for F change = 0.000) to 53.0% (adjusted R Square = 0.530). Meanwhile, the level of influence of TQ on SS reduces significantly from 0.513 (R = 0.513, t = 20.109, p = 0.000) in model 2 to 0.254 (R = 0.254, t = 10.960, p = 0.000) in model 3. The mediating effect is therefore 0.259 (Judd and Kenny, 1981). The mediating effect is only considered as a “partial mediation” because the influence of TQ on SS remains significant in model 3. Hypothesis H3 is partially supported.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.168(a)	.028	.025	1.0367180	.028	8.193	4	1133	.000
2	.533(b)	.284	.281	.8902796	.256	404.379	1	1132	.000
3	.730(c)	.532	.530	.7197786	.248	600.814	1	1131	.000

- a Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study
- b Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study, TQ
- c Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study, TQ, IB
- d Dependent Variable: SS

**Table 10 Model Summary – The Mediating Role of IB in the Relationship between TQ and SS**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	35.221	4	8.805	8.193	.000(a)
	Residual	1217.730	1133	1.075		
	Total	1252.952	1137			
2	Regression	355.731	5	71.146	89.763	.000(b)
	Residual	897.221	1132	.793		
	Total	1252.952	1137			
3	Regression	667.002	6	111.167	214.574	.000(c)
	Residual	585.950	1131	.518		
	Total	1252.952	1137			

- a Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study
- b Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study, TQ
- c Predictors: (Constant), Years in Current Institution, Age, Gender, Level of Study, TQ, IB
- d Dependent Variable: SS

Table 11 The Mediating Role of IB in the Relationship between TQ and SS

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.621	.169		27.343	.000
	Gender	.118	.064	.055	1.851	.064
	Age	.155	.066	.069	2.332	.020
	Level of Study	.033	.038	.026	.868	.385
	Years in Current Institution	-.163	.033	-.146	-4.927	.000
2	(Constant)	1.627	.208		7.825	.000
	Gender	.044	.055	.020	.795	.427
	Age	.051	.057	.023	.895	.371
	Level of Study	-.012	.033	-.009	-.368	.713
	Years in Current Institution	-.102	.029	-.092	-3.587	.000
	TQ	.633	.031	.513	20.109	.000
3	(Constant)	.598	.173		3.454	.001
	Gender	.011	.044	.005	.254	.799
	Age	.074	.046	.033	1.597	.110
	Level of Study	-.050	.027	-.039	-1.887	.059
	Years in Current Institution	-.082	.023	-.073	-3.559	.000
	TQ	.313	.029	.254	10.960	.000
	IB	.604	.025	.564	24.512	.000

a Dependent Variable: SS

Table 12 The Mediating Role of IB in the Relationship between TQ and SS

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the interrelationship among the constructs of quality of teaching staff, institution branding (reputation and image), and student satisfaction. By using higher education in Hong Kong as the setting and taking full-time post-secondary students as the subjects, the study measured student perceptions with respect to each of the constructs. Quantitative methods were adopted for data collection and analyses. Linear regression tests were performed to demonstrate how institution branding affects student satisfaction and mediates the influence of quality of teaching on student satisfaction. The results of multiple regression tests confirmed that that institution branding influences student satisfaction ( $B = 0.680$ ,  $t = 31.538$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Students expect that institutions with good branding can fulfil their expectation and would therefore feel more satisfied.

In regard to the mediating effects of institution branding, the influence of quality of teaching staff on student satisfaction is substantial, as shown in the regression weighting ( $B = 0.513$ ,  $t = 20.109$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). However, when institution branding comes into the picture, the level of influence of quality of teaching staff on student satisfaction reduces significantly ( $B = 0.254$ ,  $t = 10.960$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). In other words, the mediating effect of institution branding is only considered partial as the influence of the quality of teaching staff on student satisfaction remains significant. Therefore, an institution with high commitments to the quality of teaching staff will influence its student satisfaction more than its institution branding.

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that higher education students, from both government-funded and self-funded post-secondary institutions, demonstrate similar perceptions. This study is one of the few studies of student

perception in a higher education setting in Asia, and the overall findings are in line with the studies on student perceptions in Western countries by Haley and Sidanius (2006), and Yang Stafford and Gillenson (2011).

The findings from this study have practical and theoretical implications for educators, students and researchers. As there are a number of new post-secondary institutions which compete with established government sub-vented universities for student admissions, it has become increasingly important to be aware of students' expectations of not only the quality of teaching staff but also of the institution itself. Therefore, surveying students regarding satisfaction in relation to institution branding will provide both academics and students with information valuable for achieving pedagogical objectives and nurturing appropriate quality improvements of teaching staff. Furthermore, it may help researchers understand how student satisfaction will impact institutions that offer higher education programmes. The following real-life incident illustrates the significance of this study, for if the findings had been available to the institutions involved some of the problems could have been avoided.

The current study adds value to the body of knowledge in this area of study by verifying the theories relating to the contribution of branding to satisfaction. This knowledge may be used in other areas of studies such as management and marketing of products and services. Although many academic studies have emphasised the influence of service quality and facilities on student satisfaction, the current study places more importance on the teaching staff as the main attraction of an education institution. This study shows that the most important asset of an education institution is its teaching staff. This study also verifies marketing theory, one aspect of which associates the classic characteristics of service with frontline personnel in marketing (de Chernatony, 2006; Riley and de Chernatony, 2000; Blankson and Kalafatis, 1999; Gronroos, 1990; Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1985; Lovelock, 1983). The competitive business of education in recent years has fallen prey to paying too much attention to the physical evidence of institutions while forgetting that frontline service is delivered by teaching staff whose knowledge and quality contributes significantly to the branding of an institution (Suomi and Jarvinen, 2013; Skallerud, 2011; Shamuganathan and Tong, 2010; Brady et al., 2005).

## **6. Limitations and Recommendations**

Firstly, as this study collected data on a cross-sectional basis only, a longitudinal research using multi-method measurements over a period of time could increase the knowledge of causality of relationships between quality of teaching staff, student satisfaction and institution branding and thereby help determine what strategies enhance satisfaction and branding over time in higher education. Second, as the demographic result shows that respondents were mostly in their first two years of study, future research could explore other demographic characteristics, such as graduate students, who may have different perceptions of the research constructs. Thirdly, the findings of this study can then be adopted to lead a thorough literature review to ascertain more research gaps and more research questions so as to cultivate a more wide-ranging research model. To develop the research further, a comprehensive empirical study using quantitative methods may be carried out to gather data from a more extensive population, such as students from different years of study or from different disciplines, and validate it by further qualitative research. Last but not the least, since it is no simple task for a higher educational institution to mature, time is essential element for the quality of staff to have an effect on students' perceptions. The cross-sectional kind of this research restricted the work to shot statistical affiliations deprived of considering likely deviations in perception over time. Therefore, a longitudinal approach, which attends to the time-gap between cause (i.e. quality of teaching staff) and result (i.e. student satisfaction) may boost appreciation of the causal relationships and help to govern if there are any other subsidizing aspects.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study elucidates the results of the empirical research, discussed the implications for educators, students and researchers, identified the study's contribution to the relevant body of knowledge, explained the limitations of the study, and made recommendation for further related research. Results of the study show that: (1) teaching quality of staff has a direct influence on student satisfaction, (2) teaching quality of staff has a direct influence on institution branding, (3) institution branding has a positive and direct influence on student satisfaction, and (4) institution branding mediates the relationship between quality of teaching staff and student satisfaction. Due to critical changes in higher education in the last thirty years, the demand for quality education has proliferated. According to the 2012/13 Financial Budget Report by the Financial Secretary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, 18,000 non-local students from more than 70 countries or regions came to Hong Kong for post-secondary studies in 2011/12 academic year. Hong Kong as a regional education hub has started to bear fruit and its tertiary institutions have been recognised as leading institutions in various international rankings. This is further evidence that institution branding image has become increasingly important. A study by Guolla (1999) found that student satisfaction was 74% with the course and 67% with the instructors, implying the importance of teaching quality. Meanwhile the current study shows that branding can be built through teaching quality, which subsequently increases student satisfaction, confirming past studies by Karatepe, (2011) and Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001).

However, since this study was carried out exclusively in Hong Kong, further research is required in other jurisdictions to verify the generalizability of the findings. For example, the research framework developed for this study could be applied to other higher education institutions in nearby Asian countries for comparative purposes. Researchers of higher education may wish to perform a longitudinal study in order to follow transformations in the implementation of reputation and image practices to see how they link with different facets of quality.

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