

CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

(香港城市大學)

**A Study of Postgraduate Program Preference
from Brand Experience Perspective**

(從品牌體驗角度研究碩士課程偏好行為)

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ABSTRACT

In Hong Kong, there are eight institutions funded by the public through the University Grants Committee (UGC) and some other self-financing institutions offering various postgraduate programmes to qualified working adults for their lifelong development. If eight UGC funded universities want to design effective student recruitment strategies to fight against the competition, they must understand the key determinants affecting students on choosing “branded” postgraduate programs. However, there has been relatively little serious research effort in measuring students’ preferences of university brands.

Students’ university brand preference differences may not only rest on the variances of tangible factors including duration of completion and tuition fees but on other intangible (branding) attributes. Throughout the years of study at the local universities, students interacted with each other to establish personalized experience in relation to that particular university. This is called as their unique university brand experience. It is still questionable that would this kind of brand experience formed over several years of study with that particular university (“the antecedent”) affects the students’ preference on a particular university brand of postgraduate program (“the consequence”). In other words, query on whether brand experience is part of the antecedents contributing to the preference on enrolling a postgraduate program (“the consequence”) is worth study. Therefore, the research topic is proposed as “A Study of Postgraduate Program Preference from Brand Experience Perspective”.

The proposed augmented conceptual model adds high brand experience as well as high trust and positive perceived personality toward university brand preferences with an aim to explain student preferences for university brands in local higher education sector by using actual students’ brand preferential data from six different universities. This brand preference model, calibrated on 4 weeks of interviews by 360 undergraduates, shows new insights on the relationship between brand experience (“an independent variable”), brand personality (“the first mediator”), brand trust (“the second mediator”) and brand preference (“the dependent variable”).

The results support these additions that brand trust and personality are important links between brand experience and favorable brand preferential intentions. The most novel finding is that both brand trust and brand personality can enhance a brand’s preference. The results establish the mediating roles of these additional variables between brand experience and brand preferential intentions and also identify the incremental

explanatory value of these additional mediators, which have been neglected in previous university branding research.