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## Conference Title

# University image and its relationship to student satisfaction- case of the Middle Eastern private business schools

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## ABSTRACT

This work focuses on the study of the universities image with the aim of explaining the components of image and attributes of student satisfaction. Our study investigates the relationships between the different components of the university image and to what extent they may affect the students' satisfaction. Hypotheses were drawn setting the relationships between the affective, cognitive and overall image in relation with satisfaction. The results of the empirical work carried out on a representative sample of 763 students located in 8 countries in the Middle East demonstrate that the cognitive component of image is an antecedent of the affective component. In turn, both of these components influence the formation of the overall image of a university. However the affective and overall images statistically and significantly affect the overall satisfaction of students with their university. The research could also be extended to cover the area of the Middle Eastern Basin and study the process of formation of the university image by various publics.

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## 1. Introduction

The trend in universities today is shifting towards an engagement in marketing and branding programs. The purpose is often to enhance the reputation of the university and to have a positive influence on university ranking. Greater competition existing today is to attract the best and brightest students. A university is no longer just an institution of higher

learning but also a business. Millions of dollars are spent by universities trying to burnish their image and enhance their position in these rankings. Both students and universities are adopting the mantra suggested by Bunzel: "Markets in which small differences in performance give rise to enormous differences in reward" [1]. This leads us to our problematic which states: To what extent does the cognitive, affective and overall image affect student satisfaction? In our study, we will discuss the issue from a perspective focused towards in the context of a university. In this regard, the importance of brand image will be extended to the university

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context which is a new area of interest as a subject for study and as a novel area of study for marketing management.

The aim of the study is to investigate the relationships existing between cognitive, affective and overall university image and as a role precedent to students' satisfaction. This work should be a value to education leaders, education planners, as well as university professors and administration which will help them understand the student behavior and implement strategies which have a direct effect on boosting up the university's image and developing student satisfaction consequently. Image of universities is a new topic that is arousing interest. The academic research into corporate communication has focused on the transmitter and on the construction process of message and has ignored the approaches focusing on the receiver. Thus the originality of this empirical study validates an attractive novel value of university image focused towards the consumer.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The University Image

#### 2.1.1. The University Approach

Standard dictionaries define a university as an educational institution of the highest order, being a corporate body of teachers and students and providing facilities for teaching and researchers as well as offering undergraduate and graduate programs and bestowed degrees. A student is defined as a person who studies or investigates; and faculty or academic staff is described as being related to branches of learning or the learned professions [2]. Bok noted the important role of the university: "Advanced training, specialized knowledge and scientific discovery are now essential to solving many urgent problems facing our civilization – problems of disease and health, of the environment, of economic progress, of human survival... Universities are better equipped than any other institution to produce the knowledge needed to arrive at effective solutions and to prepare highly educated people to carry them out..."[3]. Universities provide a mix of public and private goods. Thus, it is important to understand how the university is creating value. Paulsen and Feldman use a widely popular system to describe the activities of a university [4]. This system explains the nature of faculty work by adopting 4 functional categories: teaching, service, research and academic citizenship. The importance of knowledge creation is very inspiring. It engenders social and economic change and plays a very decisive role in preserving the cultural and social continuity of the democratic system [5]. The open society needs individuals who can make sense of their environment and are able to generate responsible choices [6]. Therein lies the essence of public good provided by higher education system.

Nowadays, universities must accept their dual identity in order to survive. The normative identity which is the traditional, ideological image and the other identity is the utilitarian which is cost-effective image. They go to so far as to liken the university to a "church" and a "business". In fact research findings acknowledge that universities must become cost-effective and work like businesses in order to survive and prosper. Universities are obliged to tell their internal and external populations how they function in both traditional and utilitarian ways. In order to respond to the dynamic environment, universities should actively begin to communicate to the outside stakeholders and the media [3]. A positive image should be generated with the various publics with whom a

relationship is established and cultivate positive lines of communication with each. Although organizational image has been studied frequently with the regard of the corporate sector, it has been rarely examined in the non-profit arena. Treadwell and Harrison conducted one of the few studies examining the university's image among its stakeholder groups: students, faculty and staff [7]. The items identified in the study were commitment to academic excellence, having well regarded business school, whether students form close friendships, whether graduates are proud of their education, whether the school has national image, whether faculty research has national image, whether the school makes a cultural contribution to community, whether students party too much, presence of adequate facilities, problems with athletes' academic performance, and the homogeneity of the student population.

#### 2.1.2. Universities Worldwide

Universities around the world are classified mainly into 3 main categories; American, European and Asian. All of these models possess their advantages and disadvantages; however the best university model is the one that combines the best elements of them all.

##### 2.1.2.1. American Universities

In the United States, private universities are very common and tend to be more prestigious. They rely heavily on private funding and often offer scholarships and grants [8]. Sports take a vital role in the student's life, thus universities often have football fields, swimming pools and large gymnasiums. Moreover, Americans opt for a very well-rounded education and are quite flexible in the area of course selection [9].

##### 2.1.2.2. European Universities

They are mostly public funded by the state and offer almost free education for all students. Universities in Europe tend to be egalitarian; for instance there is no major difference between the top ranked universities in Finland (University of Helsinki) and a lesser ranked one [9]. However, private universities have a tendency to be very selective, have high entrance requirements and very specialized courses.

##### 2.1.2.3. Asian Universities

Most Asian nations consider that higher education a highly valued privilege. As a result students tend to take it seriously and live in an environment where they have to compete to be admitted and to earn good grades. All textbooks are written and produced in the private sector however; they must be approved from the Ministry of Education [10]. Research output isn't nearly as supported at Asian universities as in the West. The Asian scholars overwhelmingly believe that their universities view research as of "medium importance" as compared to that of teaching. Another East-West difference is the remuneration. Many Asian professors don't meet up ends with their salaries. Moreover, government control affects funding and also affects scholarships, since academic research in many Asian nations is limited and is not free as in the West [11].

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