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# Chris Chi Kin Lai, Georgios Patsiaouras and Zafeirenia Brokalaki

## Tutors as Brands: Exploring the Celebrification of the Hong Kong Shadow Education Sector

Celebrities play an important role in contemporary society and culture. Becoming a celebrity, in several sectors, is much easier in our days, considering the growing popularity of the process of celebrification. This study focuses on the Hong Kong shadow education market and explores how a group of tutors, who participate directly in marketing practices, are perceived by the media and themselves as celebrities. Following empirical research, we critically discuss tutors' performance and celebrity status as a phenomenon which has remained under-examined in the literature around celebrity endorsement. Our findings seek to provide some novel insights in the process of celebrification of tutors in the context of Hong Kong and draw wider conclusions around the marketisation of shadow education.

**Keywords:** Celebrification, Celebrity Endorsement, Celebrity Tutor, Human Brand

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### INTRODUCTION

Celebrity culture has been widely studied in marketing literature (Hackley and Hackley 2015) and sociology (van Krieken 2012), amongst others. Celebrities are embedded into contemporary society playing multiple roles, such as public figures to attract media attention; endorsers in advertisements to promote brands or products; and role models to be imitated or worshipped (Schimmelpfenning and Hunt 2020). Academic definitions on what constitutes a celebrity are often wide or vague because any individual who is famous or well-known can be perceived as a celebrity nowadays (Banister and Cocker 2014). Leslie (2011) argues that public recognition and regular media exposure are key features of being considered a celebrity. Previous studies on celebrity culture and celebrity endorsement focus on a variety of individuals - such as the British Royal Family - up to ordinary people who earn their celebrity status via social media. Becoming a celebrity is easier nowadays, such as the DIY or micro celebrities whose fame rises through the Internet and social media (Khamis et al. 2016).

Driessens (2013) defines the formation of celebrity as *celebrification*, which refers to the changes at the individual level by which ordinary individuals are transformed into a celebrity, such as celebrity politicians or celebrity CEOs. However, further investigation is needed to understand how and who is involved in the process of *celebrification* within specific sectors. For example, limited knowledge exists around the process of *celebrification* in Asian contexts and diverse industries like the shadow education sector, where this study seeks to provide novel insights and make a fresh contribution.

## CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

### Celebrities as Brands

According to Thomson (2006), a brand can be extended to humans via the efforts of marketing communication channels in local and global settings. The mass mediatisation of individual personality positions celebrities as human brands who are the subject of interpersonal and inter-organisational communications and marketing (Khamis et al. 2016; Parmentier et al. 2013). Pringle (2004) argues that celebrities are brands in their own right because they regularly seek to pursue their own reputation and perceived value. Celebrities' daily lives, product choices and personal affairs become commercialised goods exchanged within a market system and consumed by the public (Bell 2010; Iqani and Schroeder 2016). Celebrity brands are consumed by large audiences in various parts of the world creating and shaping a dominant celebrity culture. Cashmore and Parker (2003) critically assess the process of celebrity branding arguing that the commodification of celebrity brands turns individuals into products for consumption. Kerrigan et al. (2011) also argue that consumers admire and consume celebrity brands for the celebrity's economic value, allure, charisma and glamour, which provide associations with the celebrity itself. Considering the rise of social media globally, nowadays, digital platforms accelerate the process of *celebrification* more than ever compared to the past (Kowalczyk and Pounders 2016).

There are several studies around the concept of celebrity and considering its multidimensional nature, this paper focuses on the concept of celebrity creation and celebrity branding, within the unexplored context of Asia. Adopting a psychological angle, Rockwell and Giles (2009) have elaborated on the concept of fame by conducting interviews with 15 well known American celebrities. In this particular context, fame can easily lead to loss of privacy, demanding expectations, escalation of ego needs and occasionally isolation as well as unwillingness to embrace fame. Accordingly, fame can be perceived as a diachronic phenomenon where, primarily, urban mass societies glorify specific individuals (an emperor for example) for their extraordinary actions (Rockwell and Giles 2009). On the other hand, celebrity is a modern phenomenon which derives from the emergence of mass media and technologically advanced means of communication (Internet e.g.) which create awareness, provide mass exposure and raise the profile of various individuals in different parts of the world. In this project, we focus on the process of *celebrification* and celebrity creation, within an Asian context, rather than fame which stems from the attribution of glorification on a very small number of people.

As Kowalczyk and Royne (2013) argue that celebrity brands often reflect the celebrities'

commitment to products and services which can enhance the brand's credibility. Celebrities also like to seek public attention through their followers and fans to pursue sustained visibility and build brand equity (Malone and Fiske 2013; Williamson 2016). Existing literature also suggests that celebrities representing and endorsing particular brands need to hold personality traits, qualities and values that are consistent to the brand identity and the strategic positioning of the product (Parmentier et al. 2013). However, the aforementioned studies focus primarily on well-known celebrities, like athletes or actors, which leaves other sectors and phenomena marginalised and underexplored. Furthermore, the vast majority of these studies provide examples from Western contexts, leaving Asian or non-Western contexts unexplored.

#### The Transformation of Non-celebrities to Human Brands

Human brands are not limited to celebrities. According to Gamson (2011), almost everyone could be transformed into a brand to promote himself/herself or facilitate the promotion for products. Marketers use business executives, employees, everyday people or even anthropomorphic brand characters to promote products or service brands (Bendisch et al. 2013; Patterson et al. 2013). However, the role of human brands in some sectors, like the educational sector, have remained under-researched.

Kantola (2014) argues that a key difference between a human brand as an endorser and a human brand as an organisation's actor is the authority to make promises on behalf of the organisation. Organisational actors, such as Apple's Steve Jobs, are expected by consumers not only to make promises, but also to have responsibility for their delivery (Bendisch et al. 2013; Speed et al. 2015). This means that they are required to add authenticity and quality to the brands surrounding them. This value may help articulate these organizational brand stories, create a culture to attract and recruit talented people and build brand loyalty for a range of publics. Therefore, organisations use employees or management executives to turn their products or services into more profitable and desirable entities following their brand extension via the value of their members. Focusing on the shadow education sector, we show how Hong Kong tutors have been building their own celebrity status through the increased marketisation of the sector over the last 30 years. Accordingly, this study aims to provide some novel insights on an unexplored sector and context, where the phenomenon of celebrity endorsement takes place.

#### The Marketisation of Education and the Shadow Education in Hong Kong

The marketisation of education has long been debated in the literature of different disciplines, such as marketing (Molesworth et al. 2011; Sujchaphong et al. 2017; Brennan 2014), education studies (Arreman et al. 2013; Cotterill 2018) and business ethics (Natale and Doran 2012; Ricci 2018). Unfortunately, the commodification of education has led schools and universities to treat education as a commodity, and run like a profit-seeking company concentrated on economic returns; they seek resources, product evaluation and corresponding adjustments as well as a new relationship between teachers and students (Karpov 2013; Ricci 2018). An ongoing debate on education literature shows how the commodification of education results in encouraging catering for students and pleasing them through minimising study challenges, rather than equipping them to persevere in solving complex problems (Plante 2015; Schwartzman

2013). Yet, Karpov (2013) and McChesney (2013) argue that market-based principles are incompatible with education aspirations because the education sector is deemed a platform for knowledge dissemination to the public rather than profit-seeking.

A branch of education, which is known as shadow education, is found to spread dynamically and globally, particularly in Asia, in the past few decades (Dawson 2010; Kim and Jung 2019). Shadow education refers to private supplementary tutoring that exists alongside mainstream school education as organised learning opportunities (Buchmann et al. 2010; Lee et al. 2009). It can be conducted by individuals or companies and contains two main categories: tutoring for academic subjects related to school curriculums and tutoring for hobbies such as musical instrument playing (Bray 2010). In this study, shadow education refers to the former and it is offered by chain tutoring centres (companies) in Hong Kong.

Shadow education and formal school education are found to co-exist in Hong Kong in which the shadow education providers consist of individuals, firms and chains (Kwo and Bray 2014). Research shows that 72.5% of primary students and 85.5% of secondary students in Hong Kong received private supplementary tutoring in 2010 (Bray and Lykins 2012). A recent government report reveals that the average weekly study time of students in Hong Kong was, on average, 46.4 hours in 2015, which was 4.4 hours lower than in Singapore, where the time spent studying was 50.8 hours (Research Office, Legislative Council, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2018). These statistics demonstrate that shadow education is popular in Hong Kong, and echoes several claims (Dawson 2010; Yung 2019) that shadow education is prominent, particularly in Asia.

The nature of shadow education is commercially driven and examination taking oriented, which has attracted the attention of researchers in education regarding its impacts on students, teachers and schools (Bray 2013; Mori and Baker 2010). In Hong Kong, both researchers (Kwo and Bray 2014; Zhan et al. 2013; Yung 2019) and journalists (Shou 2015; Ives 2016) have found the tutors from main chain tutoring centres to engage in marketing activities in which their photos and names are regularly placed in advertisements to promote their tutoring service. A plethora of advertisements featured tutors promoting their tutoring can be found on the high streets, which is described as idolised tutoring held by celebrity tutors (Eastweek 2016; Shou 2015; Yung 2017). These tutors' engagement in promotion is uncommon in other countries; its existence in the Hong Kong shadow education market represents a novelty and contrasts with other educational markets. This also reflects the marketisation of education in the shadow education sector, which is an under-examined topic.

Looking at what has been described as celebrity and human brands in the literature, little research is found in regard to investigating how tutors develop themselves into a celebrity tutor to promote and deliver their tutoring business. Accordingly, this study seeks to explore the phenomenon of celebrity tutors in the Hong Kong shadow education sector and seeks to answer the central research question: How is the celebrification of tutors made and maintained in the Hong Kong shadow education sector? In the following section, we elaborate on the research methods and tools we employed so as to answer

this research question.

## METHODS

A qualitative investigation was conducted to explore the phenomenon of celebrity tutor in Hong Kong. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method (Silverman 2013) aiming to collect the voices of participants who are involved in decision making and the operation of tutoring centres. A total of 27 interviews were carried out in 2015, which were held on a one-to-one basis. We initially used a purposive sampling strategy, since our objective was to interview individuals who currently hold, or had held in the recent past, particular professions, positions and roles within the tutoring centres. Our purposive sampling technique was based on variability, and took the form of diversity sampling, with the aim to cover a wide range of tutoring chains' professionals (Bryman and Bell 2015). To become more precise, the composition of the chains' staff interviewed includes founders, senior managerial staff, administration staff, marketing staff, customer service staff, tutors, tutors' personal assistants and teaching assistants in four main chain tutoring centres in Hong Kong.

At the first stage of our study, we identified two founders and directors of chain tutoring centres in Hong Kong, through our social networks, who were willing to take part in our research study and gave us the overall permission to access professionals employed at these centres. We considered their position as senior managers and, therefore, we treated them as gatekeepers, who could suggest additional candidates and help us recruit more participants working at relevant centres in the city. In other words, not only these contacts served as our first interviewees but also as very important gatekeepers for the development of our later snowballing sampling strategy (Creswell 2014). At a second stage, more professionals from different tutoring centres, job levels, positions and career stages were approached and interviewed. Every research participant was asked to recommend potential candidates who fitted the inclusion criteria for recruitment, to facilitate us continue and enrich our study. Interviews lasted from one to two hours and were completed when data saturation was achieved (Silverman, 2013). All interviews were audio-recorded and manually transcribed and analysed. In the paper, pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of our participants.

To respond to the central research question, approximately 30 key questions were set in an interview guide, organised in thematic units, regarding the roles of participants, the operation and the business format of the chain tutoring centres, as well as the partnership strategies among tutors and the branding endeavours of the professionals taking part in the study. Visual elicitation was also used as a part of the interview guide to assist in the interview process (Belk et al. 2013). There are many marketing promotion materials, mainly printed advertisements of the tutoring centres, that appear in newspapers throughout the year in Hong Kong. Major tutoring centres also use giant billboards on building walls and trains or underground train stations (e.g. Figure 3), as well as advertisements on buses' exteriors to promote their businesses. These

advertisements reflect the chains' messages to the public and the marketing methods adopted. A total of 20 advertisements from 2005-2015 were selected as interview visual aids. The chosen advertisements reflect the dynamic evolution regarding the promotion strategy of the sector and its market evolution over that time. Our data collection led to the construction of three main advertisement categories: a) advertisements in which a tutor was shown; b) advertisements in which more than one tutor was shown, and c) advertisements for a chain tutoring centre. These advertisements helped build a rapport with the interviewees and elaborate on complex issues.

We used thematic analysis to interpret both the visual and oral data collected through the interviews (Bryman and Bell 2015). Three themes emerged from the analysis to address the central research objective which are: a) tutors as celebrities, b) tutors as human brands and c) tutor-brand alliances.

## FINDINGS

### Tutors as Celebrities

There was an overall idea, which was commonly shared among participants that celebrities are public figures or famous people, whose names are known by the public and are often shown in the media. They stated that the term celebrity can be used to refer to any person, but most celebrities are actors, singers, businesspeople or athletes. Many shadow education tutors were also recognised by the participants, in general, as a kind of celebrity and public figure because they are widely known by the public via their advertisements in which their names and photos are shown. Besides, the participants revealed that journalists are often interested in reporting the news and gossips related to the celebrity tutors. This means that the presentation of celebrity tutors in the public via advertisements and journalists' reports can lead to the tutors becoming well-known and being perceived as celebrities. This also echoes the broad definition of celebrity found in the literature (Hackley and Hackley 2015; Williamson 2016) in which media stories play a significant role in the celebrification process (Driessens 2013; Leslie 2011).

The celebrity tutor's name was found to represent his/her recognition and value in the market, which influences his/her celebrity status, competitiveness and business opportunities, such as students' enrolment in their tutoring and their bargaining power with tutoring centers. Several participants argued that the popularity of tutors perceived by the students could reflect their perceived service quality. This means that the more popular a tutor is, the more business the tutor earns and the more recognition the tutor perceives, which accelerates the tutor's celebrity status in the market.

"Public's awareness [of us is] our industry norm. This is our market value. They [students] prefer to enrol in famous tutor classes, because they feel more confident [...] and a greater number of enrolments means that more people trust the tutor." (Joyce, 34).

The celebrity tutors were found to be eager to build and enhance their reputation and the public's awareness of them in the market. The tutors preferred to use traditional

media, such as newspapers and images on buses' exteriors to launch their advertisements due to their effectiveness in establishing visual awareness among the public. Several tutors revealed that through these media channels, their advertising messages can reach not only their target audience, i.e. students, but also the wider public, in respect to the pressure around examinations taking in Hong Kong as well as the value of tutors in assisting students to excel in examination taking.

“Regular exposure in newspapers and outdoor advertisements is very important. You need to let people see you, remember you and talk about you ... Because we [celebrity tutors] appear in public, so we are known. Even if you cannot name us, you know [our nicknames of] Tutor King and the tutoring industry.” (John, 48).

Regular media exposure was found to keep the tutoring centres, and particularly the tutors, visible to the public and serve as a reminder of examination taking and competition among students. These findings confirm previous studies (Gamson 2011; Hackley and Hackley 2015) that the tutors seem to be a type of celebrity due to the public's awareness of them. In this sense, celebrity tutors remind us of artists, pop idols and entertainment industry celebrities who are promoted intensively by the media.

#### Tutors as Human Brands

The celebrity tutors were also found to be a human brand and their tutoring was found to be their branded product/service. Several tutors described themselves not only as public figures but also a brand in themselves, which is used to market their tutoring. This sheds light on previous studies which show how brands extend to humans (Lunardo et al. 2015; Speed et al. 2015), particularly celebrities, as they are the most visible human brands (Kerrigan et al. 2011; Preece 2015).

“We are a brand, a product ... English is my profession. Students enrol in my tutorials because they want to buy my tutoring ... tutoring is a human-oriented service. Our name is the key.” (Brenda, 49).

The findings show how the celebrity tutors acknowledge the marketisation of the education sector and the roles they play within this, as human brands, in the process of celebrification. Such process motivates students to perceive the tutors as a lived brand in the market in which the tutor brands are well-aware of the branding techniques and use them to sell their tutoring. This also sheds light on the concept of celebrity as a marketable commodity (Bell 2010; Holmes and Redmond 2014) and concurs with previous findings (Fiske 2013; Williamson 2016) which show the building and evolution of celebrity status.

The celebrification and branding processes in the shadow education sector that we explore are reinforced by certain qualities, attributes and characteristics associated to the tutors, such as their expertise, appearance, charisma, teaching performance etc. The marketing staff revealed that the tutor's name, photo and the academic subject he/she serves are highlighted in advertisements used by the tutors to differentiate themselves from their key competitors in the market.

“I think tutors are like brands... Unlike a commodity, you cannot touch the tutoring to evaluate it [physically]. This makes the branded service more tangible and familiar. The tutoring is conducted by the tutor, anyway, not anyone else.” (Cynthia, 33).

Further evidence shows how tutor branding processes are managed by the tutors to add meanings and value to their tutoring service. The tutoring is humanised by labelling it with the tutor’s name rather than the chain tutoring centre that the tutor works for. This makes the service more tangible, like a human brand, as argued by Brannan et al. (2011). Tutors are very aware that the human performance of a brand is critical; their name represents an educational performer that is known for their distinctive performance.

“Like the stand-up comedy, basically the tutor uses jokes to gain students’ attention and enjoyment. When they [students] are happy, they will pay attention to the tutoring, right?.” (Eric, 34).

“It’s about the image... You want to be perceived as a star, you need to present yourself as a star. Your style, your gesture, your tools all are about a package that casts you as a star tutor rather than an unknown teacher.” (Mary, 31).

In addition to highlighting the tutors’ names and their photos on the advertisements, these can be found on the tutoring materials and business gifts, as shown in Figure 1. Such evidence reflects that the tutor’s name and photo represent a part of the visual elements that serve as props to promote their brand identity and enhance the tutors’ celebrity status. These insights extend previous research findings in celebrification and human branding strategies and processes from a practical perspective showing how the celebrification of tutors and human brands emerge in the Hong Kong shadow education sector.

**Figure 1: Marketing material with celebrity Tutor’s Name (Mia Wong and Antonia Cheng) Photos are Imprinted on Tutorial Notes and Promotional Gifts**  
(source: The authors’ collection)

These humanised materials are commonly found in chain tutoring centres and are distributed to students enrolling in branded tutor classes.



Previous studies show that celebrities and brands, in general, exist separately, and are linked by an endorsement contract (Hollensen and Schimmelpfenning 2013; Lee and Park 2014). Their relationship is, therefore, terminated when the contract ends. However, our research shows that the tutor, the tutor brand and the branded tutoring are integrated into one piece, which is represented by the name of the tutor as a human brand. Their relationship is not based on any contractual arrangement like celebrity endorsements in advertising. This self-creation of the celebrity tutor and the tutor brand shows another marketing performance of the tutor, which establishes self-branding development activities as a part in the celebrification process. Such process differs from common celebrification processes implemented by the entertainment representation industry with the aim to develop celebrity artists or Hollywood stars as argued by Leslie (2011) and Rein et al. (1997).

“They [tutors] manage their image and style, promotion and supporting teams. They negotiate with the chains directly. Although they look like artists, they don’t have a manager for job seeking or bargaining. They do it themselves.” (John, 48).

The findings also extend understandings of existing business formats of contracting in the Hong Kong shadow education sector in which tutors serve as a contractor themselves, rather than an employee of chain tutoring centres (Bray 2013; Shou 2015). The celebrity tutors were found to work independently in regard to tutoring design, production, delivery, and promotion; chains only provide the infrastructure, venues and administration (enrolment). This business nature can also be understood as consignment business, such as designer brand booths in department stores in which the designer brands rent spaces from the department stores to sell their products.

“Tutors and their tutoring centre work as partners, with a profit-sharing scheme. The tutor is responsible for his tutoring, operation and manpower. The tutoring centre offers classrooms and other facilities, administration, and enrolment, like a

platform.” (Nancy, 55).

“Our operation is just like running a firm. We have designers, IT, administration, marketing, tutoring material writers, we also have our own office, we’re not working in the chain [because they have their own office], except for conducting the tutoring.” (Florence 32).

In order to establish and manage their status and tutoring business, tutors need more than their primary expertise, i.e. academic knowledge, but also other marketing, management and design skills. Each tutor brand may also embody particular meanings in regard to these perceived qualities, which reflect the branding of consumer goods (Brannan et al. 2015; Kim and Hong 2017).

“Our name is often bundled with the tutoring. Let’s say Kenneth equals English. YY represents a Chinese expert. Every tutor links up his name with his expertise to sell.” (Joyce, 34).

These findings show that for certain tutors, their image and positioning in terms of their (brand) name is strong in the market, which represents their celebrity status and reputation, and even their tutor brand image. This demonstrates that some celebrity tutors are very skilful in managing their image and position themselves in the market. This involves a strong marketing knowhow, such as brand building and techniques, which are beyond the territory of teaching, but are common marketing practices in the marketing of consumer goods/services (Cohen 2014; Holt 2016). It also implied implies that those non-teaching skills and activities are critical to the performance of the tutors.

#### Tutor Brand Alliances

Another interesting observation is that branded tutoring is often found to be extended to two or more tutors who co-exist in the tutoring advertisement. There are several tutors whose advertisements show that they belong in a particular celebrity tutor’s team. The names of two or more tutors were often found on a single advertisement or brochure. Figure 2 shows that brochures from different tutoring chains represent the leadership of a primary tutor next to a junior tutoring team. This is somehow different to the concept of umbrella branding, which refers to the practice of labelling more than one product under a single brand name (Rasmusen 2016). Conversely, this practice looks like a brand alliance (Ambroise et al. 2014) in which two (tutor) brands appear on a single product (tutoring), or one celebrity tutor endorses other tutors.

**Figure 2: Different lead tutors are Shown in the Brochures from Different Tutoring Chains (source: The authors’ collection)**



Several tutors shared that popular tutors often face the problem of over-demand. When they cannot take all students' orders (enrolment), the orders may drain to their competitors. To solve the problem of over-demand, tutors can extend their tutoring capacity through other tutors. Besides, there are some particularly tutors, who attempt to extend their business from the senior secondary students to the junior secondary students. A division of labour was found in the findings, whereby the strong tutors serve the senior students who are preparing for the DSE (similar to the GCE A-level examination), and the junior tutors under the strong tutor's name serve the junior students. The association between celebrity tutors and other less famous tutors reflects an effective marketing strategy that is designed to manage over-demand by leveraging the reputation of the celebrity tutor to attract attention and enhance the credibility and quality of the tutoring provided by less famous tutors. This can potentially result in extending a celebrity tutor's service capacity to generate more business, which represents an important practical consideration for the successful operation of the tutors and tutoring centres. We notice similar phenomena in other industries, for example, the presence of an Oscar winning actor in a film has a positive effect on the whole production. Similarly, the presence of a super-star athlete in a sports team provides opportunities for the promotion of the whole team.

“Popular tutors always have their own teaching team. This extends the tutor's tutoring [capacity] from senior secondary students to junior ones ... otherwise, how can they take all of the enrolment, particularly the live tutorials? Some students insist in live [tutorials], if they can't enrol, you may lose them forever.” (Michael, 51).

Furthermore, the association between an established tutor brand (the lead tutor) and a junior tutor brand (the tutors associated with the lead tutor) resembles an apprenticeship. The junior tutors perform as apprentices under the (lead) celebrity tutor.

“You may say it is a master and pupil relationship... in general, the junior tutors under a famous tutor's team serve junior secondary students ... This is not risky for

the famous tutor, and it's also a way of educating students to continue to enrol in tutoring with the famous tutor in the future." (Jack, 38).

The relationship of apprenticeship shows the lead tutor's ability to manage other tutors and demonstrates his/her business mind. The junior tutors also gain from that relationship. This collaboration echoes Kantola's (2014) notion of brand authenticity by which the lead tutors use their brand value to motivate (junior tutors) to work for them and customers (students) to buy (enrol) the tutoring offered by the lead tutors.

Additionally, the collaboration of different tutors aims to manage the demand and avoid losing it to competitors. Such process demonstrates tutors' power in managing their business and leveraging potential competitors (junior tutors) to extend their celebrity status and market influence in the celebrification process. This collaboration also serves as quality assurance by leveraging the lead tutor's reputation and perceived quality to the junior tutors. Meanwhile, this helps tutors to build brand loyalty by making students familiar with the quality and style of tutoring under the lead tutor brand. In result, the students may show loyalty and continue to choose that tutor's tutoring for the rest of their studies. This apprenticeship serves as a brand extension discussed in the literature on branding (Kowalczyk and Roynne 2013; Sattler *et al.* 2010) to ensure the tutor brands' sustainability and continuity in the market.

"They [students] trust YY, not me. But you say you are under YY's team and your ad shows it too, that is quality assurance. They [students] may think that if you are under YY's team, the service might not be too bad and they may choose yours if they can't enrol in YY's courses." (Joyce, 34).

Several tutors and marketing staff commented that advertisements and tutoring materials like the ones presented in Figure 2 represent brand alliances in which the celebrity tutors attempt to endorse their apprentice tutors. The lead tutor uses his/her celebrity status to endorse the junior tutors on advertisements and demonstrates his/her power of having a team of tutors under his/her name.

"It's logical. Every one shows himself [tutor's name and photo on the ad] as a brand of himself which is backup by a famous tutor [the lead tutor]. This is beyond endorsement but cooperation among them." (Nancy, 55).

This shows that the self-branding of celebrity tutors extends to tutor-brand alliances in which both lead tutors and junior tutors are brands of themselves and they are linked, whereby a strong brand is associated with weak ones. This echoes the findings of previous studies (e.g. Mishra *et al.* 2017; Riley *et al.* 2015) that have found that when one brand is less famous (e.g. the apprentice tutor brands), consumer evaluation and perception increase when it is bundled with a well-known and good quality brand (e.g. the lead tutor brands). These tutor brand-alliances, provide some novel insights to our understanding of both celebrity endorsement and human brand.

Furthermore, the concept of apprenticeship found in the findings reflects the barriers of entry in the shadow education sector. Different participants, particularly the tutors and

the tutoring centre founders, argued that the barriers of entry in the sector are high and it becomes very difficult to enter, as a newcomer, this particular market. They revealed that it is rare to see chain tutoring centres hiring or contracting unknown candidates as tutors. Several founders and teaching assistants further explained that journalists' reports regarding news and/or gossips about tutors who have changed jobs are always related to famous tutors, and never to unknown ones.

"The entry barrier in this industry is high. The chain tutoring centres won't hire unknown tutors. So, the only way to become an associate is by working with an existing tutor. Of course, the terms and conditions must be tough for them. The famous tutors are not idiots." (Henry, 29).

This type of apprenticeship implies that there is a system which offers a gateway for newcomers to enter the market, and build their own brand allowing tutors, particularly the celebrity tutors, to manage the demand for tutoring and their influence in the market, such as their brand awareness, celebrity status and market share. Such apprenticeships and tutor-brand alliances demonstrate how celebrity tutors are created and maintained as well as collaboration between tutors in the shadow education sector.

Furthermore, the name of the tutors was found to be more important than that of the tutoring centre. Different tutors and teaching assistants argued that the shadow education sector is similar to service providers in different industries, such as singers, fortune tellers or physicians, in which the service provider's name is often highlighted. They explained that students are well-aware that the tutoring will be conducted by a particular tutor, and the chain tutoring centre is only a platform that allows the tutoring to be undertaken. Hence, tutor branded tutoring is a live service centred on the tutor.

"Students choose me because of my name, my reputation ... they are smart, they know very well who is good, who is not... well, the name is important. It's our brand. People know me, Rebecca, that is my brand...because they [students] trust me." (Rebecca, 37).

This demonstrates that the tutors' name reflects their positioning and the target students' awareness of them in the market; their celebrity status is embedded in their name. Any tutor who lacks such positioning and fame, like newcomers for example, will find it difficult to compete in the market. The extensive advertisements for the celebrity tutors found in the market, coupled with the comments shared among the participants, agree that using the traditional above-the-line promotion is still popular in the Hong Kong shadow education sector and plays a key role in the celebrification process. Using giant billboards on building walls or in train stations and advertisements on buses' exteriors with the celebrity tutors' photos and names were found to be one of main promotion methods. The photos of celebrity tutors shown in advertisements can be seen on the high streets of city centres, together with other advertisements with celebrity endorsers, as shown in Figure 3. This creates the perception among the public that the celebrity tutors are a type of celebrity like other celebrities shown in advertisements for consumer goods, such as the celebrity endorser for a coffee shop shown on the right-hand side of Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Giant Billboards on Building Walls of Celebrity Tutors (left) and a Café Celebrity Endorser (right)** (Photograph taken on 23 Sep 2014 in Mongkok, Hong Kong)



The high-profile presentation of celebrity tutors via advertisements reflects their knowhow in terms of drawing the public's attention and branding themselves in the market, illustrating the celebrification processes in the Hong Kong shadow education sector. These ads of tutors in Figure 3, attract the attention of not only the targeted student body, but also the wider public. The self-branding establishment performed by the celebrity tutors is deviated from the self-branding of DIY practices of microcelebrities that is mainly constructed via social media (Chen 2013; Khamis et al. 2016). This is because social media was found to be secondary to the tutor brand building; celebrity tutors rely on traditional above-the-line promotion to earn their celebrity status. Besides, the tutor brand and his/her branded tutoring were found to both carry the name of the celebrity tutor, who is also known as the service provider of the tutoring, whereby the service provider and the service are inseparable (Lovelock et al. 2015). This reflects the hybrid role of celebrity tutors – both as a brand and a provider – which adds some fresh insights on the process of celebrification in the education sector.

## CONCLUSIONS

Shadow education tutors in Hong Kong were found to present themselves as both celebrities and human brands. This study explored the dynamics and practices of their performance and how these feed into idolisation and the creation of a fan culture around a tutor celebrity. Celebrity tutors' accounts reflect the claims found in the literature (e.g. Molesworth et al. 2011; Malone and Fiske 2013; Rojek 2012) that celebrity is a

commodity for sale in the market, which may have transformative value for other products as endorsers. The process of marketisation of education, in different levels, seems to prevail in several continents and contexts.

Different celebrity tutors were found to collaborate through an apprenticeship system that develops and fosters a tutor-brand-alliance to operate. There are celebrity tutors who extend their business by partnering with other less popular and less branded tutors. This partnership, which reminds us of an apprenticeship, shows how leading tutors aim to extend their networks by attracting talent (Kantola 2014) and attract talents – such as junior and unknown tutors - to work with them. It also serves as a gateway for newcomers to enter the market. Such relationships also reveal the politics and power tensions between tutors with different celebrity status and bargaining power in respect to leveraging each other to engage and cooperate in the market, and at the same time protecting the interests of each other, which is novel to the literature of celebrity endorsement.

This study also updated findings from previous studies, (e.g. Leslie 2011) which suggest that celebrity tutors need to regularly expose themselves in the media through advertising and promotion to establish and maintain their position in the public's mind. The tutors establish and promote their own brands and branded tutoring through a variety of above-the-line marketing communication efforts. The hybrid role of lived celebrity tutor brand and tutoring provider extends our understanding of celebrification, lived human branding and marketisation of education operating in the Hong Kong shadow education sector. These findings are context-specific, i.e. they relate to the shadow education sector, which is new in the literature on the marketisation of education. We suggest that in an increasingly competitive environment, celebrity tutors will try to identify more imaginative and marketing savvy means so as to raise their profiles and probably such process might have an impact upon the quality of educational provision. Scholars in the field of marketing and promotional communications can explore further these phenomena from a visual perspective and identify the impact of these promotional efforts on learning processes and outcomes. Therefore, we suggest that further research in different continents and countries can enhance our understanding around the process of branding and marketisation of education.

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