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Purpose of the Series

The aim of this publication is to provide an opportunity for students to publish the findings of their undergraduate or postgraduate work. Guidance on publication will be given by staff who will act as second authors. It is hoped that by providing a guided transition into the production of papers that students will be encouraged throughout their future careers to publish further papers. Guest papers are welcomed in any field relating to the Natural Environment. Please contact E.A.Laycock@shu.ac.uk. A template will be provided on request.

Acknowledgements

The editorial team would like to acknowledge and thank Will Hughes, Professor in Construction Management and Economics, University of Reading for permission to use the ARCOM template and the associated resources.

Editorial

It is a pleasure to introduce this, the first issue of the Sheffield Hallam University Natural Environment Research Transactions.

The aim of this journal is to draw together some of the excellent work produced by undergraduate students in the disciplines of Geography, and Environment and thus provide a parity of opportunity for all our students.

Future editions this journal will allow other students to benefit from the extensive and illuminating research into current and arising issues within the diverse disciplines encompassed within the remit of the Journal. We hope that providing this opportunity we encourage recent graduates to publish both soon after their studies and throughout their future careers.

I would like to extend my thanks as always to the staff of Sheffield Hallam University Natural and Built Environment Division who work as part of the editorial team to provide helpful comments and feedback. In addition I would like to recognise the efforts of the contributing authors and co-authors in writing these papers.

As Editor of this publication it has been a great pleasure to work with Sian Davies-Vollum who took a lead role in increasing the profile of undergraduate research and who has kindly agreed to write the forward to the publication. I greatly enjoyed working with her during her time at Hallam and wish her all the very best in her new role as Head of Geoscience at the University of Derby.

Prof. Elizabeth Laycock

Editor, Built Environment Research Transactions

Forward

It is with great pleasure that I write the forward for this, the first issue of Natural Environment Research Transactions (NERT). The publication of this new journal is partly due to the encouragement and tireless support of Professor Liz Laycock and our shared vision to act as advocates of student research. I am privileged to have been able to work with her and to have been involved in some small way with NERT.

The articles in this inaugural issue all originated as undergraduate dissertation work that was presented at the first Natural and Built Environment Student Research Showcase at Sheffield Hallam University in May 2015. I was fortunate to have the support to develop the showcase as a forum for final year undergraduate research. The event was to celebrate the breadth and quality of student research across the Department of the Natural and Built Environment while providing an opportunity for the students to share their work.

Most undergraduate dissertations just sit on a shelf when they are completed; this was a way to get all that exciting and interesting work out in the open! The process of arranging the event was amazingly simple. Academic advisors nominated their best student researchers who were then invited to present. This resulted in over thirty student presenters who were guided through the process of creating an academic research poster for the showcase. The event proved a success, attracting students and academic staff from across the department and provided a rare occasion to bring diverse subject areas together. There was a great buzz in the room with lots of lively discussion and debate and the pride and enthusiasm of the student researchers as they talked about their research was a joy to see.

Three of those student presenters rose to the challenge of writing up their work as an academic article and this is the work that you see herein. My hope is that this is the first of an annual issue of NERT that highlights the best work presented at the research showcase. As this year's event and these transactions prove, there are many talented and motivated undergraduate researchers eager to present and publish their work.

Dr. Sian Davies-Vollum

Head of Geoscience

University of Derby

CONTENTS

DEGREES OF DISTINCTION - THE RELEVANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION BRANDING FOR TEACHERS AND LEARNERS OF GEOGRAPHY AT SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD.

Charlie Bexon[1] **and Angela Maye-Banbury**[2]

Charlie Bexon studied BA Human Geography at Sheffield Hallam University. He graduated in November 2015 with a 2:1. Dr Angela Maye-Banbury is a Principal Lecturer in Department of the Natural and Built Environment (NBE). She supervised Charlie's dissertation and is NBE's student engagement lead.

Branding in higher education is a phenomenon which not only markets individual universities but also influences public and private perceptions of the higher education sector as a whole. In an increasingly market driven sector, university branding has emerged in recent years as a powerful driver in determining stakeholders' decision making regarding degree choices. Yet there is a dearth of scholarship which critically examines the relevance of branding to Sheffield Hallam University (SHU). By drawing on the academic literature and previously unpublished detailed interview data, we review the relevance of existing SHU branding strategies in shaping public and private perceptions of the university's reputation, credibility and integrity. We question whether current SHU branding measures excel

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in enhancing the university's potential to be viewed as a world class academic institution. Our analysis, which foregrounds the discipline of geography, reveals the enduring relevance of labels such as "ex-polytechnic", "redbrick" and "Oxbridge" in determining the distinct central characteristics of the SHU brand. We explore how enduring negative connotations of the SHU brand may be mitigated by targeted course promotion informed by stakeholder analyses to boost academic credibility and with this, commercial viability. In our concluding reflections, we explore how the interdependency between public and private representations of SHU may be further optimised to enhance SHU's reputation and credibility as a world class seat of teaching and learning. More specifically, we examine how SHU branding could be optimised to break a cycle of labelling which, we postulate, risks being detrimental to the student and staff experience in the longer term. We argue that a more discernible and radical shift of public discourse surrounding SHU is needed to optimise its capabilities. We show how more effective branding is integral to this process.

Key words: Branding, universities, academic credibility, integrity, geography

INTRODUCTION - THE RELEVANCE OF BRANDING TO THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

As we progress through the 21st century, it is increasingly apparent that brands have the ability to empower, build or harm an organisation's reputation. Universities, once deemed immune from the branding debate, are now engaging with branding discourse with vim and vigour. The construction of a discernible, enduring and compelling university

brand which appeals to a diverse range of stakeholders remains an ever present challenge. Significantly, parents as investors have become increasingly influential as secondary decision makers in determining their child's future degree choices (Grey *et al*, 2003).

This new emphasis in branding has not gone unnoticed by university management and leadership structures. The increasing commodification of knowledge, accelerated by the introduction of the fee regime, has meant that university corporate management agendas have turned their attention to branding as a discrete corporate strategic theme. Indeed, one source suggests that the globalisation of higher education system based on academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997). The theory of academic capitalism is explanatory of federal, state and university policies that have expanded the relationship between university and industry (Glenna, 2007).

Furthermore, given the increasing role of income in securing a university place, the widening participation agenda, once widespread in the sector, is now arguably being compromised a fewer people have the means to pay for a university education. Indeed, there is evidence that the policy discourse surrounding English universities has shifted as the fee regimes begins to grip. Mc Craig's (2015) analysis, for example, suggests that pre 1992 universities more commonly identify themselves as selecting only the brightest students whilst post 1992 focus more on aspirations and employability.

This paper is divided into six sections. Section one provides the context for our study. We also begin to discuss SHU's distinct approach to branding. Section two summarises our overall research aim and accompanying research objectives. We then provide a summary of the research methodology applied in the study and method of data analysis in section three. In section four, we critically review selected existing scholarship relevant to the principles and ideology which underpins contemporary university branding measures. We consider the transformational effect of neoliberalist ideology has had on the higher education landscape and the relevance of this shift to branding. We argue that more market driven critiques eclipse more pedagogically driven debates around academic communities and academic identities

in creating and perpetuating university branding measures. In section five, we reveal how the existing value chain model may be adapted by universities to maximise branding opportunities across a diverse range of stakeholders. We present our findings in section five. Here, using the discipline of geography, we review the relevance of SHU's branding with specific reference to academic integrity, quality and its claim to being the best modern university in the North of England. In our concluding reflections, contained in section six, we consider how SHU may optimise branding opportunities by foregrounding its quintessential industrial heritage. We suggest that urgent action is required by SHU university leadership to ensure that excellence in teaching is profiled more effectively internally and externally. We propose that SHU identifies then rigorously markets specific courses which compete favourably or even outperform traditional universities using league table student satisfaction data.

Our intention here is not to simplify the complex debates which surround university branding. Nor do we wish to reduce those debates to simplistic dichotomies. Rather, we are interested in exploring the extent to which SHU's status, specifically as a former polytechnic, (SHU was given university status in 1992) may be viewed as an asset, a liability or continuum comprising both elements which needs careful management and negotiation. The study was designed to examine the relevance of branding to students who, at the time the research was undertaken (Spring 2015), were completing undergraduate degrees in geography at either SHU or the University of Sheffield (UoS). Until now, no study has focused on this discrete theme.

Our study was timely. According to one source (The Times and Sunday Times Good Study Guide, 2015), SHU was ranked the "best modern university in the north of England" in 2015, a claim displayed conspicuously on SHU buildings in both its city and Collegiate Crescent campus. Significantly, current branding makes no reference to Sheffield's rich and influential industrial heritage, notably in relation to the manufacturing of steel and the mining of coal. Moreover, other league tables relay a different representation of SHU's league table position. Of particular significance is the National Student Survey and

to a lesser degree, the Higher Education Academy's Student Engagement Survey and the influential university league table contained in "The Guardian." This data are readily available in the public domain.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our aim was to review the relevance of SHU branding in shaping the learners and teaching experiences at SHU. More specifically, the research was designed to:

(i) Investigate the relevance of branding for higher education institutions.

(ii) Assess the extent to which SHU branding measures have helped redefine the identity of SHU during its transition former polytechnic to university status.

(iii) Explore the extent to which SHU's current branding measures, relative to UoS', enhances or detracts from the university's reputation and credibility.

(iv) Provide a set of recommendations designed to enhance SHU's academic credibility and reputation based on the power and increasing importance of branding.

Following an internal ethics review, we were assured that the study met SHU's ethical requirements as regards informed consent, confidentiality, data storage and health and safety for both interviewer and respondents. A mixed methods approach comprising both qualitative and quantitative research techniques was adopted but qualitative techniques dominated to address a deficit in existing scholarship. This mixed method approach allowed us to cross reference and interrogate our findings. The qualitative, humanist and interpretivist elements of the research gave the study distinction. Our intention was to review the unique perceptions of interviewees and the relative influence of SHU brand as expressed by those who at the time were undertaking geography degrees at the university. The intensely humanist and interpretivist approach enabled us to collect a diverse and often contradictory set of perceptions (Eyles, 1988) through

emphasising the value of human thought and experience (Myers, 2009).

We lay no claim that this research uncovers truisms. Rather, we aimed to identify what is specific, unique and deviant as regards SHU branding and hence generate relative meanings. As a guiding principle therefore, we subscribed to Myers (2009:38) assertion that interpretivist research facilitates "access to reality … only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings and instruments."

Following a successful pilot, six detailed interviews were completed lasting just under one hour. Our respondents comprised representatives of the discipline of geography: two SHU academic staff who teach geography and two SHU geography students. Interviewees selected were a selection of random cohorts and academics of access within the time constraints of the study. All interviews were recorded. Verbatim transcripts faithful to each interview were then produced. Open coding was used to identify recurring themes. Additionally, an online survey comprising open and closed questions was used to gather responses. A total of thirty-two responses were received using the online survey. These respondents were found through the use of Facebook and other social media such as Twitter. The only necessary criteria were that the respondent had some experience in higher education.

Open coding was used to analyse the qualitative data. Coding is the procedure commonly used to desegregate qualitative data (Shwandt 2007). By its very nature, it is inevitably subjective. To mitigate this, we took steps to assign codes independently. The data were then further examined then parsed into themes relevant to the research objectives. A critical analysis of the data was then undertaken.

TOWARDS THE MARKETISIATION OF KNOWLEDGE? THE RELEVANCE OF BRANDING TO THE UNIVERSITY SECTOR.

Not surprisingly, there is no consensus in the literature as to what constitutes branding. Existing scholarship suggests that branding is generally understood to denote a specific symbol, design or name to

distinguish a particular product amongst its competitors in the same market. When effectively branded, a product may have a more enhanced reputation as unique, trustworthy and desirable. Chapleo's (2010: 418) defines of branding as a "a synthesis of all the elements, physical, aesthetic, rational and emotional." For Vaid and Campbell (2003: 6), branding is the creation of "identifiable names and symbols to make their (manufacture's) products stand out from the competitors.

Without a doubt, the market for higher education is becoming more competitive with each passing year. Over 300 institutions of higher learning per annum in the UK today fight to grab their share of over half a million prospective students (Temple, 2001). Students have become highly discerning regarding their university experiences, often deferring to frames of references shaped by the discourse which dominate debates regarding perceived value for money (Rolfe 2003).

Yet despite the increasing relevance of branding to the university sector, little research exists which critically examines the relative influence of SHU branding measures in shaping perceptions of universities today. Although university branding is considered in the writings of Chapleo (2011), Johnston (2001), Ukpebor and Ipogah (2008) amongst others, there remains a dearth of scholarship on this theme. Moreover, what research does exist foregrounds the relative merits of neoliberalist private market principles in shaping universities' branding strategies (Doyle, 2001; Pricopie, 2007; Stamp, 2005) to the detriment of focusing on more pedagogically driven issues. More specifically, existing studies have neglected to consider the relevance of the SHU brand in shaping learners and teachers perceptions of the university as a whole. This research bridges that gap in existing scholarship.

Different strategies are needed by different companies to optimise branding opportunities. As Pricopie (2007) suggests, approaches to branding vary as a myriad of organisations seek to assert themselves in an increasingly commodity driven culture governed by neoliberalist principles. Branding techniques are thus becoming increasingly sophisticated and multi-sensory as companies jostle for their market share of a given product. The acquisition of perceived desirable

products, we are told, will enhance our own status thus enabling us to access many more desirable forms of capital (Holt 2002).

More subtle psychologically driven marketing tactics, largely centred around influencing our sense of identity, are also at work. For example, the writings of Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004) and Winter (2009) examine how leading brands seek to manipulate the consumer by both tapping into his/her core values and indeed in some cases, giving the consumer a mandate to modify his/her beliefs if this would lead to a boost in sale for a specific product. Indeed, for some, branding is seen as empowering for the customer by enabling him/her to become discerning consumer thereby only opting for the "best" products. According to Firth (1991: 381), "the measurement of quality for a service product is very difficult and consumers have to rely heavily on the brand name reputation of the supplier."

The marketization of the UK higher education system has forced universities to engage with the branding debate (Stamp 2005; Temple, 2001). Until recently, British universities' engagement with the principles of branding has been interactive, measured and lacking strategic direction. Indeed, as Doyle (2001) has noted, branding for most universities has merely meant simply displaying its crest on corporate headed newspaper as the primary sensory cue in creating the brand image. In some cases, even displaying the crest is redundant. When a brand is strong, it reaches the point that it need no longer market itself. Oxford University is a case in point - for many, the name speaks for itself. SHU has a coat of arms which includes the motto "learn and serve." Yet the coat of arms is included in few SHU publications. One exception is the booklet given to all attendees of graduation ceremonies.

For the vast majority of universities today, the real challenge is to create distinctive brands which communicate credibility, trust and confidence in an ever changing and volatile landscape (Bennet *et al*, 2003; Parameswaran and Glowacka, 1995; Santovec, 2007). Institutions of higher learning are complex, dynamic and diverse organisations with a wide range of stakeholders to satisfy. Individual departments within larger faculties provide a wide range of

undergraduate and postgraduate provision with multiple academic identities competing for space.

Significantly, however, whilst increasingly driven by neoliberalist principles, certain corporate values are still associated primarily with the university sector. These values include but are not confined to: academic freedom, collegial governance and institutional autonomy (Henkel, 2000). In university environments, the consolidation, development and communication of private market driven brand principles which remains congruent with its prevailing ethos inevitably poses particular challenges.

Furthermore, although university learning environments are increasingly interdisciplinary, academic staff often seek to retain specialist areas of interest. Therefore universities face multiple challenges when creating a memorable, discernible and desirable brand with disciplines as well as the institution itself. Multiple and often competing agendas are therefore at work. As Temple (2001:17) asserts, "You don't have to be a card carrying postmodernist to agree that the contemporary university is a bit more complex than the argument allows for".

Corporate Branding: A New Framework For Universities.

A limited number of frameworks have emerged in recent years to support universities in developing their distinctive brands although these are limited (Medina & Dufy, 1998). Medina and Duffy (1998) identified five key strategic themes relevant to university branding measures:

(i) The university environment;
(ii) Generated reputations such as the brand name
(iii) Graduate career prospects;
(iv) The destination image (such as political stability) and
(v) Cultural integration.

However, as we have suggested, higher education is increasingly a commodity, a "product", a theme conspicuous by its absence in this framework. By adapting Keller (2003), our own model addressed this and other deficits in the Medina & Dufy model (*ibid*). This new model is represented in Figure 1 below:

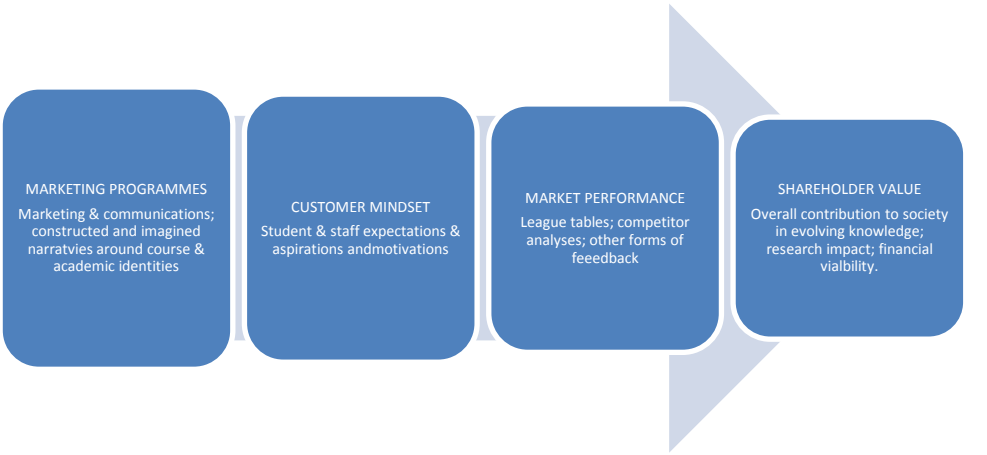

Figure 1: Value Brand Chain For the Higher Education Sector (adapted from Keller, 2003; Medina & Dufy, 1998)

In summary, the neoliberalist principles which shape university branding measures are increasingly relevant to both learners and teachers. University education does not conform to the conventional notion of a "product". Their governance systems continue to reflect an enduring commitment to collegiate culture, transparent decision making and academic identities through research and teaching. Yet the emergence of concepts such as academic capitalisation, the commodification of knowledge and the marketisation of the university sector have collectively been instrumental in compelling universities to develop branding strategies to secure a share in a highly competitive market. Thus the acquisition of knowledge is increasingly driven by whether or not prospective students have access to sufficient financial capital to complete a degree. Cultural capital is also important in accessing more elite universities. Bourdieu's (1986) ideas of cultural capital is centred around forms of knowledge and non-financial advantages that a person has, giving them a higher societal status.

Given the inevitable university hierarchy, academic snobbery inevitably ensues (Henkels, 2000).

FINDINGS

Our analysis revealed several interrelated themes relevant to university branding and the learner/teacher experience. In the interests of brevity, we are not able to cover each theme in detail here. Instead, we have selected three for review below to illustrate our central findings. These themes are:

- The relevance of branding to notions of "quality".

- The connectivity between academic identity and academic credibility.

- Lessons learnt based on a critique of SHU's branding measures.

Perceptions of Quality

Our analysis reveals the power of branding in shaping notions of "quality." There was a consistent view amongst our interviewees that quality diminished in former polytechnics. Conversely, red brick establishments were unquestionably highly respected and their "quality" unquestioned. Furthermore, in all cases, interviewees deemed the concept of quality as "old fashioned" thus diminishing perceptions of value. As one interviewee said:

"(Quality has)…negative connotations based on old fashioned definitions… If you look at the world in the modern sense I think it's not negative it's just highly due to perception."

Our analysis also has suggested that the name of an institution is immediately associated with an assumption of quality even before the student sits down in the classroom. We concur with Holt's (2002) thesis that social and cultural capital components alter the way in which a brand is ultimately perceived by the consumer. Our analysis substantiates this claim. Specifically, interviewees reported that institutions with the title of "University of…" were seen as much more credible than those institutions (such as former polytechnics) which deviated from this perceived gold standard.

The Connectivity Between Academic Identity and Academic Credibility

SHU was established in 1843, first as a school of design. Yet its image as a former polytechnic remains uppermost in respondents' minds. The findings reveal the enduring power of SHU as a former polytechnic to stimulate disparagement amongst key stakeholders. More specifically, our analysis highlighted the extent to which older generations viewed polytechnics with some scepticism not to say disparagement. The biomedicine student from SHU recalled his grandmother describing ex-polytechnics as "glorified colleges." Significantly, parents and grandparents are increasing stakeholders in providing financial support for young people to attend university (Grey *et al*, 2003). Therefore former polytechnics face considerable challenges when seeking to alter such ingrained attitudes.

The extent to which academic identity intersects with a university's reputation also featured in our analysis. Our findings reveal that those with a strong affiliation with their university are proud of their university name. Universities therefore provide environments which have the potential to create a sense of loyalty, belonging and allegiance. Our findings suggest this is a symbiotic relationship, a virtuous circle where common beliefs and values systems are consolidated and perpetuated. An institution's values are thus moulding in nature. As one SHU geography student stated:

"...you become proud of what you achieve at university."

Individual cohort culture also emerged as relevant in reinforcing identity. The UoS student interviewed suggested that at an institution with a similar cohort and mind set, academic identities may be reinforced:

This notion of "like-mindedness" is both powerful and potent as it has the capacity to both create and perpetuate both inclusive (equitable) and exclusive (elite) learning environments. Our findings suggest that universities form part of a hierarchy where there are winners and losers. A consistent sense of elitism was associated with the Oxbridge label. These stereotypical views of universities are accentuated in a city

such as Sheffield where there are two universities of different and, at times, conflicting heritage in an urban environment where higher education is deemed a commodity.

Relevance of Branding to SHU and the Higher Education Sector

Prominently displayed on the front of SHU in January of 2015 was the claim that SHU was "the best modern university in the north." Our analysis reveals this statement was both contested and championed by research participants. A student of geography from SHU sought further clarification on definitions used in the branding exercise. "It depends what modern means."

The lack of appropriate competition in Northern England also stirred scepticism amongst research participants regarding the "best modern university in the north" claim. One undergraduate reflected:

"Being the best modern uni in the north has limited success – what competition does it have? It is competing against other polys, how many more of them are there in the north? Twelve?"

This perceived lack of competition suggests that further work is needed at SHU corporate level to accentuate the university's distinct brand so that the "best university in the north" strapline is robustly defended and substantiated using a more credible evidence base.

A question in our online survey asked respondents to suggest three words which indicated what the term "polytechnic" meant to them, mixed responses were reported. Answers which reoccurred in responses included "creative", "modern" and "innovative". Such descriptions may, on face value, appear to that being progressive is positive in nature. However, they equally evoke an ever changing and dynamic institutional identity. Some respondents even elected to deploy more obvious terms of disparagement by suggesting that the term "polytechnic" evoked "'not as good as red brick", "easier to get into" and "inferior". This discursivity poses problems when developing a plausible and sustainable brand identity. Moreover, it suggests a tolerance not to say willingness to reinvent oneself when deemed

appropriate. When taken to its extreme, the very essence which creates a credible brand becomes obscured then disappears. Thus new universities such as SHU face an uphill challenge when seeking to externalise their beliefs and values in brand form, particularly when there is no apparent internal consensus regarding the institution's central belief system.

Moreover, several respondents suggested that lower entry grades were associated with "polytechnic". One academic suggested:"At the new universities it was always, like, lets apply somewhere else then if we can't quite get there then we'll apply for the Hallams, the De Montforts". This thought process is intensified when cities such as Sheffield and Leicester have two competing universities of different status. Grades therefore become the currency which gate keeps entry and which shapes perceptions of value. This suggests that in keeping with Firths' (1991) proposition, brand capital is being reduced when universities seek to be accessible and equitable. Interestingly, one SHU academic member of staff disclosed that an increase in entry grades appeared to result in an increase in application numbers. "The more points we require to get into human geography, the more applications we've got." Clearly, we are reluctant to assert categorically that cause and effect were at work here - this was a small scale study. Thus further research is needed to substantiate this claim. Nonetheless, it is worth reflecting on whether, as Ries & Ries (1998) suggest, the relative currency of a brand increases as its capital as its perceived worth to the consumer increases. Without a radical overhaul of their prevailing narratives and with that, a fresh branding approach, universities such as SHU risk never being able to be conceived by others as equal to the Russell Group or other institutions generally perceived as part of the educational elite – such as UoS'. One interviewee said: "When I applied for universities I identified the "Russell Group" brand as being the symbol of a good university." This suggests that SHU need to be bullish in developing its brand as a clear symbol of intellectual integrity to mitigate any preconceptions of mediocrity.

Concluding Reflections

Our study sought to review the relevance of branding to teachers and learners of geography at SHU relative to the University of Sheffield. The research was designed to assess the extent to which SHU branding measures have helped redefine the identity of SHU during its transition from former polytechnic to university status. We also explored the extent to which SHU's current branding measures, relative to UoS', enhances the university's reputation, credibility and future viability. As Slaughter & Leslie suggest (1997), the UK university system is increasingly driven by academic capitalism, toward the marketization of knowledge, seeing universities act more like profit-seeking organisations. Given this trajectory, it is likely that the gap between those who can and cannot pay for a university education will become more accentuated. Knowledge will therefore be available only to those with the necessary financial means to secure it, leaving generations to become intellectually disenfranchised. Where other public services have been exposed to the insidious grip of the market they're becoming vulnerable to residualisation. Fewer applications reduce corresponding financial support from other courses, namely the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Furthermore, without state intervention, former polytechnics such as SHU, are at the mercy of unfettered market forces. Relative to those institutions considered more elite, former polytechnics such as SHU may be deemed unworthy of either private or public investments. Consequently, knowledge may only be accessible to those at the top of the socioeconomic ladder.

To mitigate this risk, SHU now needs to reconsider the prevailing narratives which have shaped its branding in recent years. In short, the university needs to decide who and what it represents. Recognition of its distinct and public industrial heritage is a compelling starting point. We advocate that SHU restores its coat of arms as a principal image in all branding. SHU's coat of arms is uppermost in the literature which accompanies graduation ceremonies. Yet the coat of arms, an integral element of the university's national and international narrative, seldom features elsewhere in SHU's internal and external literature.

Furthermore, as Argenti & Druckenmiller (2004) and Winter (2009) suggest, effective branding requires a candid review of core value and beliefs. These need to be reinforced internally and externalised through the branding process using positive discourses Moreover, specific courses where levels of student satisfaction are equal or exceed those in red brick or universities deemed more elite need to be vigorously marketed. Discourses of employability may well feature in SHU's future branding strategy. But we propose that these discourses need to be reinforced by a parallel narrative which highlights SHU's academic rigor and excellence in standards. For example, leading employers could be asked to testify that SHU degrees carry equal if not more capital than the Russel Group equivalent. If the rhetoric of heritage reinforces a brand name, senior SHU leadership must revisit SHU's distinct heritage and this should be headlined through its branding process.

The power of stakeholders, notably parents, grandparents and other family members, must also be recognised in order to widen a more accurate perception of SHU. SHU undoubtedly has major challenges ahead as regards the construction of a credible and robust brand. But to defer developing branding strategies would be foolhardy, short sighted and counterproductive. The time to act is now - the university is still able to evidence high performance levels across a number of its courses. This relative position of strength will become further fortified with effective and targeted branding which communicates, at a glance, credibility, authority and integrity.

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Degrees of Distinction - The Relevance of Branding For Teachers and Learners of Geography at Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield.

AN ANALYSIS OF ETHICAL CONSUMERISM AMONG STUDENTS: A STUDY OF SHEFFIELD.

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Background and objectives: There is a growing interest in the ethics and morality of consumption with consumers being encouraged to incorporate ethical considerations in to their consumption. Yet, this approach is often still considered an alternative approach. By identifying the factors that may prevent students from considering the ethics of their consumption and methods that may encourage this, the study attempts to establish whether ethical consumption can be a feasible method to address the issues which it looks to challenge.
Methodology: The study deploys a predominantly qualitative approach, using two focus groups of students. This is in an effort to gather themes related to factors that may prevent the consideration of ethics in consumption, and the potential methods to address these, and encourage ethical consumerism. A survey was also used primarily to establish to what extent students consider the ethics of their consumption.
Findings: The findings established that a behaviour-action gap existed in terms of students' ethical consumption habits. There were a number of factors found to prevent the use of ethics as criteria in consumption choices. Predominantly these were cost;

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consumer cynicism of ethical claims; commodity fetishism or the ignorance of commodities' backgrounds; and convenience. Convenience was found to be an overarching factor. Two principal solutions that emerged, in addressing these factors, were education and labelling.

Keywords: Commodity, Ethics, Consumer, Greenwashing, Convenience

INTRODUCTION

Moral judgments often arise based on the morality of the traditional capitalist system. Increasingly, there has been a focus on the moral dimensions of consumption (Caruana, 2007), paralleled with the general increasing interest into issues of morals within the field of human geography since the 1990s (Smith, 1998). Ethical consumerism incorporates a moral dimension into consumption and traditional purchasing. As Harrison, Newhom & Shaw (2005) discuss, traditional purchasing behaviour refers to individuals buying the best quality product that they can afford. This differs from ethical purchasing behaviour which is commonly seen to introduce ethics as additional criteria.

This paper aims to build on the growing field of research and literature. It does this by considering alternative perspectives of those that do not acknowledge ethics in their consumption as opposed to those that do. The focus of the study is on everyday consumption such as food, clothing and cosmetics. Furthermore, there is both a geographic and demographic approach towards the research by directing this analysis at students and using the specific example of the city of Sheffield, England. The main aim of this article is establish whether students consider the ethics in their consumption and then to analyse the factors that may prevent them from doing so. This is separated into three key research questions to better address the overall research aim. These questions are:

1. Do students generally consider the ethics of their consumption habits?
2. What are factors that may prevent ethical consumption?
3. Are there methods to feasibly encourage ethical consumption among students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a general understanding of ethical consumption surrounding the idea of any assessment on the moral or ethical nature of consumption choices, primarily within a social, environmental and political context. There are also a number of apparent factors that may deter individuals from considering ethics within their consumption. These include commodity fetishism, ethical blindness, availability, cost, and consumer cynicism.

Understanding ethical consumption

Ethical consumption is essentially a solution to the question of the moral nature of traditional consumption patterns, and also to the wider issues in which it encounters. The general definition and understanding of the term ethical consumption remains relatively consistent through the literature. Carrier & Luetchford (2012) state ethical consumption takes 'into account the moral nature of objects when deciding whether or not to consume them'. Understanding the way in which an individual consumes ethically can slightly differ. Harrison, Newholm & Shaw (2005) view the use of ethics as simply additional criteria, alongside others when making a purchasing choice. Gabriela (2010) describes ethical consumerism as being the intentional purchase of products and services that the consumer considers to be made ethically. Whilst, Harrison, Newholm & Shaw (2005) suggest there are 'five main types of ethical purchasing' as outlined in Figure 1. Although, naturally relying heavily on this understanding of intentional positive purchasing, this paper attempts to include wider considerations of consumption behaviour.

	Product-oriented purchasing	Company-oriented purchasing
Boycotts	Aerosols Timber from unsustainable forestry	Nestlé Shell
Positive Buying	Fair trade Organic	Body Shop 'against animal testing'
Fully screened (comparative ethical rating across whole product area)	Which? Appliance energy consumption tables	Ethical Consumer magazine
Relationship purchasing (consumers seek to educate sellers about their ethical needs)	Community Supported Agriculture	Individual consumer building relationship with shopkeepers
Anti-consumerism or sustainable consumerism	DIY alternatives (mending clothes)	

Figure 1 Typology of ethical consumer practices (Harrison, Newholm and Shaw, 2005)

Consumption habits of students

Literature surrounding differences of ethical consumption habits based on demographic characteristics is exceptionally limited. Even more so when considering whether an individual's status as a student contributes to their ethical considerations. Most frequently the paper focuses on characteristics of age, education and class status.

Education has been noted as an important demographic factor in a person's ethical consumption. Starr (2009) argues that it could be expected a person's increased educational attainment is likely to increase their chances of consuming ethically. This is due apparently to the advantages of both acquiring and processing information on social, ethical and environmental issues. However, Dickson (2005) actually

found from their sample that this is not necessarily the pattern that emerges. The percentage of ethical consumers rises from 6.5 percent with 'No high school degree' to 33.8 percent with 'some college education' but then falls again to 9.1 percent with a completed graduate degree.

The effect of education level does not necessarily correspond with the ethical consumption habits of students at the time due to different general characteristics of this time in their life. As an example, Maw (2014) claims that there are 'thousands of broke students all over Britain' suggesting many students have lower incomes. As well as this, age may need considering as university students will often fall into a specific age group. According to Bray, Johns & Kilburn (2010), ethical sensitivity increases with consumers' age therefore as university students will often fall into a younger age bracket, they may be expected to have less ethical sensitivity.

Preventing factors

There are a number of apparent factors that may deter individuals from considering ethics within their consumption. Most of these factors are largely established within the thinking of moral geographies, that one would want to make the choice that is morally correct. Whilst there is not necessarily extensive literature on this area of ethical consumption, a relatively obvious set of factors emerged from this literature review. These include commodity fetishism, ethical blindness, availability, cost, and consumer cynicism.

Consumer Cynicism

Some literature notes a level of scepticism among consumers towards 'the new strain of eco-branding' (Allon, 2011). Bray, Johns & Kilburn (2010) found through focus groups that a certain cynicism existed around retailers' ethical claims. This is supported by Welch (2008) stating that research has shown the public is generally cynical about corporate environmental claims with some surveys showing that this is true in the UK and the US for 9 out of 10 people. According to Bray, Johns & Kilburn (2010), in relation to this cynicism, they found a number of their participants cited a rising trend in advertising of claims

of ethical practice for a company's competitive advantage. A repeated argument is that consumers will stop buying ethical products when they become unsure which are ethical, then resulting in a downturn of the ethical market. Dobin (2009) states that when there is confusion among consumers, it will harm the entire movement. Similarly, Welch (2008) argues this cynicism is not healthy due to the risk of a generalised cynicism of all claims, even genuine ethical claims.

Impacts of Cost

Cost is generally considered the most influential factor in overall consumer behaviour. In terms of every day, frequently bought products, Bray, Johns and Kilburn (2011) found price to be an important factor in preventing people from ethically purchasing. There were four main factors influencing ethical purchasing decisions recognised by Carrigan & Attala (2001), one of which was price, along with value. Hunt (2011) however questions whether this is due to actual prices or the perception of higher prices, arguing that most literature assumes consuming ethically is more expensive but with little evidence to support this.

Commodity Fetishism

Commodity Fetishism is a term coined by Marx in Capital: A critique of Political Economy (1867). Gonzalez (2012) argues that Marx is suggesting that this term is related to the way in which the capitalist system conceals both the connection between social labour and its surplus value, and the social character of commodity production due to the 'mystical character of commodities' (Marx, 1867). Carrier (2010) uses this term but 'more broadly than did Marx' and discusses this phrase to describe the ignoring or denial of the background of objects.

Other factors

Some other potential factors briefly mentioned within the literature include time, place and availability, and ethical blindness and lack of information. There is some argument that availability of ethical products in places of retail are crucial in a consumer's decision to shop ethically. Cole & Crang (2011) argue that as ethical consumption is enacted through place, there is an importance is the places where consumers and commodities come together. Additionally, Palazzo,

Krings & Hoffrage (2012) discuss ethical blindness as the concept that individuals may act unethically but are unaware they are doing so. This can be argued as a result of a lack of information.

RATIONALE

The empirical data used to address the research questions has been collected from two focus groups and an online survey. Although technically a mixed methods approach was deployed to collect this data, it most heavily relied on qualitative methods due to the nature of the questions having a strong emphasis on personal opinions and beliefs, which would be challenging to consider quantitatively.

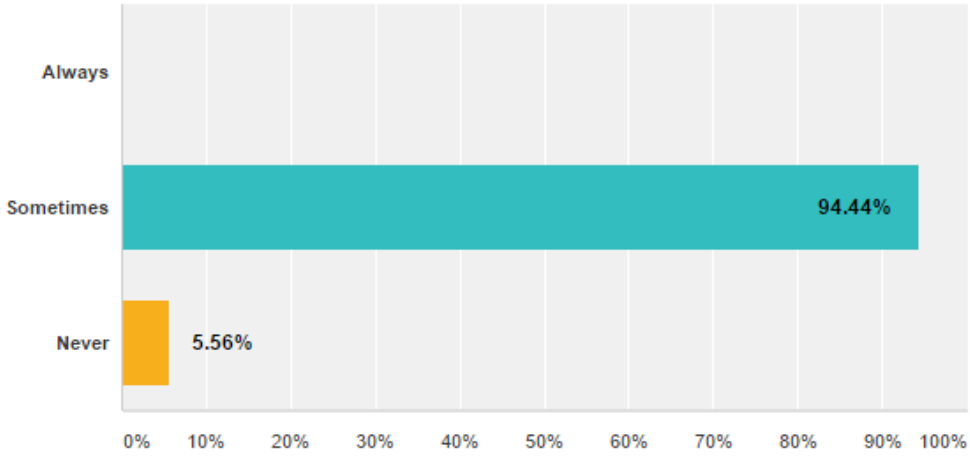

Figure 1: A graph to show how often students consider ethics within their consumption

The first research question presented a need to understand the consumption habits of students as a group by establishing patterns and measurements. For this, quantitative data was collected using self-completion surveys (SurveyMonkey) for both the production and the analysis of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of nine questions and aimed to determine whether an individual could be considered an ethical consumer. The focus groups were also used in an

effort to further understand students' potential ethical purchasing habits, as well as being the primary method for the second and third research questions. There were a total of ten focus group participants, all Sheffield Hallam University undergraduate students within the age range 18-24, who were then divided into two smaller groups of five each. The 'synergistic effect', which Liamputtongs (2011) describes allows participants to build on the responses of others. This interaction meant participants collectively decided factors that may prevent students from acknowledging ethics in their consumption in order to create a clear set of factors and to develop methods to encourage ethical consumerism. The full transcriptions of the focus groups were coded using key themes extracted from the discussions. The three main themes were ethical consumption practices, preventing factors, and solutions and these were chosen for both focus groups. Shese themed were then put into further subcategories.

DISCUSSION

In an effort to understand whether students consider ethics in their consumption, both focus groups and questionnaires were used. One question in the questionnaire asked participants: 'How often do you consider ethics in your consumption?' 94.4 percent of respondents stated they consider ethics 'sometimes' compared to only 5.56 percent answering 'never' and none answering 'always'.

The focus group data provides similar results and may offer some explanations. Almost all participants noted some level of ethical behaviour in their consumption, only one participant did not. A recurring theme that emerged from both groups was the relevance of habits within individuals' consumption, and equally in their ethical consumption, which could represent the 'sometimes' response.

From coding the focus groups with the theme of ethical consumption practices it became apparent that participants had adopted habits. Most prominent in the discussions were free range eggs or non-battery caged eggs, and to a lesser extent products not tested on animals (Figure 2).

Initial conclusions are students are often concerned about issues in their consumption, specifically regarding the ethics of it, however this does

not always translate into their consumption behaviour. This is seen as a common occurrence in ethical behaviour, primarily consumption, known as the attitude-behaviour gap (Devinney, Auger & Eckhardt 2010).

1	"I do, but not for everything. Eggs I do, because eggs are like, free range is really thrown in to your face, in terms of eggs, and chickens"
2	"I will never buy battery farmed eggs, ever"
3	"I will go for free range eggs"
4	"I prefer to buy something not tested on animals, just because like, the options there so…"
5	"I wouldn't think about make up but like shampoo and conditioner, and body wash, I always do. Which I don't know why that's different"
6	"I think like with eggs, and stuff like that, like I've got minimal boundaries on some things, like I wouldn't want to buy make up that I know had been tested on animals so I would probably check if it's a new brand. Or like eggs, I wouldn't want to buy caged"
7	"I think there's like some things isn't there that everyone buys, you get into the habit of buying, so like with free range eggs a lot of people to get into the habit of just buying them so they do"

Figure 2 Coding table on ethical consumption practices

Preventing factors

Most of the themes discussed in the literature review existed somewhat as a prediction of themes that may emerge from the focus groups. The preventing factors theme looked to establish a set of sub categories. Many of these did correspond with those from the literature however some were more prominent than others.

Cost

Cost seemed the most significant influence for most participants in consuming ethically. This is demonstrated in Figure 3. The perception was that including ethics as additional criteria would result in higher costs. A number of quotes specifically reference being a student as reasoning for cost being an issue suggesting this is based on their status

as students. The specific preventing feature of cost results from individuals simply not having additional money to spend, not wanting to spend the additional money or of concern for value for money.

1	"I think it's more of a case of like, of like, being able to afford it"
2	"…as students we can't afford to be picky about it, really"
3	"If I had money in the future, I probably would be more picky"
4	"If I had an income that would allow me to be picky and choosy about which products and which brand that I could pick then I would definitely"
5	"I think the only factor is cost for me, right now – age 22 and at university"
6	"It's too expensive. And I don't have the money to buy organic everything however nice it would be and cheap stuff is just as good"
7	"being a student, obviously you want it as cheap as possible"
8	"Fair trade chocolate bars in this library [Adsetts Learning centre] are 1 pound 20 [pence], I mean that's quite expensive from normal chocolate bars so I would say that the price is quite a big issue"
9	"…like you see all of the marks that obviously say its fair trade but when you look at the price you end up picking whatever you get the most for money"
10	"If you've got the disposable income to be able to choose to be ethical and that's your mind set then you can do it"

Figure 3 Coding table on cost as a preventing factor

It was suggested that purchasing ethical goods at a higher cost does not provide any additional benefits to the consumer therefore there is no motivation to do so. This characterises traditional purchasing behaviour, when individuals will generally purchase the cheapest product in which they are confident of its quality (Harrison, Newholm & Shaw, 2005).

Consumer Cynicism

A substantial number of responses represented a cynicism around ethical companies and products (Figure 4).

1	"…there was a video, this women did about how people advertise free range and ethical food and how they can really really, basically, lie to us".
2	"…they brand it on that, and sometimes I think that's just a selling point. Sometimes I'd question whether it is actually true or not. Is it just a marketing thing".
3	"I don't trust anything that a company says".
4	"I don't think you can just trust it at face value, can you…".
5	"It's all organic and stuff, but it's just a marketing ploy, half of the time".
6	"It's fair trade but when you actually look into it, it's not actually fair trade its still, there's still like a huge difference between the corporation and the farmers and stuff"
7	"I know with Benefit that they put on their branding that they are a cruelty free company but they're paying another organisation that do the animal testing for them"
8	"Same as [the] Body Shop, they're owned by L'Oreal but they claim they don't test on animals, well they don't but L'Oreal does"
9	"You can't just like trust the face value"
10	"I wouldn't really trust any company that is not a non-profit organisation, they're in it just for the money"
11	"I think it would be so time consuming to actually shop ethically, the amount of research you'd have to do, to think you still might not get the truth"
12	"I'd say most organisations that do try to be ethical some sort of way aren't ethical in another"
13	"It's just wording on their advertisement isn't it."

Figure 4 Coding table on consumer cynicism as a preventing factor

This cynicism seems to revolve around ideas that claims of ethical practice are used for a company's competitive advantage as Bray, Johns & Kilburn (2010) discussed. Aside from companies, there was a cynicism around some labels, with examples including fair trade and free range. More specifically, the results showed that individuals believed wording of ethical claims in advertising were used to paint a false picture and that even if there was some truth to these claims, it did

not make it legitimately ethical. It can be argued that the results demonstrate the argument made by Welch (2008) that this cynicism can lead to a generalised cynicism to all claims, even if they are genuine ethical claims.

Commodity Fetishism

This theme, based on the term coined by Marx (1867) and used to describe the overlooking or denial of the background of objects due to the 'mystical character of commodities', was mentioned throughout both discussions. Most commonly this was referred to as the ignorance that participants felt when purchasing, suggesting they often will not even consider ethics.

During part of the discussion the conversation turned to this ignorance and one participant described themselves when purchasing as 'mindlessly buying':

> *"P4: ...I prefer to buy something not tested on animals, just because like, the options there so...*
>
> *P5: To be honest, I forget, that that's a thing...*
>
> *P1: Yeah*
>
> *P5: I know it happens and I know it happens in cosmetics and stuff but when I'm actually there in the supermarket, mindlessly buying shampoo. Like, I don't really care what I'm buying because I don't think about it because in my head, it's just shampoo."*

1	"I'm just very, just like ignorant"
2	"When I'm actually there in the supermarket, mindlessly buying shampoo. Like, I don't really care what I'm buying because I don't think about it because in my head, it's just shampoo"
4	"You never think about where your clothes come from"
5	"…a lot of people just want a cup of coffee, people don't want to know where it's come from… So, I guess ignorance is also a part of it"
6	"Ignorance is bliss"
7	"…you're not seeing it directly happening, it's not happening to you, so it's quite easy to not think about it"
8	"It's quite easy to turn a blind eye to it if you want to"
9	"It's difficult to think about it, to imagine it actually happening"

Figure 5 Coding table on commodity fetishism as a preventing factor

The idea of commodity fetishism or the ignorance of the background could be argued as intentional by the consumer, as Carrier (2010) suggests that it also includes a denial of the background of objects. This can be supported by an extract from the focus groups:

> *"P2: Ignorance is bliss*
>
> *P4: Thing is you go about, you do things in your life like so you work, you do Uni, you do all these other things, the last thing on your list of priorities is going well where has that come from.*
>
> *P1: …Because if you do, you feel bad."*

Time and Convenience

Despite convenience featuring very little within the literature on ethical consumption, it appeared as a main topic within both focus groups as demonstrated in Figure 6.

1	"I guess time is a factor, I suppose, because if you were to go, say like 50 years ago or whatever someone would go into town and there would be a butchers, that comes from a farm up the road, like a greengrocers, where the farm was down the road too"
2	"Like the time thing is that with the supermarket everything's there. Why would I do all my shopping…" "…in a million different places"
3	"It's more like convenient buying now, we've just become a lazy population, where we just buy what's closest to us and what's available"
4	"If you're working 9 til' 5 everyday… you're not going to run around to a million different places, you're going to want to spend your time at home"
5	"I think it would be so time consuming to actually shop ethically, the amount of research you'd have to do"
6	"If a shops closest I would go there"
7	"I'm going to go to the nearest supermarket cos I don't have a car and I don't have the time to spend…"

Figure 6 – Coding table on convenience as a preventing factor

One notable aspect that can be taken from the focus groups is that time and convenience does not necessarily exist on its own as a preventing factor but alongside others. This is particularly relevant in terms of the issues of cost and also in consumer cynicism. On the basis that individuals do not trust companies, most participants believed it would take a lot of time and inconvenience to find the correct information:

> *P3: "the information's out there but I think you have to really look for it, as we were saying having to look up whether it's ethical or not. I think you do have to look."*

It was commented multiple times that there is a relationship between convenience and price, arguing that affordable ethical choices are available however they take more time or effort to find. As an example, one participant argues this in the sense that the ethical options aren't easily available in shops:

> *P4: "It's finding it. I don't think the price is necessarily as high, it's looking for it. Like certain place, sell it, like you can get*

certain shampoos on the internet and things like that. Like they don't have that in shops."

This suggests that actually the barrier isn't that prices are higher but that it is more inconvenient to find more affordable and genuine ethical options.

Other factors

Although, the previous sections represent the main factors found throughout the two focus group understandably additional aspects were mentioned. As the research focuses on the case study of Sheffield, there was some attempt to establish whether there is an importance of place and availability however this did not provide any significant results. There was some disagreement as to whether Sheffield as a city provides an opportunity for consumers to make an ethical choice, seemingly based on where each participant spends most of their time within the city. Overall, place and availability did not seem to have a significant influence on whether an individual considers ethics in their consumption. Some other issues that participants noted were fashion and appearance, lack of responsibility regarding unethical practices and not acknowledging issues.

Methods to encourage ethical consumption

Education was the initial response of almost all participants, believing that they would be encouraged to consider ethics in their consumption if they were taught about unethical practices in the background of their commodities and taught how to consume or purchase ethically.

The comments originally focused on providing education to younger people in schools however in both focus groups after some discussion, it was generally agreed that education on ethical consumption needed to be aimed at all generations and not just the younger generation. Other comments suggested education should focus on teaching the benefits of ethical consumption as opposed to issues with consumption. This could allow the individual to acknowledge the impact of this kind of consumption. The following two comments signify this:

> *"Long term advantages of how we buy products that can help them or how we can behave in a way that can help" (2, 407-408)*

And

> *"Show the difference if like a hundred people were to buy ethically for a week, I think you see the negative side of it but I don't think you actually see what you could do by being ethical" (2, 389-391).*

The use of labelling also appeared as a potential solution to encourage more ethical consumption. One group discussed the use of a simple labelling system against set criteria across products, presumably across cosmetics, food and clothing and other everyday products. This could provide a basic labelling strategy to easily understand at the point of consumption. This is represented by the following quote:

> *"A simple rating system that even idiots can understand. Just across the board, is it good or is it not good."*

There was also a consideration for a combination of labelling and education. This is particularly due to many participants believing they don't understand the meanings behind labels therefore it holds little significance to the consumer. It is suggested that educating people on labels at the point of consumption will make consumers take it more seriously.

As cost along with convenience are seemingly the principle preventing factors to ethical consumption, they would be the most important to address in solutions. Despite the discussions generally suggesting there is no method to create more affordable ethical choices, one participant does make a comment which could suggest that larger companies perhaps need more regulation or intervention to restrict them being able to provide significantly lower costs. This is outlined below:

> *P4: "In terms of people saying cost, it is going to cost a little bit more generally. It needs to be more of like an even playing field because these big companies are sort of managing to*

overtake all these things because they have so much power and money"

Similarly there are other comments suggesting a need for ethics to move beyond solely the responsibility of the consumer with companies, primarily, needing to change their production practices and also with increased government intervention. Harrison (2005), however, has outlined the difficulty of this due to the rapid globalisation of markets meaning national governments are less able to regulate company behaviour. Some other solutions mentioned included offering benefits to consumers when making ethical choices, the mainstreaming of ethics by making it popular culture or using the media, and making it more affordable.

CONCLUSION

Overall the main issues preventing the inclusion of ethics into consumption appeared as cost, consumer cynicism and commodity fetishism or ignorance of commodities backgrounds, then with an overarching issue of convenience. No factors, however, are independent of one another which therefore requires a range of methods to encourage ethical consumption. This research has outlined a need for the implementation of methods to encourage ethical consumption, particularly among students, to bridge the attitude-behaviour gap. Education is a clear solution to provide individuals with a motive but then this could be supported by a generalised labelling scheme with information provided in spaces of consumption, at the point of consumption. As well as this the results in a sense suggest the emphasis on ethics actually needs to be on companies; therefore government, and additionally consumers, must pressure companies into making ethical decisions regarding their commodities.

Based on the results, the use of a simple labelling scheme across many commodities and companies, enforced and regulated by government would be the most beneficial approach. It could include a number of levels based on specific guidelines that are outlined on a sign within spaces of consumption. This would hopefully provide enough information for an easy to understand labelling strategy. There should

also be an increased emphasis on the ethics of other aspects of consumption, for example the recycling and reuse of commodities, as well as ideas of anti-consumption with a focus on wasting and purchasing less.

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DECONSTRUCTING THE MOTIVES AND FACILITATING FACTORS THAT SURROUND THE ROUTINE CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL AMONGST SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES DURING THEIR FIRST YEAR OF STUDY.

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This paper aims to deconstruct the motives and facilitating factors that lead to the common practice of university alcohol consumption amongst first year undergraduates at Sheffield Hallam University. With the wider literature stating the importance of psychological and social factors, and the predominant focus upon US universities and colleges, this paper seeks to explore the similarities and dissimilarities between the two locales with regard to student motives to drink. On the basis of the wider literature, a questionnaire and extended interview script were devised, the former being administered to a group of 100 students, the latter to 8 respondents, with a 50:50 gender divide. The findings of the research suggest there are a multitude of similarities between the American students involved in the American research and the respondents from Sheffield Hallam with regard to influential motives.

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Despite this, a number of factors not given credence within the wider literature were discovered in reference to the Sheffield Hallam sample group as having an influential role in motivating alcohol consumption. The paper also briefly investigates the role of the night-time economy (NTE) in motivating consumption in Sheffield. The report, on the basis of these findings is then able to make recommendations concerning the application of this paper in aiding further research and attempts at mitigation and control of the behaviour.

Keywords: Culture, Geographical, Behaviour, Motivation, Student ,

INTRODUCTION

The discussion concerning the relationship between the university student lifestyle and routine alcohol consumption is prominent in the wider literature and the behaviour has been increasingly referred to in media articles and news publications in recent years. The predominant opinion of this behaviour from the media and the public is one of negativity, yet the behaviour continues to exist, leading the author to believe there are a number of factors that continue to motivate and perpetuate student alcohol consumption. With the wider literature and its predominant focus on social and psychological correlations, the author sought to deconstruct the motives and ascertain whether culture and geography played a part.

To the researcher's knowledge, there is a predominant focus in the literature surrounding this topic placed upon students' drinking habits and motives in American educational institutions. The author believes that similar patterns of consumption and causal factors are at play in the cultural phenomenon of student drinking in the United Kingdom, despite differences existing between both geographical locations and with regard to culture. Secondly, that aside from purely psychological and social motivations suggested by the wider literature, there are also

cultural, geographical and economic factors that play a role. This paper will outline the results of a study based in Sheffield and compare this to American findings to determine if geographical and cultural factors act as a catalyst.

RESEARCH METHODS

Three main methods of data collection were used. A literature review that presents a summary of the wider reading; a closed questionnaire to develop an understanding of patterns of consumption within the selected sample group; and extended interviews to elaborate upon these findings with more in-depth qualitative data.

The literature review was the primary research conducted in the study and involved the analysis and collation of secondary data in the form of theories and concepts from the wider literature associated with the study of alcohol consumption, and more specifically, the motives for university students to undertake such behaviour. This data was collected in order to develop appropriate aims and objectives for the project and to lay the foundations that would guide the researchers own primary research- by studying successful questionnaire styles and detailing the motives discovered in the wider literature.

A questionnaire was produced on the basis of the information gleaned from the wider literature and an analysis of the successful approaches used in other studies in the field. The questionnaire contained closed questions to gain quantitative data, with regard to actual patterns of consumption and behaviour in numerical form and to discover the factors and stimulants that led to these patterns. A closed question format was selected to aid in the analysis of the data, by presenting a wide array of possible motives (taken from the wider literature) it narrowed the scope of responses to specific, pre-defined categories.

This questionnaire was then piloted to twenty individuals to test its feasibility and underline areas of the questionnaire that could be adapted and improved. Participants were sourced via two methods; first of all by contacting student representatives from different courses and faculties to forward the questionnaires via email to a random body of students, and secondly by standing outside major entrances and exits to

Sheffield Hallam University buildings and administering the questionnaires at random to students as they passed by.

Due to the research centring upon Sheffield Hallam University, the sample group was made up of one-hundred students currently enrolled and undertaking undergraduate degrees at this institution. The sample group contained students from all three years of study, answering questions with regard to their first year drinking habits. The questionnaires were anonymous in order to allow the participants to fully express their true behaviours and motivations.

The extended interviews were conducted in order to build upon the information and data presented by the questionnaires and to offer further qualitative insight into the motives and facilitating factors that lead to alcohol consumption amongst university students in their first year of study. The researcher carried out eight extended interviews, with an equal gender split; four males and four females (See Appendix D). Participants were given the opportunity to volunteer by providing their contact details at the end of the questionnaire and the interviews were conducted from these respondents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the wider literature, "theorists regard drinking motives as the final common pathway to its use; i.e. the gateway through which more distal influences are mediated" (Cooper, 1994; Cox & Klinger, 1988). Academics such as Carpenter & Hasin (1998) and Cox & Klinger (1988) state "drinking motives or reasons represent a subjectively derived decisional framework for alcohol use based on personal experience, situation and expectancies".

The question of whether individuals have to have an influential motive to drink is one consistently founded within the literature. The motivational model proposed by Cox & Klinger (1988; 1990) states that "the decision to drink is a combination of emotional and rational processes" and that "to have a particular motive or a reason is a necessary condition for drinking, conceptualized by the final decision to drink or not to drink". That is, if you have consumed alcohol, an emotional or rational factor has motivated such behaviour. Kuntsche *et*

al (2005) states on the subject, that "in most cases, decisions about drinking are even unconscious and automatized", a person does "not have to be aware of either having made a decision or the factors affecting this decision [to drink]". That an individual can make a decision or be motivated by a particular factor subconsciously, is an integral element of the wider literature concerning human psychology.

In the wider literature "applications of motivational theory to drinking behaviour have consistently supported the importance of motivational factors in alcohol use across adults (Abbey, Smith and Scott, 1993; Carpenter & Hasin, 1998) adolescent (Bradizza, Reifmann & Barnes, 1999; Windle, 1996) and college (Carey & Correia, 1997; Kassel, Jackson & Unrod, 2000; Ratliff & Burkhart, 1984) populations" (Read *et al*., 2003).

The Motives to drink amongst college/university students.

There is a considerable wealth of research concerning alcohol consumption and the resultant health and social issues amongst American college and university students, and to the researchers knowledge, there is a predominant focus given to the United States as opposed to the United Kingdom.

"Many have stressed the role of specific motives for drinking in this population" (Carey & Correia, 1997; Karwacki & Bradley, 1996; Maclean & Lecci, 2000; Stewart & Zeitlin, 1995). Baer (2002) continues "two general types of drinking motives typically emerge in studies of college students: drinking for social purposes and drinking for emotional escape or relief". This notion is echoed in the wider literature, "a large body of research on the aetiology of college student drinking has identified social and psychological correlates of alcohol use and misuse" (Baer & Carney, 1993; Fromme & Ruela, 1994; Weschler, Dowdall, Davenport & Castillo, 1995).

Read *et al* (2003) expanding upon the model theorised by Cooper *et al* (1995) and Cronin (1997) have added the notion of enhancement- improving or initiating a positive mood- to the two general types proposed by Baer (2002) - Cronin presents a scale with social

camaraderie, mood enhancement and tension reduction (1997) and Read *et al* list their motive categories as enhancement, coping and social reinforcement (2003).

Muthen & Muthen (2000), Perkins (1999) and Sher, Bartholomew & Nanda (2001) have stressed that "drinking attitudes and behaviours have been shown to be somewhat unique for college students as compared to younger adolescents or adults" (Posited in Read *et al*, 2003). "The social context of the college environment has been associated with heavy alcohol use (Carey, 1993; 1995) creating a culture where such use is relatively normative (Gotham, Sher & Wood, 1997; Weschler, Lee, Kuo & Lee, 2000)" (Read *et al*, 2003). This claim is reinforced by Read *et al* (2003) quoting Simons, Correia & Carey, 2000; Stewart, Zeitlin & Samoluk, 1996; Wood, Read, Palfai & Stevenson, 2001) - "social factors have been shown to play a central role in college drinking".

This belief is further supported by research from Neighbors, Nichols-Anderson, Segura & Gillaspy (1999), Cooper (1994) and Stewart *et al* (1996), concerning "social facilitation [and] social reinforcement motives" (Read *et al*, 2003). Social reinforcement motives are defined as "drinking alcohol for social purposes, such as to enhance the enjoyment of a social occasion, to facilitate social interaction or to partake in a shared social activity" (Read *et al*, 2003). "These motives are somewhat unique from other drinking motives as they presumably motivate alcohol consumption that is in keeping with standard social activity"(Read *et al*, 2003). Read *et al* continues that it is perhaps not surprising that in the alcohol-supportive social milieu of college, this effect is salient amongst drinkers (2003).

Studies by Graham *et al* (1991) and Wood *et al* (2001), find further social motivations such as "direct and explicit offers to use alcohol" (Graham, Marks & Hanson, 1991- cited by Read *et al*, 2003)- "alcohol offers represent a more direct form of social pressure that may uniquely motivate drinking behaviours" (Read *et al*, 2003). Within the wider literature, the notion of 'perceived peer drinking environment' has been presented as another major motivational social factor for student drinking - "individuals who perceive their peers as reinforcing alcohol

use may be more likely to drink" (Read *et al*, 2003). Read *et al* continues that empirical support from studies such as Collin, Parks & Marlatt (1985), Costa, Jessor & Turbin (1999) and Graham *et al* (1991) have shown support for this effect, especially amongst the college student demographic (2003).

With regard to the emotional motives that lead to alcohol consumption amongst college students, the wider literature defines the emotional stimulation motives under two categories: positive emotion known as enhancement motives, and negative emotion known as coping motives.

Cooper (1994) and Stewart *et al* (1996) found that "drinking behaviour may be driven in part by motives to induce, increase or maintain positive affective states" (Read *et al*, 2003). The work of Carey & Correia (1997) and Stewart *et al* (1996) have linked positive enhancement motives to college student drinking. Within the literature, there have been a number of studies that support the notion of "social lubrication outcome expectancies". Expectancies, as mentioned previously are a common concept within the literature - Darkes, Greenbaum & Goldman (1998), Kidorf, Sherman, Johnson & Bigelow (1995) Sher, Wood, Wood & Raskin (1996) and Werner, Walker & Greene (1995) - and refer to "beliefs about the effects or consequences of alcohol use" (Read *et al*, 2003). Social Lubrication alcohol expectancies is therefore a belief "that alcohol use will enhance social situations and make them more enjoyable" (Read *et al*, 2003). Carey (1993, 1995) posited, as college drinking is heavily linked to social contexts, this particular effect has an influential role - a claim supported in the reading of MacLatchy-Gaudet & Stewart (2001), Mooney, Fromme, Kivlahan & Marlatt (1987) and Wall, Hinson & Mckee (1998).

Another positive emotional motivation discussed within the literature is that of "Impulsivity and sensation seeking" (Read *et al*, 2003). Work by Zuckerman, Kuhlman, Jaireman, Teta & Kraft (1993) described impulsivity as "a general tendency to act without planning or thinking ahead and to seek out immediate gratification" (cited in Read *et al*, 2003). Further work by Depue & Collins (1999) and Zuckerman (1992, 1994) have linked impulsivity to 'sensation seeking' - "a dispositional

need for high levels of stimulation" (Read *et al*, 2003). Studies such as Beck, Thoms, Mahoney & Fingar (1995), Jackson & Matthews (1988), Johnson & Cropsey (2000), Ratliff & Burkhart (1984) and Schall, Weede & Maltzman (1991) have attributed both impulsivity and sensation seeking to drinking in the college demographic (Read *et al*, 2003).

Alternatively, as cited by Read *et al* (2003), work by Abrams & Niaura (1987), Cooper, Russell, Skinner, Frone & Mudar (1992) and Farber, Khavari and Douglas (1980) has identified that coping motives involve drinking to ameliorate negative emotions and holding the belief that alcohol can alleviate negative mood states. Brown (1985) and Kassel *et al* (2000) have associated these 'tension reduction alcohol expectancies' with problem drinking amongst college students (Read *et al*, 2003) - this finding supported by Camatta & Nagoshi (1995), Hutchinson, Patock, Cheong & Nagoshi (1998) and Maclean *et al* (1999). Research by Beck *et al* (1995), Perkins (1999) and Weinberger & Bartholomew (1996) does suggest that "a substantial portion of college undergraduates report drinking as a result of negative emotions" (Read *et al*, 2003), showing it has wider application than excessive problem drinking.

In short, the wider literature presents a multitude of research papers and studies from the USA that attribute a wide array of motives, both social and psychological, to drinking patterns amongst the college student demographic.

RESULTS

On the basis of the primary research data, one of the main findings from this research is that social motives are extremely influential in alcohol consumption amongst the student demographic. With regard to both the questionnaire and extended interviews, these motives were consistently selected. A almost half of the sample group (47%) said that a positive, social atmosphere was of 'great influence' in selecting a drinking environment. Sixty three respondents said they participated in pre-drinks as it was more sociable. Furthermore, and perhaps most significantly, eighty six respondents claimed that fun and enjoyment

was an influential factor, with eighty two people also selecting socialising and making friends. This pattern continued with thirty one respondents citing fun and enjoyment as the most influential factor in their behaviour, with twenty six respondents choosing socialising and making friends.

With regard to the extended interviews that were conducted to explore the themes highlighted by the questionnaires, all of the eight respondents stated that social motives were influential in their behaviour (see appendices), with half of the respondents explicitly claiming that social motives were of great influence:

"It is probably one of the most influential factors. I don't think there are many others ways to socialise, that are as effective for young people, as drinking"

"I would say most people go out for social motives more than any other factor"

"For me personally social motives are a huge reason as to why I drink".

"Absolutely. I would say they are the biggest influence in my opinion".

With regard to the questionnaire responses, negative emotional factors were shown to have a fairly minimal role - the researcher is confident that despite the personal nature of the questions, due to anonymity, the data is accurate. Only five respondents selected homesickness and twelve respondents selected stress as a motivating factor. No respondents selected either of the above factors as the most influential, while both factors received twenty nine selections as the least influential factor in consumption.

With regard to the extended interviews, the pattern continues as seven of the eight respondents claimed they felt negative emotional factors had little to no influence, with only one claiming they believed stress to be more of a motivation than social factors.

"I haven't drank for those reasons, I don't think I would associate that with students"

"In my personal experience, they don't play a role"

"I wouldn't say negative emotional factors are as influential or common amongst students"

"I personally have never experienced that as a need to drink, but I could understand why people could do that, but personally, no".

This conflicts with research papers from the wider literature, as they claim that "a substantial portion of college undergraduates report drinking as a result of negative emotions" (Read *et al*, 2003).

This research paper has found that three other major categories of motivational factors influenced the behaviour of the Sheffield Hallam students sampled:

Cultural

Cultural factors, such as the expectation of university life, were consistently given in both the questionnaires and the extended interviews as influential. Forty six respondents selected the option "Expectations of university life" and twelve respondents selected this as their most influential factor. This pattern continues in the extended interviews:

"Yeah definitely for cultural reasons. Like, you're a student, therefore it is what you're expected to do"

"I think it (routine alcohol consumption) is just part and parcel of being a student"

"I would say that's very influential, you do definitely expect it (routine alcohol consumption as a part of student life) especially when you hear about fresher's week etc"

"It's kind of part and parcel of being a student in a lot of people's opinion"

From the findings, it is clear that cultural motives have an impact, whether it be as a result of what prospective students hear from friends and family who have attended, or the stories on social media and news outlets, there is a clear belief that student lifestyle and routine alcohol consumption are synonymous with one another. All eight extended

interview respondents claimed they believed student drinking to be a social norm, and all eight respondents also stated that they did not believe it to be negative behaviour; this is supported by the work of both Gotham *et al* (1997) and Weschler *et al* (2000), who claim that the environment breeds "a culture where such use is relatively normative". A number of the respondents claimed it had the potential, like anything, to become negative in excess, but they believed "too much can be made of the effects of the over consumption of alcohol in the media, which isn't necessarily sort of true".

The researcher believes that cultural factors have an even greater influence than many students realise, perhaps symbolic of how deeply engrained these cultural ideologies are within the student subconscious. In response to both the questionnaires and the extended interviews, the belief that it is an acceptable, commonplace, expected behaviour was commonly mentioned and the author believes this cultural factor runs as an undercurrent to other motives. This theory is supported in part by Kuntsche *et al* (2005) who state "in most cases, decisions about drinking are even unconscious and automatized".

Economic

The low cost of alcohol was presented within both the questionnaires and the extended interviews as an influential factor in motivating student alcohol consumption. Thirty nine respondents gave price as an influential factor when choosing a location, eighty respondents said they participated in pre-drinking activities because it was cheaper, and sixty one respondents claimed that the low cost of alcohol was a factor in their drinking. It is by no means a more influential factor than social motives - eleven people selected low cost alcohol as their most influential factor. It is, however, an important motivation as only five people selected it as their least influential factor. The extended interviews support the notion that it is a widespread motivation amongst students:

"In terms of the wider student population I would say it definitely does have an effect"

"Yeah, I would say price is very influential"

"Personally, I, in first year, would have chosen to go out on a student night due to lower cost"

"It is a huge factor in my experience of student life".

It is clear from the research that the low cost of alcohol is a common motive amongst this demographic, despite not being attributed to student drinking regularly by the wider literature. The author believes this dissimilarity may come from the cultural and legal differences between the UK and the USA with regard to the age at which people are allowed to drink. In the UK, with the drinking age of 18, students are legally able to visit drinking establishments and are therefore more heavily influenced by low cost alcohol. In the USA, as the age for alcohol consumption is 21, students undertake at least two years of their higher education without the ability to attend such establishments, and therefore cost plays a less influential role. This is not to say that American students are not influenced by price, simply that it is not a commonly presented motive within the wider literature, despite its prominence in this research. The research found that students are not solely motivated to drink by cost (they would consume alcohol irrespective of price), but that this is a major factor in motivating more excessive, or more frequent consumption through behaviours such as 'pre-drinking'.

Geographical

The accessibility and location of drinking establishments, although not as influential as social motives, was also given in both the questionnaires and extended interviews as a motivational factor. Fourteen respondents selected this factor as greatly influential in selecting a drinking environment, and nine respondents said location was the most influential factor in their consumption, with no respondents selecting it as their least influential. This was continued in the extended interviews:

"I think in Sheffield especially, geographical location is a strong factor because no matter where you live, there's a hub of pubs, bars and clubs close by"

"Now we live in the city centre, everything is a lot more accessible"

"I drink more in Sheffield based on the fact that there is greater access to a variety of different pubs, bars etc"

"I would say living in a city has a huge influence as there are so many places, that are close by… it definitely influences behaviour"

It is clear from the research that for a number of respondents, geographical factors clearly play a role in their motivations to consume alcohol, something that was rarely mentioned within the wider literature. Many respondents seemed to hold the belief that this was majorly down to their attendance at a city campus university. It is the opinion of the researcher that geographical factors play a role in American college students, despite the lack of literature explicitly stating this, as the college campus and accommodation communities (fraternity houses etc.) offer a peer-drinking environment that greatly influences behaviour due to geography - "Drinking rates are highest in fraternities and sororities followed by on-campus housing" (Presley *et al*., 1996a, 1996b; Weschler *et al*., 1998, 2000b). This research, regarding Sheffield Hallam students, offers geographical factors as an influential motive in this behaviour.

CONCLUSION

With regard to the first research question in this project - "what motives - social, cultural, geographical, economic and psychological - do students have to contribute to the practice of university drinking in their first year at Sheffield Hallam University?" - there are clearly numerous motives that affect student behaviour with regards to alcohol consumption. Despite some factors being more prominent than others - such as social motives - a wide range of factors can affect individuals in different ways and to different extents. It is impossible to maintain from the findings that only social and psychological motives have an effect, as the wider literature would suggest, as the respondents highlight a number of factors outside of these realms that led to their drinking habits during their first year of undergraduate study.

In reference to the second research question - "With regard to these motives, are there similarities or dissimilarities when compared with the extensive studies of American university students?" - it is clear

from the findings that there are similarities between students from both the Sheffield Hallam University (UK) and the United States. The findings of the study show that students as a demographic clearly share innate psychological and social motives irrespective of nationality, however it became clear from the research that dissimilarities existed that stemmed predominantly from cultural and geographical variants.

Finally, in regard to the third research question posed at the beginning of this project - "Do geographical and cultural factors act as catalysts for the phenomena, by aiding or allowing the trend to continue?" - it is clear that there are factors of this nature that have catalytic importance to the behaviour. As stated in the discussion, the author is of the opinion that cultural factors often exist as an underpinning motivation that runs as an undercurrent to more obvious factors.

It is the opinion of the author, on the basis of this research, that if the desire is to curb this behaviour, policies should aim at targeting the cultural factors associated with student drinking such as the glorification of alcohol in the student lifestyle from an early age and the constantly reinforced association between university life and routine alcohol consumption that leads students to adopt a "part and parcel" mentality. If this notion of 'student lifestyle' and its constant association with alcohol consumption was to be reduced, it is the opinion of the author that the extent to which the behaviour currently exists would diminish in severity over time, not to disappear completely, but to lower from the current heights of health concern.

With regard to further geographical and cultural factors and their catalytic role in the consumption of alcohol amongst students, the author found that the notion of the night time economy (NTE) was extremely influential in accommodating the behaviour. Despite this key finding, the author, with the restrictions of word counts and time constraints removed, would be interested into conducting further research into the importance of this social construct alone.

Overall, the study was a success and the aims and objectives of the author, to investigate in depth the phenomenon of student drinking and the underlying factors that motivated such prominent social behaviour, were achieved. The author found the respondents to be open and honest

with regard to a behaviour that is often viewed with criticism and contempt by large portions of society, and this openness allowed the author to delve into the root cause of the behaviour and discover the motivations built into the foundations of student life

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