The Power of University Field Trips And Experiential Marketing On Community Relations

Student field trips are nothing new. They allow students to recognise, synthesis and take part in real world scenarios and activities. Yet despite a plethora of research on the benefits of field trips more broadly (Friess et al., 2016; Larsen et al., 2017), few studies have theorised the benefits of field trips and the interplay between experiential marketing and its impact on building community relations. We define community relations as the associations between students and staff and also student-student interactions. Indeed, field trips have been shown to foster strong partnerships and learning communities (Chouhan et al., 2020) and this is a key highlight that we have observed from such trips.

Through a series of field trips conducted over a four-year period on one undergraduate Marketing course, spanning three destinations (London, Antwerp and Valencia) with over one hundred and fifty students, we chart our observations and experiences of these trips and influence on building a strong cohort identity.

Experiential marketing permits students to move beyond deductive learning and engage in inductive and immersive experiences (Samuel et al., 2021). The various tasks and itineraries set by academics for students can enable them to unleash their creativity, teamwork, resilience, communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, amongst many other hallmark graduate skills.

We detect that field trips are not experiential by default. Rather, they become experiential by design and implementation. For example, prior to the pandemic, BA Marketing students attended a field trip to Valencia, Spain. The purpose of the trip was to provide an international study tour opportunity, strengthen the course community and cultural awareness as well as exposing students to local marketing techniques.

The trip involved a tour of Valencia FC. Students were exposed to various important marketing techniques that are integral to the ‘Valencia FC’ brand. Students also visited a world renown local drinks factory called ‘Horchata’. It is a famous drink in Spain consisting of local tiger nuts and milk. Students were exposes to the factory operations as well as their core marketing activities. On the final day, students visited the Museum of Science and Arts and the Oceanographic museum- one of the biggest in the world.

As part of the trip, students were tasked with completing a field trip project. The project required students to create a blog and accompanying video that promoted Valencia to potential visitors. The projects were evaluated by a CEO of a Marketing Agency.

The implications of such field trips therefore trigger positive outcomes for community relations, University and school internationalisation strategies, subject specific skills development and also rankings. For instance, we observe that the field trips had a profound impact on our NSS scores, with the Valencia trip contributing to an overall BA Marketing NSS score of 92% overall. Field trips make memories and those which students cherish for a long time and look back on. Therefore, we call on fellow academics to consider them, especially in the wake of the pandemic, its impact and hopeful progression out of it.