THE HUNGER GAMES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON:
To what extent does the branding of UoL institutions entail an identity of difference between them?

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Introduction

London-based institutions are increasingly in competition with each other to attract students, akin to the ruthless fights for survival in the *Hunger Games*.

With comparative analysis on three London based institutions (LSE, KCL & SOAS), our study finds that there is a convergence in branding practices. However, in contrast to branding, the students' identity formation points to an "identity of difference", with SOAS as the most distinct.

Methods

Our study has three primary methods, to compare the students' and institutions' perspectives:

- **Discourse analysis:** textual analysis of marketing literature (prospectuses) as a starting point for comparing universities
- **Interviews:** two interviews with LSE and SOAS marketing staff.
- **Surveys:** 46 students from each institution to examine and compare their relation to institutional identities.
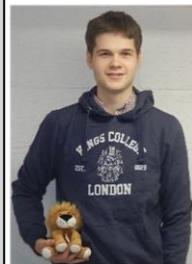
Results

Discourse analysis: word frequencies show that KCL had largest marketing material; LSE & SOAS specialisms were prominent in text.

Interviews: LSE Head of Communications emphasised the university's global context, as well as its "Fabian roots." (cf. SOAS below)

Surveys: KCL & LSE had the most similar responses (as in Chart 1), with SOAS students giving the most distinct responses. LSE students were strongest at identifying university mascot and motto (identity symbolism: see Table 3).

Interviews: SOAS marketing staff described SOAS as "unboxable", "another world", "unique" and political as part of its identity.

Surveys: Intriguingly, 1 in 4 SOAS students associated SOAS with "diversity" unprompted.

Chart 1: words that students associate with institution

SOAS as "another world"?
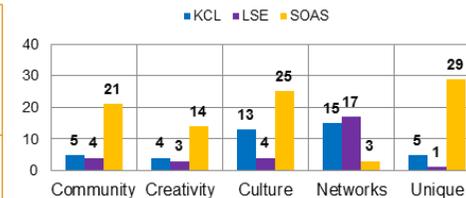
Chart 2: LSE prospectus word cloud

Table 3: correct recall percentage, by university

	KCL	LSE	SOAS
Mascot	52.2%	73.9%	10.9%
Motto	13.0%	65.2%	8.7%

Conclusions

- KCL, LSE and SOAS all have the same focus: to educate and to conduct social science research. Institutional identities are therefore likely to overlap.
- There are significant similarities between the marketing identities of KCL and LSE and some with SOAS.
- Students' at universities with similar branding (KCL and LSE) relate to symbols more than students' from an institution (SOAS) with a distinct brand identity, our surveys suggest.
- As a consequence of brand convergence, students create an 'identity of difference' though symbols: knowing mottos and mascots.
- More research could be conducted over a larger a dataset to bring together the concepts of branding and community identity in the university context.

Key literature cited

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