



Article

“Shared landscapes: The impact of residents' visual and sensual perceptions of regional meat production on brand development”

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the brand opportunities which emerge from local consumers' knowledge of Herdwick Lamb (HL). Anchoring HL in Cumbria is the protected designation of origin (PDO) which stipulates "lamb and sheep of pure-bred flocks of Herdwick ewes and rams that have been born, raised and slaughtered in the county of Cumbria" (Commission Regulation No.453/2013). Of interest here are the inferences which consumers make for the final product because of their experience of heritage, landscape, environment and husbandry observed in the context of HL production. Consumer perspectives on product attribute-building have largely been ignored in attribute-related literature (Darby and Karni, 1973; Andersen, 1994). This paper aims at advancing understanding between local perceptions of a product growing in a specific place and the messages used to communicate the values of that final product to consumers.

The literature is rich on the analysis of the retail setting for products and its impact on customers and employees, Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011) expanded Bitner's (1992) conceptual view of the *servicescape* model to include consideration of (amongst other elements) the use of natural stimuli in commercial-based settings. Yet the impact of multi-sensory consumption of the *pre-product* is a phenomenon largely unexplored in literature relating to branding and marketing (Aaker, 2010; De Chernatony, 2006; Kapferer, 2008).

The pragmatic marketing questions are: How does the shared place reality influence local consumers' perceptions of HL? How might these perceptions contribute to the brand identity of HL?

Background

To introduce the place studied in this paper, Cumbria's population was estimated at 497,900 in 2016 (Cumbria Observatory, 2018) with an additional influx of 45 million visitors in 2016 (Cumbria Tourism, 2017). This sizable visiting market consuming Cumbrian products relies on local word of mouth to reinforce the values of HL and to reinforce local food tourism networks (Dougherty & Green, 2011). The topography of the Lakeland landscape directly influences the management of the HL flock, offering limited valley-bottom land called in-bye. It is valued to produce fodder crops (hay or silage) for use during winter. Consequently, the HL are kept up on the fells for as long as possible, resulting in an extended viewing period for local inhabitants and allowing perceptions of certain qualities of the 'lamb' product to develop in the minds of local consumers. Land on the high fells is often unenclosed common land, where lambs inherit knowledge of the boundaries of their grazing from their mothers (Denyer, 1993). The supply of authentic Lakeland HL is limited to stocking capacities of a stipulated geographical zone. The product adds to the rich selection of regional meat rather than aiming for national distribution (Mason, 1999).

Locals' perceptions of the climate, soils and fauna as well as the traditions of agricultural production, heritage and skills constitute their understanding of *terroir* (Lenglet, 2014). The Herdwick meat produced by one farm may reflect environmental constraints, *terroir* qualities, and priorities, which are either common or distinct to the HL output of nearby farms. It is these factors which offer potential for farm-based rather than breed-based brand boundaries (see Tregear and Gorton, 2009 for a discussion on dual/collective branding strategies in agriculture). As Cumbrian farm income is less than 50% of the average farm income for England,

opportunities may exist for hill-farmers in Cumbria to increase their incomes by successfully developing brands for their HL (Orr, 2009).

The proposition is that, if the HL represent a component of a landscape with which people identify, then there is an extant informal brand relationship between pre-product and consumer, which could inform the formal HL brand as created by practitioners. Consequently, the author is contributing the term ‘pre-product’ in this paper to describe the consumers’ multi-sensory experience of HL as seen, smelled, heard and walked amongst by consumers on the fells/in farmyards or at summer shows. The term sits amongst – but moves beyond - other concepts such as *commodity*, which has connotations of price-taking in supply chain analysis (Beverland, 2005) or *raw material* which has technical processing connotations (Alves et al., 2002).

To frame a meaningful discussion on the topic the literature on branding as it is applied to agricultural products is considered. Secondly the literature is examined concerning the process and sequence of consumer perception-building, through attribute awareness, experiences and cognitions. Finally, the conceptual framework of the brand identity prism is examined in the context of Cumbrian HL (Kapferer, 1997).

Literature Review

Mainstream branding literature promotes the branding process as an important activity for profit maximising firms (Aaker, 2010; De Chernatony, 2006; Kapferer, 2008). Consumer-based brand equity represents the value consumers afford to branded products because they know the meaning of the brand, whereas less value is afforded to unbranded products (Aaker, 2010). To benefit from brand equity, brands need an identity. Kapferer’s brand identity framework (1997) encompasses both producer and consumer facets and will be used in the paper to bring together the characteristics and culture of HL with consumer perceptions.

The brand literature as applied to agricultural products, which rely on place of origin as a key part of their identity, is limited to specific cases including: Parma Ham (O’Reilly, Haines & Arfini, 2003), Champagne (Charters & Spielmann, 2014), and Beacon Fell Traditional Lancashire Cheese (Tregear & Ness, cited in Barnam & Sylvander, 2011). The specificities of place in terms of topography and climate, heritage, culture, and the distinct production processes adopted for different agricultural commodities, constrains the development of a body of branding literature ‘broadly’ applied to regional foods. However, frameworks relating to branding such as Kapferer’s (1997) Brand Identity Prism, offers a useful conceptual framework to establish what the brand stands for and promises to consumers.

To effectively argue for the significance of pre-product experiences, attention is first given to literature on perception. The classification of existing product attributes by Darby and Karni (1973) and Andersen (1994) sought various ways of categorising attributes, which are important to customers at different stages of the purchase process, such as ‘search’, ‘experience’ and ‘credence’ categories. ‘Search’ attributes are those which can be identified prior to purchase (e.g. fat visible in the meat), ‘experience’ attributes include taste, which is experienced only on consuming the product, and ‘credence’ attributes represent beliefs which the consumer holds in relation to the product. Credence characteristics are, therefore, clearly tied to consumer knowledge. For example, applying this concept to the case of lamb, for a consumer to select ‘X local farm lamb’ over ‘English Lamb’, requires trust in the supply chain without typically having full information on the processes within it (the abattoir system or the existence of supermarkets’ proprietary cutting plants, or the prerequisites for meat to be

labelled 'English'). Only the label confirms that the meat is truly from 'X local farm' if sold in a supermarket. However, the situation is more transparent if sales are made directly by the producer, via farm shop/web page or farmers' market. Furthermore, in the absence of gastronomic confidence on the part of the consumer, meat purchase may depend on the knowledge and skills of the butcher/seller to advise on appropriate cuts or give ethical assurances on production standards, thereby directly influencing consumers' beliefs (Schroder & McEachern, 2004; Kirwan, 2006). In this case credence attributes inform the search process/provisioning strategy.

Writers on credence attributes (Darby and Karni, 1973; Smallwood and Conlisk, 1979; Anderson and Philipsen, 1998) assume no visual verification of beliefs is available to the consumer; a gap in the literature this paper addresses. Regional food literature recognises verbal verification as valuable via conversations at the farm shop or farmers' market where local brand relationships emerge and develop (Youngs, 2003; Sage, 2003; Szmigin et al., 2003; Kirwan, 2006). However, the experiential approach to marketing, as drawn on in this study, assumes a more holistic approach, incorporating sensory experiences, cognitive experiences, physical experiences, behaviours, lifestyles and social-identity relative to others (Schmitt, 1999). Literature which deconstructs 'experience' for lamb consumption more specifically, conventionally emerges from food science studies, much of it taking a partial Pan-European perspective (e.g. Font i Furnols et al., 2008). The narrow focus here is very strictly the lamb taste, with tasting undertaken in laboratory-like conditions. There is a gap in the literature for a holistic approach to lamb consumption.

Components of Kapferer's (1997) brand identity prism follow as the study's conceptual framework. First: relationship, reflection and physical which together represent the brand's visible components, and self-image, personality and culture which represent the essence of the brand. The contribution of the concept of *place (or pre-product) experience* is also demonstrated in each of these elements, in addition to applying the framework to the context of HL.

Relationship

For an embedded product such as HL, the relationship between brand and client should echo the values which define rural inhabitants' relationship to their place of residence. Certain theories of identity take account the central importance of place (Taylor, 2009). The importance of socio-spatial identity is highlighted by Cohen (1986), for instance, who recognised the respective roles within communities. This author found that young people in the North-east identified with their place "from a familiarity with the geography of the district, and a feeling of being a cherished part of a close network of relationships" (Coffield et al., 1986: 141-2). This is particularly significant for the present article, in that both the visual appreciation of the geography and the community are cited as components of identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

Cultural geographers often view place as a negotiated reality resulting from actors laying claim to certain places (Duncan & Ley, 2013). In the context of Cumbria, it might be as 'a site for hill-farming'. Indeed, "sites are never simply locations. Rather, they are sites for someone and of something" (Shields, 1991:6). Places are then collectively ascribed an identity. With this in mind, interaction between people, place, and farming practices present themselves as key brand relationship concepts to be considered in the case of HL.

Reflection

The brand development process at retailer or producer level must consider the target consumer to pitch the social expression of the brand correctly. Currently Booths supermarket (which champions local producers) independent butchers and producers acknowledge the availability of HL and all of these focus on the local quality of the lamb but less apparent is the connection with the consumer (Shaw, 2012). Consumer values which are satisfied by buying products such as HL are mainly detailed in the literature analysing the clientele of farmers' markets. This shows the importance of face to face contact with the producer because direct conversations allow for verification of/participation in "quality, community, natural and [local] identity" (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000:293). Consumers value food which is locally identifiable, traditionally produced and where qualities are verifiable by the producer (Kirwan, 2006. McEachern et al., (2010:406), for example, discuss the "overtly ethical" behaviour exhibited by some consumers at farmers' markets, by consumers who support a non-standard supermarket exchange, and value the sustainability and community aspects of this type of provisioning which go beyond simply obtaining a product. The appeal of HL which has been produced in plain sight responds to these preferences. The type of consumers using farmers' markets regularly have been further classified as being either 'Rational' or 'Adventurous', which translates to middle aged or above, retired/employed, with a high level of education who like to spend time provisioning and cooking from scratch (Buckley et al., 2005). It is these customer activities and discerning values which need to be reflected in HL brand's components at producer/retailer level.

Physical

The physical aspects of the brand refer to its salient aspects in terms of design, such as the shape of the Orangina bottle (Kapferer, 1997). Meat packaging design is constrained by considerations of product perishability and requirements of the chilled distribution system; however, use of visuals of the animal in the landscape would seem to link best to the pre-product experience explored in this paper. The extant literature provides notional links to the theme of visual perception of lamb production, notably familiarity with landscape as a foundation for a relationship with place (Coffield et al., 1986). Similarly, brand physique implicitly brings relevance to the visual spectacle of the animal, whilst culture is in-part the cognitive embedded result of rituals and knowledge related to sheep farming (Kapferer, 1997; Morris & Kirwan, 2010). Consumer perceptions on the physical appearance of HL, and witness to any pleasing husbandry practices will be sought in this respect.

Self-image

The self-image component measures how a consumer feels the brand fits their own self-concept, this section limits itself to the consideration of food consumption. Literature which investigates the symbolic nature of direct purchase of food includes: focus on validating self-identity through social action such as involving one's self in a farmers' market or discussing meat origin with the butcher (Jenkins, 1996); to express ethical self-identity by overtly buying local food (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008); as rationalisations for decision-making relative to healthy food choice (Kristensen et al., 2013); and a sense of place created through a mix of relationships, responsibilities, rights and roles of the people living there (Aitken and Campelo, 2011). Consumer purchase of local HL provides opportunities for public demonstration of a range of these values.

Personality

One of the anthropomorphic features of brands is their personality. The literature approaches it from different dimensions: emerging through the traits they display (Aaker, 1997); the brand behaviours in terms of marketing decisions and resultant consumer cognitions, attitudes and behaviours in response (Allen & Olsen, 1995); and as inferred from the people directly associated with the brand such as employees, the CEO or brand endorsers (McCracken, 1989). Customers identify different values from different personality dimensions. For example, sophistication and ruggedness dimensions have been found to be valuable in social and identity-related reasons, whilst other dimensions served more utilitarian functions such as value-for-money (Maehle and Supphellen, 2011). HL is an integral part of the lakeland landscape, it is stocked because of its hardiness. Consumer perceptions of HL personality markers will be elicited.

Culture

Defining our cultural influences involves considering consumer-held credence attributes in relation to food and region. Berard and Marchenay (2007) identify three different perspectives on place association afforded to French food products, ranging from place of origin, to abstract historical link, to being rooted in time and shared knowledge. The presence of a product in its place of origin can be novel or entrenched in the heritage of a place, with the related term *embedded* found largely in geography-influenced literature on regional food networks (Murdoch, Marsden & Banks, 2000; Hinrichs, 2003; Lee, 2000; Sage, 2003; Sonnino & Marsden, 2006), originating from Karl Polanyi (1957). Morris and Kirwan (2010) link the term specifically to meats and cheeses, in a discussion of producer and consumer knowledge relating to these products and their various links to grassland biodiversity. They also consider the ‘co-production of the economic and the cultural’, where farm activities influence local culture through traditions and rituals, which may passively (as you wait for sheep to be shepherded along a road) or more actively (farmers’ market or local show) involve the local population and others (Bridge and Smith, 2003; Jackson & Chung, 2008). Both of these situations positively impact consumers’ understanding of sheep farming.

Shared knowledge for HL includes a culture of place, of agriculture processes (specifically hill-farming) and of the breed characteristics. In terms of Cumbrian culture and heritage, the first Herdwick sheep are thought to have arrived with Norse settlers in the 10th Century and found to be hardy enough for a life on the Lakeland fells. The culture evolved around sheep production with regional techniques of counting and marking sheep and social gatherings at shepherds meets to return strayed sheep. Since the expansion of tourism and leisure activities (including agricultural shows) in Lakeland, the visual presence of the breed is widely known (Urry, 1990; Denyer 1993; Norgate & Norgate, 2003). These cultural markers provide rich brand relationship references.

Together the prism components represent the external expression of the brand through its visible components of physique, relationship and reflection, whilst the unseen essence of the brand is defined by personality, culture and self-image. As the aim of brands is to resonate with consumers, it is important to collect data concerning experiences and understanding of place relative to the perceptions of HL, as this contributes to brand and consumer identity (Ley, 1981; Cohen, 1986; Aitken & Campelo, 2011).

Method

The identity prism offers an analytical framework for bringing together the sender of a communication (the brand) and the recipient of that brand (the consumer). By overlaying this framework with the lifescape concept we can bring together a generic marketing tool and the notion of the pre-product in a regional food context. A lifescape is defined by Convery et al., (2005) as representing the links between rural communities and farming, livestock and landscape. Its adoption here is somewhat novel in the genre of food product research, in that it is unconstrained by considerations of food as an ingested substance (Frewer & Van Trijp, 2006) or food as an economic good (Ritson & Hutchins, 1995) or competing product (Steenkamp, 1989; Grunert et al., 1997). Instead it considers the living animal, the landscape, and consumers' identity in relation to place, as the points of reference for brand creation.

Given the novelty of this stance above, the primary data will aim to explore rather than confirm or reject presupposed relationships. Gathering unique personal perspectives and preferences demands an interpretive and qualitative approach (Sullivan, 2010; Bryman, 2012). This approach encourages individuals to divulge their perceptions of embedded food products and self-concepts, with resulting findings subsequently informing the brand development process.

Whilst food models offer a multi-variate approach to understanding consumer food choice, Grunert (1997) states that multi-attribute approaches relate to consumer perception so can conceivably cope with search, experience and credence attributes. However, multi-attribute models are not able to process the interrelationship between attributes. This requires a hierarchical model such as means-end chain theory (Gutman, 1982a, 1982b, 1991). Means-end chain (MEC) analysis facilitates examination of identity of the respondents and products with the region. It has been used to analyse consumer perceptions in relation to olive oil (Zanoli & Nespetti, 2002); consider consumer response to wine made from organic grapes (Fotopoulos et al., 2003); consider attitudes to local food (Haas et al, 2013) and to brand positioning (Jeng & Yeh, 2016). MEC analysis is used here to link lower level concrete or abstract product characteristics, with functional or psychosocial consequences, arising from consumption, which reveals the rewards which motivate continued consumption (Gutman, 1982b; 1991). The qualitative data collected does not constitute an accurate representation of results for any population. It aims to explore the links which consumers reveal between their own schema of self and the schema of the product. Gengler et al., (1995) offer a guide on MEC data analysis, which was used in processing the data.

The sample comprised twenty respondents (of both sexes) selected on their local status to the HL production areas in Cumbria; local being defined as living in such a location for at least 5 years. In the absence of a metric from the literature, reasonable judgement was used to assume that some local knowledge is attained after 5 years. Respondents were self-selecting, in that they actively responded to a request for participation which was published via a school newsletter or a notice on a farmers' market stall. The Locally Sourced Foods Report (Mintel, 2008) defines the general profile for ethical purchase as over the age of 30, which the sample complied with, and all respondents were carnivores, and hence had consumed HL. Half of the respondents resided in the north lakes area around Keswick, the others close to Kendal in the south lakes. On reflection, the pensioner group included in the sample were able to offer a valuable extended life-view of selecting and eating lamb. Whereas, busy professionals gave insight into management of their local provisioning, and respondents involved in arts and crafts provided insight on the crafting aspects of farming. The sample also bore close resemblance to

Buckley et al.'s (2005) categories of Rational or Adventurous consumers (as detailed above under Reflection).

Data was collected through interviews which were conducted at a mutually convenient time and place, ranging from homes to quiet public places such as restaurants. Interviews ranged from 50-130 minutes. Soft laddering interviews were conducted in this research to enable the MEC analysis (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). These involve participants using their natural flow of speech in interviews. Themes selected for discussion were structured around a funnel approach, first asking respondents about their perceptions of lamb amongst other meats and then focussing in on a single lamb visible in the local environment. The themes covered the respondent's experience of seeing stock grazing, and interactions between stock and farmers. Perceptions of the landscape in which this experience took place were probed, and seasonal aspects considered in landscape vistas/experience as well as seasonality in diet. Provisioning experiences were considered from the perspective of contact with the supplier, information available in retail outlets and via farm access. Key local historical incidents and personalities known by the respondents were also discussed. Prompts were used to remind consumers of how HL was being promoted. The use of 'stimulus material' and particularly in the format of pictorial representation has been associated with increased validity in respondent judgement (Looschilder et al., 1995).

Data analysis was based on transcripts of the recorded interviews were each allocated a pseudonym, the content coded and analysed to produce a 'summary implication matrix' (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). This allowed identification of the number of times each coded element links to another. Content analysis across interviews then permits identification of common patterns of meaning and a set of codes was derived to summarise common meanings. The links between codes were aggregated across respondents to produce an implications matrix, from which the hierarchical value map (HVM) was constructed (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988) this represents a summary of the samples' most frequently linked cognitions (Figure 1). Once all values are plotted it is possible to select a cut-off level, which is the number of linkages which the analyst decides will provide a clear but comprehensive HVM. The HVM represents the dominant perceptual connections for HL. The next section introduces these results.

Results

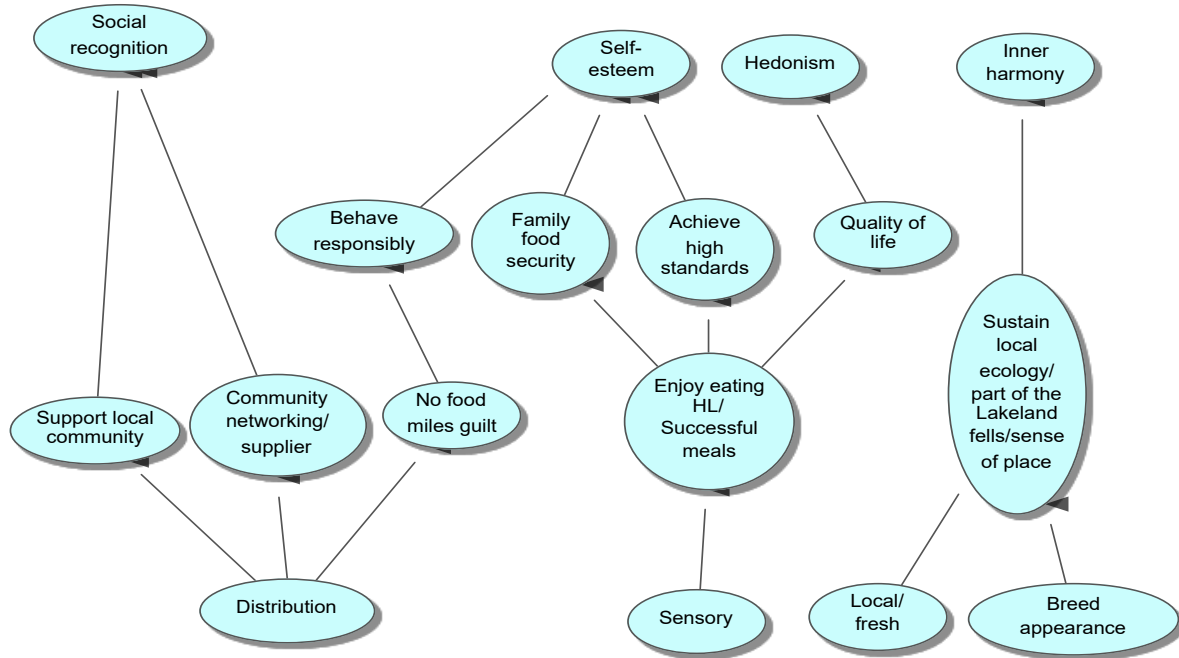
Consumer values relating to HL reveal three important dimensions. Figure 1 shows the hierarchical value map (the composite map from all 20 respondents, the cut-off point is 3). It demonstrates three key findings, reading the vertical connections from the left as: place experienced through community; the central vertical connections reflect the landscape and self; whilst the vertical connections to the right represent the landscape incorporating the embedded Herdwick. These findings reveal consumers' constructs of place incorporating HL and these findings will now be discussed in turn, alongside illustrative interview data.

The landscape experienced through community

The first key theme identified in the data revolves around the importance of community interaction and knowledge-exchange to the perception of HL. During interaction with producers, customers may ask which farm the lamb is from and will achieve a level of knowledge commensurate with their need for verification of product quality. Through these interactions consumers enhance their bank of credence attributes relating to HL (Figure 1, left-hand side vertical linkages/ladder). Customers are actively participating in their local culture,

building relationships with the farming community and investing in their local identity. Customers appreciate the interaction with producers on several levels:

Figure 1. Hierarchical Value Map for Herdwick Lamb



...it's just that you know that the lamb she has, has been reared in reasonable conditions, obviously if it has been kept well, the meat is better at the other end (Sam).

...it is so nice to be able to walk to the farm and buy some meat, it's a friendship thing... (Phoebe).

...as part of being part of a community, when I spend money on lamb I would rather invest that into the community in which we live, to a local farmer (Hannah).

...from the meat perspective you want to know that they are looked after properly, if it is a local farm you know you can go and peer over the hedge...and sometimes even as a lay person, you can see when animals look fit and cared for (Cleo).

I know that they are raised on the farm and taken in small numbers to the market process, there is no stress. That influences the taste of the meat if the animal is killed when it is really stressed then you literally can't eat it (Karl).

Ethical considerations expressed by participants include: animal care, food miles (implicit) and sustaining the local economy. Local purchase permits these consumers to express their ethical beliefs publicly (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008). The visual confirmation of the credibility of

these elements is evident from the respondent comments above. The type of consumer (reflected above) shows expressed knowledge and concern in relation to the stress endured by animals in the slaughter process, with trust in husbandry also important. HL is perceived as unstressed, semi-wild and consequently tender meat (Schroder & McEachern, 2004). The tenderness is viewed as a reward for good husbandry, a considerate approach to farming seen to be driven by ethical concerns rather than financial gain (Kirwan, 2006). Local consumers are, therefore, embedding themselves in their community via food provisioning choices. Such local networking demonstrates esteem for the role of farming, fulfils needs for social recognition and builds trust in product quality.

Brand implications from this ladder highlight the importance of personalisation on behalf of the producer/location/fell name/farm name to facilitate recognition and networking amongst the community, echoing Kapferer's (1997) ideas on relationship, culture and self-image.

The landscape and self

The second key finding from the data involves respondents' reflections on the landscape in different climatic conditions, a shared sensory experience for residents and HL which signifies the importance of (pre-product) experience attributes prior to the retail context. In addition, there are positive inferences for meat quality from the landscape and indirectly for themselves as HL consumers (Figure 1, central vertical linkages/ladder). Respondents' understanding of lamb is assisted by direct visual appreciation of the product as part of their lifescape. For them there is a flavour and food quality that they can logically attribute to factors sensually verified in the environment of production.

All the rain that we have had this year, means that the grass and all the wild flowers on the high fells must be pretty good this year, and that is what is giving it the flavour. I wouldn't expect them to be fed that much in the way of nuts and so on. (Cleo).

...but it can only be better up there, because it is wild, and it is higher up. So there are less people, less pollution, so it is as good as it can get really isn't it? I suppose the only pollution it gets is from the rain. I think that the water higher up is cleaner, nearer the source, whatever the vegetation is it is going to be better than that on the lowland (Eliza).

I think if you don't bring children up on healthy food, then it is much harder for them to make the choice later (Eliza).

...and there is something about the provenance of the meat in the butchers which is not clear to me, it is just meat there, I more trust meat that is badged with the farm (Jo).

Consumers offer a keen sense of awareness of the shared ("we" Cleo) landscape, its change through the seasons and varying climatic conditions impacting on flora and lamb flavour. The relationship between the landscape incorporating HL and self is evident. The high fells are viewed as an optimum production ground with HL output gaining connotations of pure/organic.

Provisioning decisions are heightened by concern for children's diet and the credibility of the quality of meat is visually evident.

Following the perception of HL as high-quality lamb with connotations of pure, cleaner and healthy are associated with production from the fells gives a clear position for it amongst its competitors as a premium product. The contribution it makes to family welfare offers satisfaction from responsible purchasing. These findings support those of Michaelidou and Hassan (2008) in terms of health motivated food choices. Furthermore, the perception of wild and landscape images, as revealed in the quotes above, link to the personality, physique and culture aspects of Kapferer's brand identity prism (Figure 2).

The landscape incorporating the embedded Herdwick

The third key finding from the data involves reflections on the HL in the environment, the pre-product experiences and understanding of HL as a defining icon of place, sustainable agriculture and culture in Cumbria (Figure 1, right-hand side vertical linkages/ladder). Relating to Kapferer's (ibid) brand identity facet of physique, HL are described by participants as pretty sheep of dark colour with short stubby legs. Some respondents further commented on the physical condition of HL as fit and healthy compared to flabby lowland lamb. In eating terms, this is assumed to translate to dense meat which is expected to be lean in winter and fat in summer, evidence of consumers' ongoing observation of the condition of the animal in its environment. The meat changes in quality along with the seasons and mirrors the ease of habitation in this environment:

HL are quite purpley/grey, they do have nice faces. They are a bit more attractive than other sheep (Jill).

...the fact I know the farm is hugely appealing (Jo).

HL as a feature of the landscape is very much in one's imagination, and I would want to support that (Jo).

...when you get onto a road which has got the cattle grids on, and you have the sheep wandering along, with no barriers, I used to find that amazing (Helen).

But with the HL we are talking about a real sense of heritage and a real distinction, which I am completely in favour of (Jo).

I understand how complicated it would be to control growth on the hills without the Herdwick, it does it perfectly, and manages to live up there. Without it the landscape would change (Karl).

In terms of the personality facet of Kapferer's prism (1997), HL is therefore seen as traditional, an authentic part of Lakeland, wild, strong, and possessing intimate knowledge of its home and grazing boundaries. Respondents' comments thus relate to their own experience of being in this place and recognition of how severe winter conditions in the fells can be; therefore, respect is afforded to the stock on the fells. The cultural aspect of the prism is also exemplified by the heritage of Lakeland being recognised as tied to HL production. Therefore, purchase of HL represents active and satisfying contribution to that evolving heritage (Elliott & Wattanasuwan,

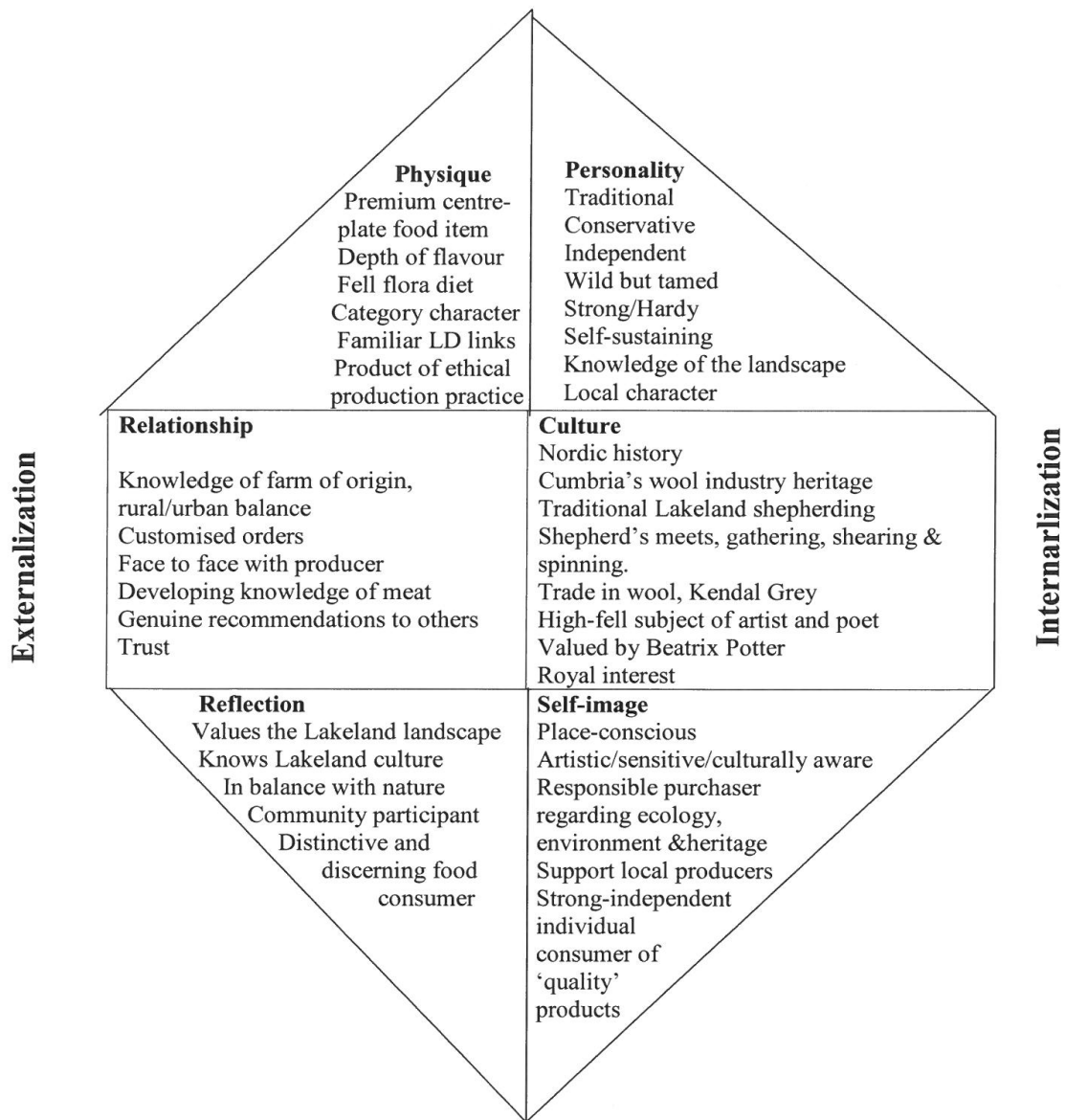
1998; Bridge & Smith, 2003; Jackson et al., 2006). Reflection on these qualities of place contributes towards consumers' inner harmony and self-identity.

The brand implications of these findings recognise the importance of perceptions gained by consumers sharing a place, a lifescape with a growing product. The final product ties the consumer to community, to achieving an identity incorporating regional heritage and to the continuity of the visual aspect of the landscape.

Figure 2, exemplifies the imperative of place in the development of a regional food such as HL. From observations of the physical pre-product in the landscape, to the role it has played in the regional culture and identity, which are reflected in the community ties, and self-image of consumers. Kapferer's identity model for HL may be used as a starting point for discussion with practitioners commencing the brand development process. The pre-product status may also be explored with other agriculture, fishery, forestry and crafted products.

Figure 2. Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism Applied to Herdwick Lamb

Picture of Sender



Kapferer's (1997:100) prism of identity applied to Herdwick lamb.

Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to uncover how shared lifescape influenced consumers' perceptions of HL, and thus how observation of the pre-product in the landscape has enabled

cognitive processing and verification of product qualities. The results show that respondents have cognitively processed perceptions of growing HL in Lakeland. These cognitions shown on HVMs represent visual observations of agricultural practices, recognition of the distinct community roles of farmers, and appreciation of HL in their shared Lakeland landscape. Collectively these represent latent experiential-brand relationships, the significance of which is underappreciated in the branding process literature, or in regional food branding initiatives.

The study makes four contributions to the literature. First, as the pre-product perceptions constitute an experience of the brand essence of the HL before being formalised by a marketer or farm owner, this critically places research of consumer perceptions of the pre-product firmly at the inception of the brand development process for embedded food products and in sharp contrast to FMCGs where products are ‘hidden from view’ until launch (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). The conceptual shift is towards the social construction of brand development.

Second, research results propose an amplification of the conceptual boundaries of the servicescape to include cognitions, visual familiarity and community investment relating to the pre-product (Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011). In terms of search attributes consumers are looking to buy the product they have seen in the pre-product state, they have become involved with the product. The HL purchase will satisfy multiple needs: to reinforce community links; to build self-identity and satisfy place-belonging needs (Coffield et al., 1986; Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000; McEachern et al., 2010). Essentially the place of purchase becomes a search attribute.

Third, accepting this broader lifescape-orientated view of the servicescape, the experience attribute becomes relevant to multiple occasions pre and post consumption which constitute informal experiential HL marketing events (Schmitt, 1999). These include: views of or encounters with the pre-product in the landscape; experiences relating to husbandry practice; at agricultural shows or when walking through a farmyard/on the fell; the community experience of the farmers’ market or farm shop, and the conventional experience of consuming the product. Results show that consideration of a broader context (than the purchase occasion) for embedded food products is validated.

Fourth, credence attributes are built less from the traditional secondary sources of information, rather from cognitions resulting from direct experience and observation of the pre-product, discussions with the producer at the farmer’s market/other (Kirwan, 2006). The identity features summarised in Figure 2 provide a resource for entrenching emerging HL brands in resonating local knowledge and perceptions.

The brand ingredients for HL above are abundant and already manifest in the minds of local consumers. There is clearly an opportunity to approach regional meat brands from an experiential perspective given the holistic range of satisfiers identified which relate to social and cultural well-being as well as individual identity needs. The limitations of this case in terms of its transferability relate to the advantageous location of Lakeland HL production, both in terms of the significant tourist market and the ‘vertical fields’ which allow for easy viewing by those not fond of climbing fells. However, these advantages are not features of all regional meat. Similarly, the empirical data is drawn from those most able to access this premium product, both cognitively and financially. Contrasting results may be elicited from the under 30 age group, and are significant for the future of HL brands.

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