



## Value in Studying Abroad (ViSA) – Exploring Value-Seeking Behaviours in International Student Exchange

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### Abstract

This research explores the multifaceted concept of consumer value in study abroad experiences by examining both outgoing exchange students undertaking a semester abroad and incoming exchange students studying at Sheffield Hallam. While study abroad is promoted as a transformative educational opportunity (Bain & Yaklin, 2019), there remains limited understanding of how different student groups perceive and prioritise the value of this experience. Our research addresses this gap by applying consumer value theory (see Holbrook, 1999; and Leroi-Werelds, 2019) and comparatively analysing the expectations, motivations, and perceived outcomes of both cohorts. Drawing on 30 in-depth qualitative interviews (11 outbound, 19 Inbound) the study investigates the distinct and overlapping value-seeking behaviours of outgoing and incoming students. Outgoing students often emphasise personal growth, cultural immersion, and enhanced employability, whereas incoming students may prioritise English language, developing independence and opportunities for travel. By systematically comparing these perspectives, we consider how value is not fixed but shaped by context, student background, and mobility direction. The findings highlight shared aspirations, offering a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes a meaningful study abroad experience. Importantly, the study demonstrates that value is co-constructed through institutional offerings and student expectations, rather than delivered unilaterally. These insights have significant implications for higher education institutions and academic practitioners responsible for designing, promoting, and supporting study abroad programmes. By aligning provision with the varied value expectations of both incoming and outgoing students, institutions can enhance participation, satisfaction, and overall impact. Ultimately, this research contributes to more effective and student-centred internationalisation strategies in higher education.

### Keywords

study abroad, Erasmus, internationalisation, value co-creation

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