An Exploration of Relationship Development and Management in International Business Schools: MBA Students’ Perspectives

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2014

Helen HY SR Li

Manchester Business School
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<td>ARA</td>
<td>Activities-Resources-Actors [Model]</td>
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<td>B2B</td>
<td>Business-to-Business</td>
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<td>B2C</td>
<td>Business-to-Customer</td>
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<td>C2C</td>
<td>Customer-to-Customer</td>
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<td>CEIBS</td>
<td>China Europe International Business School</td>
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<td>CRM</td>
<td>Customer Relationship Management</td>
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<td>EBV</td>
<td>Economic-Based View</td>
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ABSTRACT

An Exploration of Relationship Development and Management in International Business Schools: MBA Students’ Perspectives

Helen HY SR Li; PhD in Business Administration; The University of Manchester; 2014

Given the increasing importance of international higher education (HE) markets from a business perspective (Chadee and Naidoo, 2009; Anonymous, 2011a, 2012a), this research responds to the review of Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) that highlighted a lack of holistic approaches and theoretical models to address the nature of the HE service; and built on scholarly work (Mazzarol and Hosie, 1996; Mazzarol, 1998; Naude and Ivy, 1999; Ivy and Naude, 2004; Ivy, 2008) relating to HE marketing strategies. The research moves from the traditional marketing approach adopted predominantly in the existing literature of HE marketing (i.e. Mazzarol et al., 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006) and instead adopts a relational approach. This offers an alternative way of investigating the HE service, and contributes towards a broader theoretical perspective on HE strategy and a deeper understanding of the complex nature of the HE service.

The theoretical background of this research was based on both the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982) and the Relationship Life-Cycle Model (Ford, 1980; Wilkinson and Young, 1994). In response to limited existing research on the students’ perspective in HE (Trowler, 2010), this study provides a means of exploring HE marketing from the perspective of a markets-as-networks tradition (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Ford et al., 2002). Due to the adoption of a social constructivist epistemological stance (Gergen, 1985; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998), a case studies research approach (Yin, 2003, 2011) and semi-structured interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994) were utilised. Template analysis was chosen for data examination and interpretation (King, 1998, 2004), from a longitudinal contextual time-space of prospective students, current students and future alumni viewpoints (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005).

The research findings suggest that the HE service is interactive and relational by nature, comprising six key relationships that are fundamentally important from the perspective of students being the focal-actor. These include relationships with alumni, other students, academic staff, administrative staff, multi-national companies (MNCs), and overseas exchange partner higher education institutions (HEIs). Despite the multiple roles of students, as clients (Mills et al., 1983; Hill, 1995), producers (Armstrong, 1995), products (Emery, et al., 2001; Modell, 2005) and customers (Kotler and Fox, 1985; Conway et al., 1994) of the HEIs, students are the users of these networks. They are also the beneficiaries of these key relationships, as they perceive and seek the added-value of the HE service, such as knowledge enrichment and employability enhancement. The synergy of these relationships and networks collectively contribute to the added-value of the HE service, enhance students’ overall positive experience and satisfaction with their institutions, and also have the potential to significantly impact on the HEIs’ competencies and business strategies. Practically, managing and influencing these relationships provide an opportunity for HE managers in resource allocation, strategic planning and policy-making, and the quality of service provision at the operational level.
DECLARATION

I confirm that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Candidate: ________________________ Ms. Helen HY SR Li
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DEDICATION

To my son Justin,

who enlightened me to understand the true meaning of life
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been an extremely valuable learning experience for me to truly understand the real meaning of ‘no pain, no gain’ through my pursuit of this doctoral study. Equally, it has been the journey of putting together this thesis that has enabled me to fully appreciate the professionalism, the dedication, the humbleness and the nurturing nature of the academic community. It is that which gives me a sense of pride to be an apprentice amongst many.

Looking back, it has been a marathon to bring this doctoral study to its final completion. I would have not been able to reach the finishing line, if I had not had the guidance and support from my amazing supervisors and academic advisors. Thanks for never giving up on me, and for cheering me on during challenging times, when I often had doubts myself.

To Professor John Murphy, for scholarship provision and making it financially feasible for me to embark on the PhD study. To Dr Jamie Burton, for having faith in me being able to balance my daily job and this research study, and for being extremely patient with my progress during the entire doctoral investigation. To Professor Pete Naudé, for his guidance and support at my very first conference presentation in Sweden. To Professor Judy Zolkiewski, for spending her valuable time, in giving me detailed feedback and also in providing me with much needed guidance at the most critical stages of my writing-up. I owe my deepest gratitude and respect to all of them.

The completion of this PhD would have been more difficult without the support of a number of administrative staff members at MBS PGR Office, including Daniel Wheatcroft, Anusarin Lowe, Madonna Fyne, and Lynne Barlow-Cheetham, to whom I am most grateful for their consistent professional input during my doctoral studies.

I am deeply thankful to the three participating schools – Warwick Business School, Manchester Business School, and China Europe International Business School – for their support and assistance during the research process. In addition, I sincerely thank all the people who agreed to be interviewed by me for the purposes of this research.

The last seven years have been the most challenging time of my life. While combating tragic incidents, coping with family losses, being flicked between life and death, the journey of working on the PhD study has given me space and comfort, and enabled me to temporarily forget about my pain and worries. My son Justin, the gift of my life, with every step of his development has enlightened me to truly understand the great responsibility of being a mum, and the real meaning of being alive. It is him who chose to fall asleep next to my study desk night after night, and who unlocked my inner strength and cleared my vision to see the path ahead.

I extend my life-time gratitude to my parents and family for their understanding and ongoing support. In particular, to my beloved papa Gerard Blanchard resting in peace, granddad Costas Nicolaou, and brother Adam Mannis, I thank you all from the bottom of my heart, for loving and supporting me unconditionally since my youth days. It is not a miracle, but it is the end of an era, which now provides a strong basis for heading on and exploring further adventures in life. Be alive and live well!
Chapter 1  Introduction

1.1  Background

The research was set in the context of internationalisation and marketisation of higher education (HE), and in particular its significant contribution to the UK knowledge-based economy (Anonymous, 2007a, 2011a, 2012a) and its increasing importance to the rapid development of Chinese HE (Mok, 2005; Ryan, 2011). In the context of heightened competition in the international HE business environment (Michael, 1990; Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999), the literature review of HE marketing revealed the urgency and desire for solutions regarding how higher education institutions (HEIs) strategically position themselves and successfully compete long-term (Anonymous, 2010a; Johnstone et al., 2010; Maringe and Foskett, 2010). The overall objective for this study is to contribute towards the development of a broader theoretical understanding of HE strategy and to gain a deeper understanding of the complex nature of the HE service.

1.2  Theoretical Background

Supporting the criticism that customers and consumers are assumed to be passive and transactional (Aijo, 1996; Ford, 1997; Ballantyne et al., 2003), much of the HE marketing literature review demonstrates that HEIs have generally followed a traditional marketing belief and primarily practised a transactional approach (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). As a result, there is a paucity of empirical studies examining the student experience with HE service provision (Anonymous, 2011b), especially during the key stages of their study journey with HEIs. In order to equip HEIs with competitive advantage and to assure their sustainable long-term success (Mazzarol, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006), they need to recognise that student satisfaction and value-creation should not diminish after the transactional point of student enrolment and tuition payment (Beneke and Human, 2010). In moving away from a domination of the transaction marketing concept with a focus on student
acquisition, increasing numbers of HEIs are now attempting to address aspects of student conversion and retention in their HE marketing practice (Naidoo and Wu, 2011).

In a HE context, the key customers remain the students (Kotler and Fox, 1985; Modell, 2005; Marginson, 2006; Smart and Banks, 2006), along with another 15 public bodies/stakeholders identified in the educational market (Kotler and Fox, 1985). Thus, HEIs needs to recognise that they operate in a complex multiple stakeholder context, where they should seek to serve the interests of students as their core business, as well as engage with these other stakeholders.

With the adoption of the service marketing concept in HE marketing research (Nicholls et al., 1995; Mazzarol, 1998; Cubillo et al., 2006), there has been raised interest in exploring relationship management and relationship marketing in the HE sector. Johnson (2001) suggested that a greater focus should be placed on the two-way relationship between the HEI and its customer, given such increasing importance. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) criticised the literature on HE marketing as being incoherent and for theoretical models being inadequate, in terms of reflecting the particular context of HE and the unique nature of HEI services.

From a theoretical perspective, it is true that direct adoption of the relationship marketing concept into the HE sector is limited (Naude and Ivy, 1999). However, Lovelock (1983) recognised that students form ‘membership’ relationships with institutions. Additionally, with the impact of positive word-of-mouth (WOM), satisfied and loyal students can be deemed ‘walking-talking’ adverts for their home institution, and they can also have strong influences on prospective students’ choice of institutions (Conway et al., 1994; Emery et al., 2001; Modell, 2005). Furthermore, education is a long-term investment (Marginson, 2006), and qualifications are increasingly becoming an important gateway to career enhancement (Anonymous, 2011c), and an inseparable part of an individual’s social status (Brooks et al., 2012). The profiles of graduates and alumni are increasingly becoming the living images of their home institution, the free marketing tools and voluntary ambassadors of HEIs that new applicants could then relate to (Stahli, 2005;
Therefore, the importance, as well as the potential influence, of an individual student should not be under-estimated (Stahli, 2005), and should not be limited to the duration and formality of direct commercial exchange activities. Instead, satisfied students or customer groups contribute to overall profitability (Marginson, 2006), and bring a range of benefits to home institutions, both directly and indirectly (Thomas, 2011).

The relevance of Relationship Marketing (RM) in HE is not exceptional, especially given the importance of relationships. Nevertheless, RM faces challenges in its applicability and implementation, and has been debated by a number of academics (Berry, 1983; Christopher et al., 1991; Halinen, 1994; Barnes and Howlett 1998; Pressey and Matthews, 2000). Due to the characteristics of the HE sector, including the multiple roles of students (Levitt, 1980; Mills et al., 1983; Kotler and Fox, 1985; Conway et al., 1994; Armstrong, 1995; Hill, 1995; Emery et al., 2001; Modell, 2005) along with the impact of WOM (Elliott and Healy, 2001; Helgesen and Nesset, 2007; Kim, 2009; Voss, 2009), it could be inadequate to view relationships between students and HEIs through an orientation of repeat purchase and commercial exchange activities (Naudé and Ivy, 1999; Marginson, 2006; Naidoo and Wu, 2011; Thomas, 2011). Equally, it may be insufficient to reveal the nature of the HE service without an awareness of RM from the perspectives of student-centricity, long-term orientation and the inseparable context of the HEI’s other stakeholders.

As it is extremely challenging to measure value-creation of an individual student, from his or her lifetime perspective, the ethos of the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Group (Anonymous, 2012b) potentially offers an alternative approach for investigating the dynamics of relationships between students and HEIs, with a recognition of contextual influences of other HEI stakeholders, as well as relationship interactions in the contextual time-space of past, current and future (Halinen, 1998; Halinen and Törnroos, 2005).
The fundamentals of the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982) and the Relationship Life-Cycle Model (Ford, 1980; Wilkinson and Young, 1994), could be characterised as interactive and inter-dependent (Håkansson ed., 1982), single-relational and cross-relational (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Ford, 2002; Ford and Håkansson, 2006), as well as longitudinal and evolving (Ford, 1980; Wilkinson and Young, 1994). These concepts are of great relevance and applicability to the HE sector, and thus worth exploring. Relationship interactions exist between students and institutions, and they are interdependent. It is no exaggeration to state that if there are no students, HEIs will cease to exist (Kotler and Fox, 1985; Anonymous, 2001). The nature of the interactions between an individual student and their HEI are longitudinal instead of transactional, i.e. the tuition-fee transaction superficially leads one to believe that is the case.

Different from traditional marketing, the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982) provides a means of presenting real-world business scenarios. Given the importance of relationships as being a key organisational resource (Håkansson ed., 1982; Ford, 1997, 2002), and from viewing relationships as elements of network structure (Axelsson and Easton, 1992) as well as in terms of markets-as-networks (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Ford et al., 2002), there is significance in relationships and associations probably being one of the most important assets of companies from the strategic perspective (Ford, 1997, 2002). Relationships provide indirect benefits, since they grant access to other relations, organisations, resources and competencies, which affect the development and utilisation of resources in a company itself and in its counterparts (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Walter et al., 2001; Ritter et al., 2004). The added-value of relationships attracts companies to become coupled and clustered together (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995) and organised in a network-like structure (Ford, et al., 2002; Håkansson and Snehota, 2006). The development and continuous management of business relationships are a central and crucial activity of a successful organisation (Cunningham and Homse, 1982), and potentially enhance an organisation’s competitiveness, effectiveness and profitability (Zolkiewski and Turnbull, 2002; Ritter et al., 2004). As such, there could be some value in investigating these aspects of relationships within the HE sector.
Whilst students are not just ‘customers’ and have multiple roles (Levitt, 1980; Mills et al., 1983; Kotler and Fox, 1985; Conway et al., 1994; Armstrong, 1995; Hill, 1995; Emery et al., 2001; Modell, 2005), their interaction with a HEI does not mirror a traditional 4Ps-driven transactional purchase (Ivy, 2008). It is an interactive engagement that forms a longer-term relationship. The limitations of transactional marketing have constrained the further development of research in HE Marketing, as it has been unable to address the complex nature of HE and to provide solutions from a strategic management perspective. The relevancies and advantages associated with the IMP approaches, i.e. the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982) and the Relationship Life-Cycle Model (Ford, 1980; Wilkinson and Young, 1994), could have the ability to present the real-world business scenarios of HE, and could also provide an alternative view of strategic management in HE. Therefore, successful relationship development with its students and network management within its multiple stakeholders may potentially have a strong impact on the performance of an HEI, enabling it to gain strategic organisational capabilities and competitive advantages that are unique and difficult to be imitated by other rival institutions leading to long-term success of the HEI.

Moving from the traditional marketing and buyer behaviour approach adopted predominantly in the existing literature of HE marketing (i.e. Mazzarol et al., 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006), this current research study adopted the relational concept, as a fresh and alternative way of investigating the HE service, and to contribute towards the development of a broader theoretical perspective on HE strategy and a deeper understanding of the complex nature of the HE service.

1.3 The Thesis Structure

The current research is presented in the following chapters of this thesis. Chapter 2 provides an overview of marketing in HE, critiquing the relevance of RM and arguing for the applicability of IMP approaches that offer a much needed alternative strategic solution, in response to the paucity of evidence associated with HE marketing. Chapter 3 outlines the epistemological stance and methodological choices that have been made.
Chapter 4 explains how data collected in this investigation has been analysed. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 present the findings of the individual case studies. Chapter 7 then provides a cross-case comparison of the overall findings and a synthesis of theory. Finally, Chapter 8 draws together conclusions from the research herein.

Figure 1.1 outlines the key literature review, research process and findings that this research project produced.
Figure 1.1: Overview of the Thesis Structure
- Literature Review, Research Objectives, Research Questions and Findings

**Overall Objective for this Study**
To contribute towards the development of a broader theoretical perspective on the HE strategy, and to gain a deeper understanding of the complex nature of the HE service.

**Research Objective**
To investigate what the relationship dynamics are from a student perspective within an international HE context? And how the relationship dynamics impact on the relationship development between the students and their institution?

**Research Questions**
- What actors are involved from the perspective of students as the focal actor?
- What episodes and activities are involved in relationship development between students and their institution, as perceived by students?
- How do the relationship dynamics that correspond with the key interactive stages during the life-cycle of students’ experience with their institution impact on the different stages of relationship development between the students and their institution?
- What is the nature of the environment within which the relationship dynamics and interactions between students and their institutions exist?

**Methodological Objective**
To use empirical methods that provide a processual understanding of relationship interactions from the transaction point through to contextual time-space of past, present and future.

**Case Study of Contemporary Business Network: from the Contextual Time-Space and Student-Centric Perspective**
The Student Experience Map and Six Key Interactive Stages Derived from the Pilot Study
- Enquiries Stage
- Applications & Acceptance Stage
- Registration and Orientation Stage
- Studying and Living Stage
- Career Development Stage
- Graduation / Alumni Stage

**HE key characteristics:**
- Role of Students
- WOM
- Multiple Stakeholders

**Research Findings**
- Identified six key types of relationships and network dynamics.
- Strategic solution for HE marketing: strategic value net is centered around the development and management of these key relationships and networks.
- Revealed the nature of the HE service – as a business enterprise HE is viewed as a network of exchange relationships, with students as active network users seeking both knowledge enrichment and employability enhancement.
Chapter 2  Literature Review

2.0  Introduction

This section provides an overview of both the marketisation and internationalisation of the higher education sector, and outlines the key characteristics of the HE service, including: 1) the multiple roles of students (e.g. Swanson and Frankel, 2002); 2) the multiple stakeholder HE context (e.g. Kotler and Fox, 1985); and 3) the impact of WOM (e.g. Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003; Burton and Khammash, 2010).

It then presents the other three key layers of literature review (i.e. Traditional Marketing, Relationship Marketing and the Interaction Approach), and a research timeframe that is associated with each theoretical paradigm, respectively: 1) a start-and-stop timeframe for Traditional Marketing; 2) a life-time timeframe for Relationship Marketing; and 3) a past-current-future contextual timeframe for the Interaction Approach (i.e. Håkansson ed., 1982).

For this doctoral study, the research timeframe has been expanded from the traditional one focusing on a single purchase transaction at a single point in time, to that addressing a longitudinal process within the contextual time-space (Halinen, 1998; Halinen and Törnroos, 2005) of past, present and future. This reflects an individual existing student’s experience with an HEI; as all three of these time-space constructs are represented respectively as the prospective student, the current student, and the alumni. As illustrated in Figure 2.1, in this section two threads interweave throughout the literature review process. This then serves as the mechanism for identifying research gaps, adapting the conceptual framework, and establishing research questions, in order to conduct the current study.
Figure 2.1: The Map of Literature Review
2.1 Overview of Marketing in Higher Education

2.1.1 The Causes of Higher Education Marketisation

This section introduces the connections that exist between marketing and HE. The starting point is an understanding of the causes of HE marketisation. This provides the foundation to investigate and gain insights into key forces that have empowered the marketing phenomenon in the HE sector, and that have also altered the landscape of the international HE market.

It has been suggested that the causes of marketisation in the HE sector could be closely linked to a shift in government policies towards more business-like mechanisms, along with the introduction of competition to the sector (Jongbloed, 2003; Marginson, 2006; Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2007).

For example, in the UK, new mechanisms of allocating HE research funding were introduced by central authorities (Anonymous, 2003a, 2009a), aimed at optimising investment returns and increasing the autonomy of an HEI for its future development. Starting in the 1980s, marketisation of UK higher education was manifested through a series of government reports (Johnson, 2001), which included the Jarratt Report 1985, the NAB Good Management Practice Report 1987, and the Review of the University Grants Committee 1987. Then UK HE was officially brought into the market through the Education Reform Act 1988 (Johnson, 2001). Entering the 1990s, the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 blurred the division between universities and polytechnics, subsequently reshaping the UK HE sector and infusing competition amongst all HEIs. In the 2000s, the progressive marketisation of HE rapidly accelerated. For example, top-up fees, established from the 2006-07 academic year onwards, steered HEIs in England and Wales into further marketisation. Two major policies have been further pursued by the UK government most recently, i.e. a widening participation strategic agenda (Anonymous, 2009b) and uncapped student fees (Anonymous, 2010b, 2011d). To a great extent, these policies potentially contributed towards an open market in UK HE, and also
increased further competition among HEIs both nationally and overseas. Therefore, the UK government has aimed to influence issues relating to widening access, accountability, quality and managerial efficiency, through the introduction and encouragement of market forces upon HEIs. The ultimate result of government effort has been the emergence of quasi-markets in HE (Niklasson, 1996) and the progressive marketisation of HE. Additionally, the introduction of other financially liberating moves in the future is likely to further change the landscape of the UK HE sector (Anonymous, 2011d).

Scholars also clarified that universities were obliged to equip themselves with marketing and business approaches, in order to comply with new government demands and to achieve favourable positioning against their rivals (Anonymous, 2001; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). Today, the function of HE has changed dramatically (Anonymous, 2009c, 2012a). Many, if not all, HEIs see themselves as educational businesses that have to compete against each other for students or customers (Naude and Ivy, 1999; Anonymous, 2001; Ivy, 2001; Johnson, 2001; Gutman and Miaoulis, 2003).

Over the last 20 years, the concept of the marketing mix was adopted into HE marketing. It included an extended and revised set of marketing guidance to assist HEIs to capture prospective students. For example, ‘place’, as a specific element of the marketing mix, was intensively emphasised by universities (Ivy and Naude, 2004; Maringe, 2005, 2006; Ivy, 2008). The creation of niche programmes is also an outcome of successful implementation of the marketing mix (Abdullah, 2006; Chadee and Naidoo, 2009; Anonymous, 2011e), including those focused on cross-disciplinary or combined studies, in order to keep certain less popular academic subject areas afloat. The concept of the customer decision-making process was also adopted. For example, Baldwin and James (2000) examined students from a consumer perspective, and argued that it is the student who makes informed decisions and rational choices about academic programmes and institutions. Other research, notably Mazzarol’s work from Australia (Mazzarol and Hosie, 1996; Mazzarol, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999, 2002; Mazzarol et al., 2003)
investigated the trend of HE internationalisation, and examined the influencing factors regarding prospective students’ choices of study overseas. Gutman and Miaoulis (2003) also showed that HEIs adopted a number of marketing initiatives, including the creation of a visible brand name (Maringe, 2006), in order to capture the minds of targeted prospective students, and to influence their decision-making processes. Therefore, operationally, marketisation of HE has been reinforced through the adaptation by HEIs of private sector principles and practices that address new government expectations.

To conclude, government-led initiatives that promote quasi-markets, along with the response and adjustment of HEIs towards more business-like approaches, are two fundamental forces that have closely interlinked and collectively fuelled the development of HE marketisation.

2.1.2 The Characteristics of the International HE Market

The characteristics of the international HE market are being driven by key global education exporters and importers (Michael, 1990; Anonymous, 2001; St. George, 2006; Wood et al., 2006; Ryan, 2011). Changes and challenges in the international HE market have been accelerated by their marketing strategies and activities, as well as by the desire of international students for mobility and career enhancement from studying overseas (Anonymous, 2004; Chen and Zimitat, 2006; Kim, 2009; Blackburn, 2011).

From a global perspective, the HE education market is continuing to grow at a strong pace (Anonymous, 2011a, 2012a; Lawton and Katsomitros, 2012). It is being fuelled by increasing incomes in developing countries, an opening of some new markets (e.g. China and India), greater value placed on an international education, and the inability of domestic higher education service provision in many countries to grow at pace with demand (Mazzarol et al., 2003). From a European point of view, the ‘Bologna Process’ has sought to create a European HE Area that promotes student mobility and enhances overall student employability and accessibility to job markets in European countries.
(Anonymous, 2005). But subsequently, it also brought immediate competition close to the UK’s doorstep against other European HE providers (Anonymous, 2007b).

In reviewing the landscape of the global HE market, international education is dominated by developed countries, particularly English-speaking countries, such as the USA and the UK, due in part to their proactive marketing strategies (Wood et al., 2006; Chen, 2008; Bennett and Kane, 2009; Anonymous, 2012a). There has also been a recent notable rise in developing countries, especially non-English speaking nations, such as China, which have been significantly promoting and investing in their HE internationalisation (Huang, 2005; Anonymous, 2008a, 2011a, 2011f, 2011g; Ryan, 2011). Rapid economic globalisation, IT advancement, as well as HE marketisation, have been the main driving forces exerting significant influence on the internationalisation of HE in individual countries (Ibid.) In comparison with the pre-1990s, the nature of the current international HE market is changing significantly and is becoming highly competitive at a global level (Teichler, 2004;Marginson, 2006; St. George, 2006; Lawton and Katsomitros, 2012).

2.1.2.1 Overview of UK Higher Education Exporting Strategic Positioning

As one of the leading English-speaking and developed countries in the global HE market, internationalisation of UK HE is commercially encouraged by its strategic positioning towards educational exports, and driven by the entrepreneurial spirit of its HEIs (Anonymous, 2008b, 2010c, 2011a, 2011f).

In focusing on financial aspects, UK HE is recognised as a major national export industry, contributing to the growth of a knowledge-based economy (Anonymous, 2007a, 2008b, 2012a). Such export revenues outstrip the value of traditional sectors, such as food and drink, tobacco, ships and aircraft (Vickers and Bekhradnia, 2007; Anonymous, 2011a), and could potentially be worth £20 billion to the UK economy by 2020 (Anonymous, 2004). Figure 2.2 indicates that international student numbers have grown consistently for over a decade and also highlights substantial potential growth in the future (Anonymous, 2004, 2006). As the presence of thousands of overseas students has
increasingly become an integral part of university life in the UK (Ramachandran, 2011), this has been enriching for HEIs, with a range of positive benefits beyond pure income generation (Anonymous, 2010c). For example, in the creation of multi-cultural learning environments; in the favourable endorsements of UK HEI brands; and in the political, business and intellectual ties with those who experienced UK higher education (Anonymous, 2008c, 2008d, 2009c, 2010a, 2010d, 2012c). Last, but not least, many traditional academic subjects and programmes, especially in science and engineering, have been made viable and sustainable largely through international student enrolments (Anonymous, 2003b, 2003c; Vickers and Bekhradnia, 2007).

**Figure 2.2: Growth in International Student Numbers to the UK, 2020 Forecasts, Sub-Divided by Level of Study**

(Anonymous, 2004, p.125)

Similar to many other corporate businesses, the strategic positioning of UK HE in the global market has been a continuously evolving process Table 2.1 summarises the timeline of these developments, as well as the different characteristics of marketing strategies and positioning being adopted by UK HE, in relation to the Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI) (Anonymous, 1999a, 2006, 2010c).
Table 2.1: Three Development Stages of UK HE Marketing Strategies and Positioning
(from the author’s analysis, with reference to Anonymous, 1999a, 2001, 2003c, 2006, 2010c)

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<td>Characteristics of Marketing Strategies and Positioning</td>
<td>No joined-up strategies</td>
<td>Co-ordinated strategy</td>
<td>Government-led marketing strategies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• fragmented, fragile and lacking in strategic direction</td>
<td>• integrated the activities and resources of both government and institutions</td>
<td>• aimed to promote a joined-up and better balanced policy, between recruitment, partnerships, research and capacity-building</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• loss of share in traditional markets</td>
<td>• established the UK as one of the leading players in the international HE market</td>
<td>• aimed to maintain the UK with a strong and leading position in the global HE market</td>
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Before 1999, the UK international education industry was starting to experience the impact of heightened competition (Anonymous, 1999a, 2003b). Its engagements with international students were rather passive and laid back (Anonymous, 2001). This was largely due to the fact that the UK government had a lack of real vision and strategic approaches with respect to international HE marketing. Also, most UK HEIs had a deficiency of marketing professionalism, and were short of business-like approaches (Anonymous, 2001, 2003b, 2004). Their fragmented marketing activities exposed them as vulnerable and less competitive, in terms of maintaining market share (Teichler, 2004). The Gilligan Report (Anonymous, 2001) critically argued that if UK HE was to survive in many of its overseas markets, then it was fundamentally important that a holistic approach be adopted, in which international student recruitment was integrated far more effectively into the operations of an educational institution as a whole. There
was also the need for a far stronger customer-focused and market-oriented approach, i.e. with recognition being given to students as clients or customers (Anonymous, 2001, p.36). There was a heightened urgency to improve the UK’s competitive position in the global HE market, so that it was not to be seen as fragmented, fragile and lacking in strategic direction.

In June 1999, the PMI 1 was launched, aimed at strategically positioning UK HEIs in the global market. As Mr Blair stated in his press release (Anonymous, 1999a, p.2): “Our universities and colleges are second to none. Their world-class reputation means that they are among the most popular for international students”. Operationally, the British Council was appointed as the driving force, and led a three-year global marketing campaign, with the marketing strategy to brand UK education as first for quality and choice (Anonymous, 2010c). The PMI 1 has undoubtedly been successful; its targets were exceeded ahead of schedule\(^1\) (Anonymous, 2006). In addition, it enabled the UK to make huge strides in attracting international students, and it established the country as one of the leading players in the international HE market (Anonymous, 2003c, 2004, 2007a). Importantly, the PMI 1 was the first example in the world of an approach that integrated the activities and resources of government, institutions across the educational sector, along with a global organisation such as the British Council as its in-country marketing vehicle (Anonymous, 2001). Its co-ordinated strategy significantly raised the profile of UK HE internationally, being highly recognised by institutional senior managers and decision-makers (Anonymous, 2003b), and the initiative injected further awareness and interests in international HE marketing.

Since 2004, new entrants and existing rivals in the international HE market have become more aggressive and strategic (Anonymous, 2008b, 2011a, 2012a). As such, UK universities could no longer ride on the achievements of the PMI 1 (Anonymous, 2009c). Instead, they sought an energised strategic direction, in order to address a wider

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\(^1\) The PMI target aimed to increase UK universities market share to 25% by 2005; i.e. an extra 50,000 students. Further education colleges aimed to double the number of international student by 200; i.e. by an extra 25,000 (Anonymous, 1999a, p.3).
internationalisation agenda (Anonymous, 2008b, 2008c). The introduction of the PMI 2 in April 2006 aimed to promote a joined-up and better balanced policy between recruitment, partnerships, research and capacity-building (Anonymous, 2006). Government-led marketing strategies were concentrated on creating a strong national brand which differentiated the UK from other nations (Anonymous, 2010c), with a clear focus on diversification and consolidation in priority countries (Anonymous, 2006). Broadly acknowledged by UK universities, the PMI 2 was the framework to develop and strengthen governance structures and communication channels (Anonymous, 2006, 2008d, 2010a, 2010c). The initiative also continuously encouraged and facilitated UK HEIs to work jointly, and to compete collectively, in the global market as one unilateral British-branded export industry (Anonymous, 1999b, 2008b, 2008d).

While global competition has been intensified (Johnstone et al., 2010; Maringe and Foskett, 2010), UK universities cannot afford to stand still, as they will lose not only fee income but also market share. The dynamics of the global HE market have unavoidably brought challenges to UK universities. Relevant examples include the influence of technology, and students becoming increasingly mobile and more discerning relating to education quality and employability (Anonymous, 2003a, 2010d, 2011d; Brooks et al., 2012). As a result, HEIs can no longer simply dwell on a conventional marketing approach (Anonymous, 2001). Instead, they need to be much sharper and more creative with their marketing strategies, in order to differentiate themselves, and to be equipped with sustainable competitive advantages, not only from international rivals, but also from UK competitors.

2.1.2.2 Overview of China HE Importing Strategic Positioning

As one of the leading non-English speaking and developing countries in the global HE market, HE internationalisation in China is very distinct from the case in the UK; it is deeply rooted in the Chinese centrally-planned government system, having been embedded in the rapid economic and social development of the country, which also coincided with the IT revolution (Huang, 2005; Mok, 2005; Zhou, 2006). Its strategic
positioning is predominantly importing knowledge from abroad, with only a most recent recognition that China has now begun to pay more attention to exporting Chinese knowledge to the world (Anonymous, 2008a, 2011a, 2012a).

Similar to China’s transition towards a planned market economy, the strategic positioning of Chinese HE has envisioned a knowledge revolution in the rapidly changing country, as well as in the global arena. The Ministry of Education (MOE) China led the internationalisation of Chinese HE. Its policies and initiatives demonstrated six significant stages of national strategic development in responding to global market dynamics. Table 2.2 summarises the timeline of these developments, as well as the well-defined strategic focus being adopted by the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and the State Council.
Table 2.2: Six Development Stages of China HE Internationalisation Strategies  
(from author’s analysis, with reference to Huang, 2005; Mok, 2005; Zhou, 2006; Anonymous, 2008a, 2011a, 2011c, 2011g; Ryan, 2011)

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<td>Core Strategies and Positioning</td>
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<td>Sending scholars abroad to study, predominantly members from national Academies and key State universities</td>
<td>Permitting Chinese students to go abroad for overseas study at their own expense</td>
<td>Growth of the HE sector, unprecedented across China, towards a mass HE education system</td>
<td>Selecting state universities into two elite groupings: * 211 Project * 985 Project</td>
<td>Encouraging international student enrolments, and promoting trans-national education (TNE) joint degree programmes</td>
<td>To date, 322 Confucius Institutes established in 94 countries and regions, with a view to expand Chinese language learning</td>
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Prior to the 1990s, the internationalisation of China HE was predominantly affected by academic factors, and could be largely characterised as importing. For example, in sending Chinese members of faculty abroad, and in permitting students to go overseas for advanced research and studies, all as part of efforts to establish world-class universities in China (Zhou, 2006). At present, amongst the total number of Chinese students studying overseas, the proportion that are self-funded amounts to over 93% (Anonymous, 2011g; Ryan, 2011). This noticeable phenomenon has evolved in parallel with significant socio-economic transformation and growth in China. It has also been influenced by a dynamic market economy and changing needs of employment, which have accelerated demands for a more knowledgeable and skilful labour force.

The Chinese HE sector has experienced significant growth over the past two decades. Key indices, such as expanding student enrolments, as well as increasing levels of up-scaling in faculty recruitment, are evidence of the transition to having an energised role in mass education. For example, the percentage of China’s relevant-aged population enrolled in universities increased dramatically over the last two decades. In 1991, the university enrolment ratio was only 3%, which then increased to 24% in 2009 (UNESCO 2011). This is an incredible change in the history of the development of China HE. To a great extent, the expansion of China HE provision directly and indirectly contributed to economic growth in the country, as well as widened HE accessibility for general Chinese citizens. From a future viewpoint, as a result of its One-Child Policy, China’s demographic profile is changing; the population of 18 to 22 year-olds is estimated at 88 million by 2020 (Ibid.). Under the guidance of government central planning, Chinese university enrolment will continue to accelerate to fulfil its goal of educating 40% of that age cohort by 2020 (Ibid.).

In addition to unprecedented HE expansion, national initiatives were also set to enhance both the capacity and competitiveness of leading universities. A system of key and elite universities in the Chinese HE structure can be traced back to the early 1950s (Zhou, 2006). In particular, fifty years later, two new initiatives developed: the 211 Project and the 985 Project, to inspire a culture of excellence and awareness of international
competition in top-tier Chinese universities (Ibid). For example, the 211 Project has been implemented to improve the overall quality of the Chinese HE sector, by developing approximately 100 universities in a number of key disciplines targeted at the 21st century, subsequently to enhance China’s performance in knowledge creation and innovation (Anonymous, 1995). The 985 Project aims to develop a number of world-class universities and establish key research centres of excellence (Anonymous, 1998). In doing so, Chinese government funding was concentrated in nine Ivy-league type universities amongst 39 selected institutions, aiming to achieve international stature (Zhou, 2006). These projects reflect Chinese government ambition and efforts in China addressing HE reforms, and undoubtedly play a critical role in Chinese socio-economic development, as well as being significant milestones of Chinese HE internationalisation. To a great extent, foremost Chinese institutions have implemented internationalisation into their academic profession, and are increasingly becoming an integrated part of the global educational community.

The meaning of internationalisation of the China HE sector in the late 1990s was transformed significantly. A broad range of activities were involved, including the transfer of foreign curricula and the integration of foreign language, cross-cultural or international professional qualifications into university degree teaching (Huang, 2005; Mok, 2005; Zhou, 2006; Ryan, 2011). In particular, there has been a rapid increase in the number of joint or trans-national programmes provided in Chinese HEIs in collaboration with foreign partners since 2004 (Anonymous, 2013a). For example, Fudan University of China, along with Singapore National University, not only cooperate in student enrolments at branch campuses established in their respective countries, but also mutually recognise their curricula and degrees. In comparison to the early 1990s, trans-national education (TNE) collaborations have accelerated the import of foreign curricula, as well as more recently the export of China HE. These TNE programmes are no longer confined to studies in the Chinese language, but have also broadened to other disciplines, including international trade, management, science and engineering (Huang, 2003).
Lately, a new trend of China’s internationalisation is emerging, shifting from importing foreign knowledge, to a much improved importing-exporting balance. The establishment since 2004 of Confucius Institutes overseas, and their rapid expansion over the last decade, are recognised as a key basis for introducing China to the world. By late 2012, more than 400 Confucius Institutes had been established in 108 countries and regions to promote Chinese language learning (Hartig, 2012). Cross-border HE initiatives have also taken great effect. For example, in 2008, foreign student enrolments in China (at 223,499) for the first time outnumbered those leaving China to study overseas (at 179,800). By 2010, the MOE in China had set a target of enrolling 500,000 international HE students by 2020 (Watson and Yap, 2012). Most recently, in 2012, the number of foreign students in China rose dramatically, hitting a record high of more than 292,611 and presenting a diversity of 194 countries; with China on track to meet its 2020 goal (CoHE, 2012; Lawton and Katsomitros, 2012).

China, similar to the rest of the world, has not escaped the process of HE internationalisation. Since the announcement of the nation’s Open-Door Policy, mechanisms were put in place to send Chinese faculty and students to study abroad, and to encourage Chinese universities to exchange and cooperate with their counterparts worldwide. More recently, offering increasing numbers of scholarships to attract foreign students and establishing Confucius Institutes worldwide are key strategies, among many innovative ways, that have been introduced by the Chinese central government to encompass China HE internationalisation. Over the last three decades, China has participated in the trend of HE internationalisation with effective initiatives and tangible successes. This has laid a solid platform for China to now have an even more significant part to play at a global level.

2.1.3 The Key Characteristics of HE

The overview of Marketing in HE would not be sufficient without exploring the key characteristics of HE, these being: 1) students are a special kind of customer (e.g. Kotler and Fox, 1985; Brookes, 2003a; Modell, 2005; Cubillo et al., 2006; Voss, 2009); 2) HEIs operate in a complex multiple stakeholder context (e.g. Kotler and Fox, 1985; Mazzarol
and Soutar, 1999); and 3) the profound impact of WOM should not be underplayed (e.g. Arndt, 1967; Gelb and Sundaram, 2002; Burton and Khammash, 2010). This investigation enables the researcher to understand the complexity of the HE service, and importantly encompasses a critique of key research streams in HE Marketing.

2.1.3.1 The Multiple Roles of Students – a Special Kind of Customer

Existing literature showed that the role of students in HE has generated special interest and been intensively researched (Hill, 1995; Guolla, 1999; Oldfield and Baron, 2000; Elliott and Shin, 2002; Brookes, 2003a; Modell, 2005; Cubillo et al., 2006; Voss, 2009; Anonymous, 2011b; Brooks et al., 2012). Although a majority of scholars tend to focus on considering students as customers, Swanson and Frankel (2002, p.25) demonstrated that “students can play a number of roles in the process of education, other than that of customer”.

Sequentially, students could be mainly viewed as clients, producers, products and customers. For example, as in other categories of professional services (e.g. law firms, dental clinics and hospitals), students have an overall understanding of their service needs. Nevertheless, they are still dependent on guidance and advice of education professionals (e.g. professors, lecturers and administrators). From this viewpoint, students are clients who demand improvement at the end of the educational service process (Mills et al., 1983; Hill, 1995; Anonymous, 2011d, 2011e). Additionally, professors, lecturers and administrators at education institutions could be viewed as resources, whilst students are producers who take the active role in the learning process and are held responsible for the academic outcomes (Guolla, 1999). Furthermore, from another perspective, education institutions could be considered as a manufacturing organisation, with the student being the final product (Levitt, 1980; Conway et al., 1994; Emery, et al., 2001; Modell, 2005). In this case, the student offers themselves to potential employers as a package of benefits, ready to be purchased with a price tag of starting salaries (Anonymous, 2011c, 2011d). In addition, students perform the role of customers,
since “satisfaction with an educational product/service is one outcome of the exchange between instructors and students” (Guolla, 1999, p.91).

Whilst the uniqueness of students and their multiple roles in the HE sector are recognised, considering students as customers is controversial, and has been intensely debated (Barrett, 1996; Bejou, 2005). For example, Modell (2005) suggested that a person who pays for a service is a customer and should be treated like one. However, tuition fees paid by students to HEIs are not a mere exchange of money for a product or service, since universities are not only organisations providing a range of services, but also authorities regulating the academic standards. As Halbesleben et al. (2003, p.256) emphasised, tuition “facilitates education, but does not cause it”. Therefore, treating students as customers could potentially result in a decline of academic standards and grade inflation (Chonko et al., 2002; Clayson and Haley, 2005). On the other hand, following Eagle and Brennan’s (2007) argument, students must acknowledge that the ultimate responsibility for educational success and failure lies within them. Tuition-fee payment does not give students the guaranteed entitlement for a degree award; nevertheless, HEIs are responsible as service providers to ensure that students are satisfied with the educational service standard and their personal experience with the HEIs’ personnel.

Despite the fact that the role of HEIs is gradually becoming multi-functional (Anonymous, 2010a, 2011d), fundamentally these institutions are knowledge providers. Any naive implementation of the students-as-customers idea in HE could potentially damage the best interest of students (Barrett, 1996; Eagle and Brennan, 2007). Although there is an increasing tendency of using the terminology “students as customers” in HE literature, as well as in practice, it is vitally important that the concept of students-as-customers should be interpreted with a degree of caution (Sharrock, 2000; Maringe, 2005). For the current study, having taken cognisance of the multiple roles of students, the researcher aims to explore any further potential roles they may have in the HE business network context.
2.1.3.2 The Multiple Stakeholders’ Context – Students as Primary Customers

In a HE context, many types of customers have been recognised. However, the key customers remain the students (Kotler and Fox, 1985; Modell, 2005; Marginson, 2006; Smart and Banks, 2006). The current study supports the view of dividing customers into two categories (Kotler and Fox, 1985; Marginson, 2006); primary customers (i.e. current students), and secondary customers (i.e. other stakeholders).

Kotler and Fox (1985) argued that students are the most important people on campus; without them, there would be no need for the educational institution. This conclusion stands the test of time, as twenty years on, Marginson (2006) emphasised that students, especially current registered ones, are the most visible and primary customers that HEIs serve. Therefore, it is critically important for HEIs to recognise that their existence and development largely depends on students, and learners should be at the core of their service offerings. Additionally, employees of HEIs should treat students as ‘real’ individuals with feelings and emotions, instead of ‘impersonal’ digits (Anonymous, 2001, 2006). Hence, more and more HEIs are looking to embed a student-oriented attitude and approach into their marketing and service portfolios (Anonymous, 2011c, 2011d, 2012c, 2012d), especially with a heavy emphasis in meeting the demands of existing students for satisfactory study experiences (Anonymous, 2010e).

Kotler and Fox (1985, p.245) also stated there were 16 public bodies / stakeholders associated with a HEI. These are current students, prospective students, academic faculty, parents of students, administrative staff, alumni, suppliers, competitors, government agencies, the business community, mass media, foundations, trustees, accreditation organisations, local community, and the general public. Amongst these associated groupings, current students should be considered as the primary stakeholder. Although all these stakeholders were identified nearly three decades ago, their important influences have been strongly recognised by HE marketing scholars and practitioners (Modell, 2005; Beneke and Human, 2010; Naidoo and Wu, 2011). For instance, stakeholders including the mass media (e.g. through the publication of HE league tables),
competitors (e.g. by offering similar programmes, or operating in the same overseas markets), accreditation organisations (e.g. in being focused on international transferability), and academic faculty (e.g. through their reputation and expertise), are becoming some of the key factors that influence students’ selection of educational institutions (Mazzarol, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999), as well as their satisfaction (Emery et al., 2001; Bogler and Somech, 2002). Additionally, research surveys show that the business community (i.e. companies and employers) are becoming increasingly significant for HEIs, due to the increasing focus by students on employability and mobility (Anonymous, 2006, 2009a, 2010b, 2010e; Brooks et al., 2012). It should also be noted that the needs of these stakeholders vary, and impact on the development of HEIs at different levels. For example, trustees, government agencies, alumni and foundations are generally recognised as important sources of funding for institutions (Anonymous, 2003a, 2008a). However, alumni may focus more on league table positions of their HEI; while foundations and government agencies may place emphasis more on research outputs; regardless of them all possibly enjoying the satisfaction of being part of institutional success (Ibid.).

To conclude, HEIs need to recognise that they operate in a complex multiple stakeholder context, where they should seek to not only serve the interests of students as their core business, but also engage with other stakeholders.

2.1.3.3 The Impact of Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and Electronic WOM

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is perceived by receivers as ‘a non-commercial act’ (Arndt, 1967), but considered as having ‘highly credible information’ (Naidoo and Wu, 2011). It is particularly relevant in Services Marketing, as a result of the primary characteristics² of service industries (Zeithaml et al., 1985; Parasuraman, 1986). WOM results from the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of customers (Spreng et al., 1995), and also strongly influences the buying decisions of customers (Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003). From a statistical perspective, Zemke and Bell (1990, p.44) suggest that 96 per cent of unhappy

² From the work of Zeithaml et al. (1985) and Parasuraman (1986) four primary characteristics of service industries were identified; these being intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability.
customers do not complain to the organisation they have dealt with. Instead, they engage in negative WOM, with an average of more than nine acquaintances (Ibid.). Furthermore, WOM has a strong influence on consumers’ buying decisions, carrying twice the effect in comparison to advertising (Ibid.).

In parallel with the traditional concept of WOM, a new phenomenon has been established, referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) (Gelb and Sundaram, 2002; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003), which is facilitated by improvement and accessibilities of modern technologies. EWOM has been revolutionary in its actions (Duan et al., 2005; Hocutt et al., 2006). For example, research findings highlight that the internet extends the outreach of WOM, and provides people with the platform to express their dissatisfaction “quickly, in great volumes, around the world, and anonymously” (Hocutt et al., 2006, p.199). So, today, a single customer is able to rapidly share his or her opinions with potentially millions of others, through the internet and social networks, such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter, resulting in potential consequences for service providers.

The above literature is of relevance in the HE context. The correlation between customer (dis)satisfaction and (negative) and positive WOM is equally significant in HE Marketing (Elliott and Shin, 2002; Bennett, 2003; Kim, 2009; Voss, 2009). For example, research findings demonstrate that service failure and poor service recovery are major causes of students’ dissatisfaction (Keaveney, 1995). This subsequently leads to negative WOM being shared by students with their peers, through posting comments in online forums and chat-rooms, in addition to complaints being raised directly with course directors (Swanson and Davis, 2000). Dissatisfied students withdrawing from academic programmes could likely damage an institution’s reputation through negative WOM. This potentially could lead to negative impacts on student recruitment and retention (i.e. consumers’ buying decisions). WOM is also recognised as one of the stimulating factors affecting student attitudes towards HEI brands, as it impacts not only on their buying decisions, but also on their loyalty and relationship commitment especially post-

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3 The traditional concept of WOM is limited to oral, face-to-face, person-to-person communication with the close network of an individual (Arndt, 1967).
graduation (Keaveney, 1995; Elliott and Shin, 2002; Bennett, 2003; Bejou, 2005). Findings show that from a lifelong learning perspective, satisfied students are likely to return to the same institution to attend further courses (Voss, 2009). Also, such satisfied students can help market the institution and attract new students, through sharing their positive learning experiences and engaging in positive WOM (Elliott and Healy, 2001; Helgesen and Nesset, 2007).

Nowadays, education is widely viewed as a long-term investment, with qualifications becoming an important and inseparable part of an individual’s social status, and a platform for job opportunities and career enhancement (Brooks et al., 2012). There is always the possibility that dissatisfied students will praise their institution after graduation in order not to ‘lose face’ among colleagues (Wolverton, 2006). However, highly satisfied students are likely to spread positive WOM, becoming a ‘walking-talking’ advertisement for HEIs during their lifetime, and a ‘living image’ of HEIs that new applicants could then relate to (Stahli, 2005; Thomas, 2007). Importantly, although repeat purchase from the same individual student is limited (Naude and Ivy, 1999; Chen, 2008), the impact of WOM marketing for HEIs by an individual student should not be underestimated (Kim, 2009).

The division between primary (i.e. current students) and secondary stakeholders reinforces the core of the HE service offering as being student-driven. Of equal importance is the profound influence of (E)WOM, with the potential of providing credible information of students’ positive experiences with an institution. The likely economic value of the implications of (E)WOM to institutions, as well as its impact on student loyalty and relationship commitment, should not be ignored or underplayed.

2.1.4 The Key Research Streams on HE Marketing

Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) systematically reviewed 63 empirical papers published between 1992 and 2004, and critically analysed key themes and areas of research related to HE marketing. Whilst studying these views, and after reviewing
additional papers published before 1992 and after 2004, i.e. for the period between 1985 and 2013 with a total of 84 papers, the researcher suggested that the themes could be condensed into two categories and four key streams. From a management process perspective, HE marketing largely focused on examining student buying behaviours and decision-making. From the lens of services marketing, HE marketing principally concentrated on investigating the importance of student satisfaction. Therefore, the development of HE marketing literature could be viewed as a collection of research examining the critical success factors of HE, either from process-based or people-based perspectives. Figure 2.3 summarises these theoretical classifications.
Chronologically, in the 1980s, the first articles on HE Marketing were derived from theoretical models developed for consumer marketing, which originated in the UK and US (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). For example, Kotler and Fox (1985, p.6)
initially defined marketing of HE as a business process that involves “analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programmes, designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values”. Equally, Noble (1989) used the 4Ps marketing model to examine the relationships of students with a university. Kotler and Fox (1985), Noble (1989) and Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) all have applied a transactional marketing theoretical framework in the education sector. Such an approach was then used to underpin research conducted by other academics. For example, Ivy and Naude (2004), Brookes (2003b), Abdullah (2006) and Ivy (2008), explored the implications of the traditional ‘marketing 4Ps’ and ‘marketing 7Ps’, consequently suggesting an extended and revised marketing mix. This included a seven-element model of the underlining success factors for student recruitment (Ivy, 2008), as the adaptation of a better-fit HE marketing framework, in response to global competition. In UK HE business operations, some pricing tactics were being widely applied, for example, Early-Bird Deductions⁴ (Anonymous, 2001, 2009a, 2011f), Loyalty Discounts⁵ (Anonymous, 2001, 2011f; Chen, 2008), and Fixed-Fees for Study Duration⁶ (Anonymous, 2007a, 2010b, 2011f).

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⁴ Early-Bird Deduction: HEIs offer between 5% and 10% discount against tuition fee, in order to entice students, to make full tuition payment by a date prior to arrival (Anonymous, 2011f). This marketing tool was widely practiced among HE sector in the 1990s and early 2000s to gain a more accurate prediction of enrolment forecasts and to inform decisions prior to the university clearing period (Anonymous, 2001). However, increasingly over the last 10 years, popular HEIs, especially Business Schools, have tended to use a reservation fee to replace early-bird deduction (Anonymous, 2010b).

⁵ Loyalty Discounts: HEIs offer between 10% and 20% discount against tuition fees, to students who have completed one degree course and decided to stay on and pursue another degree programme (Anonymous, 2001). This marketing tool has proved to be controversial among HEIs and marketing practitioners (Anonymous, 2011f), as it has been known to retain and convert undergraduate students to taught Masters degree students (Anonymous, 2008a). However, other HEIs view that a loyalty fee is a giveaway unnecessarily, because students choosing to stay on and pursue another degree are already enticed by their positive undergraduate (UG) study experiences (i.e. familiar with the campus environment, with the profile and reputation of the institution, with friends and networks, etc), and as such a loyalty fee may not be the critical factor to impact on their decisions-making process (Chen, 2008).

⁶ Fixed-Fee for Study Duration: Today, most UK HEIs offer students, especially international students, a fixed tuition fee for the duration of their degree programme studies (Anonymous, 2007a). This aims to help international students to plan their studying and living budget wisely, and to minimise foreseeable monetary loses due to fluctuations in foreign currency exchange rates (Anonymous, 2011f).
In addition to a stream of research related to the marketing mix, scholars also focused on the effectiveness of HEI marketing communications and information dissemination (Michael, 1990; Mortimer, 1997; Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Gatfield et al., 1999; Gray et al., 2003). For example, research findings demonstrated that such marketing communications were largely aimed at image and reputation enhancement of the institution (Bakewell and Gibson-Sweet, 1998; Ivy, 2001). Here, there was an emphasis on programme superiority, profound history, faculty expertise and HE ranking tables, as well as on a country brand index (Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) investigated the push-pull factors influencing destination choice of international students for study overseas. They included the importance of the following: knowledge and awareness of the host country; recommendations from friends and relatives; cost issues; the studying/living environment; and social links and geographic proximity (Ibid.).

The adoption and implementation of influencing factors through marketing communication echoed the increasing professionalism of marketers in the higher education sector (Anonymous, 2008d, 2011c). For example, one of the most recognised and successful examples was the launch and management of the PMI 1 initiative through a series of strategic marketing promotional campaigns (i.e. marketing communication) organised by the British Council (Anonymous, 2010c). As a result, the UK education brand blossomed alongside that of US education, and became the second biggest educational market for Chinese student recruitment (Ryan, 2011). Students, parents and employers genuinely perceived UK education as being highly reputable, based on its established history and quality (Anonymous, 1999a, 1999b, 2008b, 2010c, 2011e).

Following the introduction of the HE Marketing concept in the 1980s, the process of marketisation of HE then became noticeable operationally in the early 1990s (Newman and Jahdi, 2009). The emerging trends of HE internationalisation took strong root in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Such developments have accelerated a rapid expansion of international HE markets (Knight and De Wit, 1999; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). While academic scholars have assessed the suitability of adopting marketing principles to
achieve educational objectives, consequently there has been a distinctive rise of marketing mentality and growth of commercial awareness amongst HEIs (e.g. Mazzarol, 1998; Brookes, 2003b; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Maringe, 2005, 2006; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006).

In parallel with the adaptation of the marketing mix into HE marketing research, around the mid-1990s other scholars began to view HE through the lens of Services Marketing, and thereby considered education as a service (Nicholls et al., 1995). For example, Mazzarol (1998), conducted an extensive examination of education as a specific marketing problem, and introduced a classification scheme for education as a marketable service.

The significance of defining the nature of the education service as being people-based, consequently drove the application of a services marketing concept into research associated with the HE sector (Mazzarol, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999). For example, Desai et al. (2001) proposed to view HE as a service business, and suggested that it is important to recognise the needs and wants of students, since such a greater understanding should result in an improved and positive educational experience. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) also expressed the same viewpoint of considering education in terms of services marketing, as the nature of service processes are prevailingly intangible, inseparable and heterogeneous. Other research findings also outlined concerns that the scale and diversity of HEI service provision poses difficulties in maintaining consistent quality across different service units within HEIs (St. George, 2006; Eagle and Brennan, 2007). Based on the tenets of HE being a ‘people-based’ and ‘marketable service’ (Mazzarol, 1998), HEIs are not only acknowledging that they are in a market, but are also recognising the importance of student satisfaction and service quality (Oldfield and Baron, 2000; Elliott and Shin, 2002). For example, there is a complementary wide range of literature focusing on analysing these two fundamental forces, along with their positive and negative influences (Keaveney, 1995; Guolla, 1999; Elliott and Shin, 2002; Bennett, 2003).
Other research, such as Cheng and Tam (1997), Cubillo et al. (2006), and Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), aimed at gaining a better understanding of the student decision-making process, as well as establishing knowledge on managing students’ expectations and service satisfaction. Swanson and Frankel (2002) also analysed the critical importance and advantages of achieving student satisfaction, and suggested that universities and professors should investigate what students expect from them.

Services Marketing literature emphasised that customer satisfaction leads to relationship enhancement and customer loyalty (e.g. Grönroos, 1994, 1996, 2000; Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1991). In the HE context, research findings supported this argument. For example, Guolla (1999), along with Elliott and Shin (2002), demonstrated that student satisfaction was linked to an enhanced learning experience. Other empirical investigations also illustrated how student satisfaction leads to loyalty and long-lasting relationships being built between universities and students, this especially the case post-graduation (Keaveney, 1995; Elliott and Shin, 2002; Bennett, 2003; Bejou, 2005). Today, in their service provision, universities increasingly use student satisfaction as a key element of differentiating themselves from other HEIs (Anonymous, 2011c, 2011d). Amongst HE practitioners, student satisfaction has been recognised as a fundamental source of gaining competitive advantage in education markets. For instance, it is evident that the participation rate amongst HEIs in the National Student Survey (NSS) exercise in the UK is growing annually (Anonymous, 2010e), and that universities are increasingly investing resources into enhancing the student experience (Anonymous, 2010d, 2011b).

The development of HE Marketing is a mix-match adaptation mainly from the traditional marketing concept. From a management process-based perspective, two key streams of such research focus on an exploration and application of the marketing mix, and on marketing communication in the HE context. From the people-based perspective, a further two research streams focus on gaining empirical insights into the nature of the education service, and into the importance of student satisfaction and service quality.
2.1.5 Critique: Limitations of HE Marketing

The above literature review demonstrated that the development of HE Marketing has generally followed a traditional marketing concept, and that it primarily practised a transactional approach. In this section, the limitations of the transactional approach in the HE context are critiqued, and it is argued that there is a necessity to explore a relational approach, which potentially is a better fit for the key characteristics of HE.

The terms traditional marketing, conventional marketing, classical marketing, marketing mix, transaction marketing and 4Ps marketing have been used interchangeably (Ballantyne et al., 2003) in consumer marketing. The transactional view of marketing adopts a start-stop philosophy, intending to separate the marketing and purchase processes, and focuses on individuals and single sales in the short-term (Aijo, 1996). Most significantly, its important assumption is in the passivity of buyers and in being relatively homogeneous markets (Ford, 1997; Ballantyne et al., 2003). Therefore, the business philosophy and underpinning objective of transactional marketing is to attract new customers (Gummesson, 1994a), and compete with customers for value, rather than developing interactive cooperation with customers (Ford, 1997). Therefore, transactional exchange is characterised by its short-term nature, or through one-time exchange, with no commitment from customers per se beyond the limited interaction (Sheth, 2002).

Similarly, these beliefs have been adopted and practiced in many HE business operations. For example, as the ‘marketing mix’ presented itself as a powerful concept of traditional marketing, and as it was valued as an easy concept to understand and implement (Aijo, 1996), HEI marketers and practitioners exercised each element of the marketing mix exhaustedly. Using ‘place / location’ by way of illustration, in business practice terms, HEIs promote not only their institutional campuses, but also the location of their city or closest city, airport or nearby airport, the cultural and historical heritage of their institution, the region, etc (Anonymous, 2003b). Nevertheless, the provision of this intended comprehensive information is potentially viewed by some prospective students as being overwhelming (Modell, 2005; Anonymous, 2011c, 2011d). Furthermore,
enticed by the economic significance of international students (Anonymous, 2007a, 2011a, 2012a; Vickers and Bekhradnia, 2007), but limited by repeat purchases from the same individual student (Naude and Ivy, 1999; Chen, 2008), arguably it is only natural that HEI practitioners shore up their business philosophy by focusing on new student acquisitions year-on-year through a predominantly transactional-driven approach. Consequently, student conversion is a very widely adopted phrase in HEI recruitment activities (Anonymous, 2001). In response to HE business practices, the existing literature of HE Marketing has mainly taken a snapshot approach to view the student decision-making process (Cheng and Tam, 1997; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Cubillo et al., 2006), and the influential factors of selecting institutions (Mazzarol, 1998; Naude and Ivy, 1999). Therefore, HE marketing is grounded in the underpinning assumption that students passively respond to their marketing tactics. Such tactics are aimed at attracting mass numbers of prospective students, then looking to convert them into registered students, which potentially results in transactional value exchange and short-term success (Marginson, 2006).

It is important to acknowledge that the education exchange process is long and involved (Eagle and Brennan, 2007). Student satisfaction with their educational experience goes far beyond the transactional exchange, e.g. processes of enrolment and tuition payment. The literature review of HE marketing confirmed that existing researchers had rarely devoted much attention from a longitudinal perspective. Instead, they (e.g. Mazzarol, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999, 2002; Ivy and Naude, 2004; Maringe, 2005, 2006; Ivy, 2008) took a sole focus on identifying influential factors impacting on students’ choices of institutions, only at partial and transactional points. Therefore, it could be critically important to conduct in-depth investigations to gain an understanding regarding the benefits, i.e. added-value, of the longitudinal education experience perceived by students. It is such an approach that may provide insights into what underpins student satisfaction.

As illustrated in section 2.1.3.3, it is important to recognise the significance of (E)WOM (e.g. Zemke and Bell, 1990; Gelb and Sundaram, 2002; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003; Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003; Burton and Khammash, 2010). In particular, (E)WOM is
closely related to student satisfaction (Keaveney, 1995; Spreng et al., 1995; Swanson and Davis, 2000); positive (E)WOM gives an institution a competitive advantage and also presents a powerful endorsement of long-term success (Andreassen and Streukens, 2009). Therefore, (E)WOM can potentially offer a synergy that connects prospective students, current students and alumni all into one combined customer group, through interactively sharing their first-hand experiences. Additionally, it is this powerful synergy of (E)WOM that can potentially transform students’ perspective of HE, moving from one end of a spectrum; starting with transitional exchange (i.e. when becoming an enrolled student), to the other end represented by long-term commitment (i.e. becoming the image of the HEI for a lifetime). Furthermore, it can also create a possible interlink between the value exchange concept of tuition-for-studies and that of social responsibility. Therefore, this reinforces the need to obtain an in-depth understanding regarding what are the added-value dimensions of HE perceived by students, and what students value the most from their study experiences.

In recent years a number of UK government reports (Anonymous, 2009a, 2010b, 2011f) have called on HEIs to respond to the heightening competition in international HE markets, by focusing on student retention as one of their key marketing strategies to sustain long-term success. Consequently, in HE marketing practices, there is more awareness regarding the importance of student retention. With the adoption of a Service Marketing concept into HE Marketing research, especially over the last two decades (Nicholls et al., 1995; Mazzarol, 1998; Cubillo et al., 2006), there has been raised interest in exploring relationship management/marketing in the HE sector. For example, Johnson (2001) suggested greater emphasis should be placed on the two-way relationship between HEI and customer. Also, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) criticised the literature on HE marketing as incoherent and existing theoretical models as inadequate, in terms of reflecting the particular context of HE and the unique nature of their services. Thus, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, p.317) suggested “there was much interest by researchers in the relationship marketing model, and the rapid development in service marketing recently seems to have gained some ground. However, there is still much research to be done to explore these models in the context of HE”.
As illustrated in section 2.1.3.2, research findings demonstrate the complex nature of 16 stakeholders (Kotler and Fox, 1985; Modell, 2005; Marginson, 2006; Smart and Banks, 2006). Despite the importance of secondary stakeholders being agreed among HE marketing scholars and practitioners, these stakeholders have been viewed no more than a written list since they were identified nearly three decades ago (St. George, 2006). Thus, there is a paucity of evidence that provides an understanding of the influences these stakeholders have upon student satisfaction. It is important to recognise that any examination of relationship management, between an HEI and its current students, would be superficial and incomplete without gaining a full understanding of how students perceive the value of their relationships with other stakeholders. Furthermore, whilst examining the benefits of the educational experience perceived by students (e.g. the added-value of relationship management between the HEI and current learners), it could be equally essential to investigate the other stakeholders that current students expect close relationships with. In addition, it may be critically important to understand what added-value is associated with these secondary customers which contribute towards the overall enhancement of student satisfaction with HEI service provision.

The consensus of the HE Marketing literature review demonstrates that a traditional marketing approach, with a transactional view and passive assumption, was widely applied. Consequently, existing research, largely having a short-term viewpoint, focuses on the student decision-making process and on the influential factors of selecting institutions (e.g. Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Chen and Zimitat, 2006; Cubillo et al., 2006). This provides HEIs with marketing tactics for student acquisition (e.g. Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Maringe, 2006). In response to heightened open market competition (e.g. Marginson, 2006; Maringe and Foskett, 2010), universities need to shift their business objectives from student acquisition to student retention (e.g. Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001; Tinto, 2007), and to be equipped with competitive advantages to sustain long-term success (e.g. Anonymous, 2011d; Naidoo and Wu, 2011). Thus, there is a lack of available strategic solutions in existing research into HE Marketing. This includes the input of students in the long and evolving education process, the fact that HEIs operate in a complex multiple stakeholder context, and the significant impact of (E)WOM.
Additionally, existing research findings demonstrate that student satisfaction is linked to enhanced learning experiences (Guolla, 1999; Elliott and Shin, 2002), and to positive (E)WOM endorsements (Elliott and Healy, 2001; Helgesen and Nesse, 2007; Voss, 2009). Student satisfaction also leads to loyalty and long-lasting relationship commitments (Keaveney, 1995; Elliott and Shin, 2002; Bennett, 2003; Bejou, 2005). These close inter-linkages would potentially provide an insightful understanding regarding the benefits, (i.e. the added-value of the longitudinal education experience perceived by students themselves), that formulate into positive (E)WOM endorsements. Arguably, such investigations would also indicate with which other stakeholders current students look to develop close relationships, in addition to their relationship with the HEI. They would also potentially indicate what are the added-value dimensions associated with secondary customers towards the overall enhancement of student satisfaction with HEI service provision.

In summary, there could be a need to understand what added-value is perceived by students regarding their educational experiences, and with which particular stakeholders they demand relationship interactions to achieve customer satisfaction. As a traditional marketing approach generally does not provide universities with competitive advantages for sustainable long-term success, it may be necessary to investigate and understand the essence of relationship management existing between HEIs and current students. Such a research finding would not only address the suggestion given by scholars from the HE Marketing field, such as Johnson (2001) and Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006), but would also provide much needed alternative and strategic solutions for HE practitioners.

2.2 Relationship Marketing in HE

One route that could have been taken in this thesis would have been to consider the prospects of Relationship Marketing in Services Marketing. For a discussion of these prospects, and why such an option was actually not adopted, refer to Appendix A.
2.3 An Alternative Approach: Adopting the IMP Approach in HE Marketing

2.3.1 The Theoretical Origins of the IMP Approach

The Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Group\(^7\) (Anonymous, 2012b) was initially established in 1976 by academics and researchers mainly from five European countries and universities. Håkansson ed. (1982) challenged the traditional marketing literature, which originated from Industrial Economic Theory (Porter, 1985), as being reactive and driven by the external business environment. Furthermore, he criticised its concentration on the narrow analysis of a single discrete transaction, on its manipulation of the marketing mix, and on its views of passive and atomistic market structure. Instead, Håkansson ed. (1982) was inspired by Inter-Organisational Theory (Van de Ven et al., 1975), and many other theories focussing on relationships between organisations, as well as the analyses of connections between an organisation and its business environment.

The original establishment of the IMP approach proposed a paradigmatic view (Ford et al., 2006), in which relationships exist between buyers and sellers. Such relationships are active, involve a complex pattern of interaction, and potentially endure long-term, thus leading to the stability of market structure (Ford and Ritter, 2004). Furthermore, the IMP approach embedded the essences of marketing literature, especially on inter-company relationships and the “organisational system perspective” (Sweeney, 1972, p.4), commonly known as the managerial approach. Simultaneously, the IMP approach was also influenced by the thoughts of the New Institutionalists (Williamson, 1975), which was a new strand of studies within micro-economic theory. This suggested that the transactional process needed to be viewed as the means of establishing and exchanging relations, due to the increasing dependency among business parties (Williamson, 1975).

\(^7\) Success and influence of the IMP Group has resulted in a huge variety of outputs (Ford and Håkansson, 2006). For example, on the 2nd February 2012, a web search conducted by the researcher identified that there were over 1,000 active research members, with over 2,000 papers, included on the IMP website.
2.3.2 The Myths of Action, Independence and Completeness

In response to the above-mentioned theoretical origins, there are distinct differences in theoretical beliefs between the IMP approach and those of traditional marketing, with Ford et al. (2002) delineating these as 1) the myth of action, 2) the myth of independence, and 3) the myth of completeness. Each is discussed in more detail as follows.

Firstly, traditional marketing is originally rooted in the myth of action (Ford et al., 2002). It notes that the supplier is the active and dominant party in marketing. Marketers could manipulate the variables of the marketing mix, and direct these at the market (Porter, 1985). Thus, the consumer is passive, reactive, and considered to be individually insignificant (Sheth, 2002). Ballantyne et al. (2003) note that in the traditional approach each purchase is viewed as an isolated event, between the supplier and the consumer solely. In contrast, the IMP approach offers a very different lens to view markets. Fundamentally, it is suggested that markets involve a process of interactions between supplier and customer; where the value exchange between two actors are rationalised by seeking solutions to problems (Håkansson ed., 1982). Zolkiewski and Turnbull (2002) contend that each business sale and purchase should not be viewed in isolation; instead such sale/purchase formulates the continuing, closed, complex and long-term business relationships between supplier and customer. Ford and McDowell (1999) also point out that each relationship between two ‘actors’ is related to other relationships, to which these two units are linked, i.e. the interactive relationship between supplier and customer could only be understood in a wider network with which these two actors are associated (Ford et al., 2002, 2006).

Secondly, from a traditional marketing perspective, the myth of independence (Ford et al., 2002) originated in ideas to do with business strategies (Kotler and Armstrong, 1996; Kotler, 2003). It is based on the opinion that a company can carry out its own analysis of the environment in which it operates, and then develop and implement its own particular strategy, in accordance with its own competencies and shortcomings (Ansoff, 1965). In contrast, based on the fundamental belief of the interactive relationship between supplier
and customer, the IMP approach therefore suggests that companies not only have limited freedom to act independently, but also the outcome of their actions would be strongly influenced by their customers and other counterparts (Håkansson ed., 1982). Furthermore, as illustrated by Ford (1997, 2002), business strategies formulated from a company’s own evaluation would be inefficient. Instead, relationships between suppliers-customers, including their surrounding networks, are assets in the company’s strategic development. The essence of strategy formulation is to cope with, and importantly take advantage of, relationships with surrounding networks; so that the company’s strategic network position is based on its interdependence with multi-dimensional relationships (Ford et al., 2002, 2006).

Thirdly, from a traditional marketing viewpoint, the myth of completeness (Ford et al., 2002) is rooted in Industrial Economic Theory (Porter, 1985). It emphasises the importance of an organisation’s effectiveness with its own inner resources, which are driven by external business environment changes (Quinn et al., 1996). The IMP approach, however, is quite the opposite, as it considers that no organisation has sufficient resources to completely fulfil customers’ needs (Zolkiewski and Turnbull, 2002). Therefore, core competencies of companies are determined by their relationships with customers, and with other counterparts within surrounding networks (Ford et al., 2002, 2006).

In summary, the IMP approach is built on the beliefs that buyers and sellers are equally active and interactive in continuing business relationships (Håkansson ed., 1982; Ford et al., 2002). This led to the development of the Interaction Approach and the ARA (i.e. Activities-Resources-Actors) Model respectively, as well as to the expansion of IMP research outputs (Ford and Håkansson, 2006).

2.3.3 The Interaction Approach

Håkansson ed. (1982) argued that the Interaction Approach/Model, as illustrated in Figure 2.4, is based on interactive and interdependent theoretical beliefs, and consists of
four basic elements and variables, including: 1) the interaction process; 2) the participants in the interaction process; 3) the environment within which interaction takes place; 4) the atmosphere affecting, and affected by, the interactions.

**Figure 2.4: Illustration of the Interaction Approach / Model** (Håkansson ed., 1982, p.24)

Distinct from the traditional buying/selling transactional process, companies and customers are viewed as individual business actors (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). The interaction process is interactive and dependent by nature, and could be viewed from an organisational perspective, as well as from an individual’s standpoint. Despite the framework itself illustrating a two-party relationship, (i.e. relationship interactions between Party A and Party B), the fundamental concept of the Interaction Approach could be applied to relationship interactions between multiple parties (Axelsson and Easton, 1992). Different from the traditional Economic-Based View (EBV), the Interaction Approach views the value exchange between two parties from a relational and longitudinal/ongoing perspective, rather than as an encountering, or touch-and-go,
transactional activity (Håkansson *ed.*, 1982). Therefore, the interaction process between
two parties, or multi-parties, could be viewed from a perspective of short-term exchange
episodes, as well as one of long-term relationship-building. Consequently, each party
becomes institutionalised with a set of roles within the complex interaction patterns,
which are perceived as an expected problem-solution, i.e. added-value, offered to each
other (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Lastly, interactions taking place in the business
evironment are affected by their atmosphere, as well as affecting the atmosphere
simultaneously (Håkansson *ed.*, 1982). Parties and companies need to be aware of the
ever-changing business environments in which they are operating, and therefore
recognise the characteristics of interaction atmosphere.

### 2.3.4 Key Barometers of Relationship Interactions

In sharing the same fundamental basis as the Interaction Approach, the formulation of the
ARA (i.e. Activities-Resources-Actors) Model (Håkansson and Johanson, 1992) is the
output of observations that multiple relationships between companies interact and
influence each other simultaneously in business markets. This originated from the
Interaction Approach, and expanded the view of relationships beyond simplistic two-way
interactions to multiple interactions, recognising that actors interacted and interconnected
through activities and bonds (Håkansson *ed.*, 1982; Håkansson and Johanson, 1992).

Both the Interaction Approach and the ARA Model recognise the importance of
‘activities’ (in the Interaction Approach these are referred to as interaction episodes;
whereas in the ARA Model they are referred to as activity links). These are the different
ways that organisations perform their technical, administrative, commercial and other
operations. The development of a relationship between two actors influences the
activities undertaken. Links therefore reflect sequential, as well as horizontal,
interdependencies of activities. This simultaneously mirrors either the adaptation or
coordination characteristics of a relationship. Unique performance could be created
through linking activities, which also affect not only the productivity of the companies
involved, but also the whole associated network. Thus, the assessment of activities and
their strength enables an explanation of the nature of relationships and its effects (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995).

Both the Interaction Approach and the ARA Model also recognise the importance of ‘power distance’ between actors (i.e. in the Interaction Approach this is referred to as atmosphere; whilst in the ARA Model it is referred to as actor bonds). This connects actors, and influences how two parties interpret situations and form their identities in relation to each other. Commitment, identity and trust are processes that constrain, as well as enable, the perceived behaviour of the actors in relation to each other. Bonds arise in a business relationship due to the mutual commitment between two companies to each other. Bonds in a relationship could be characterised as a portion of a wider web of actors. In order to gain an understanding of a relationship between two companies, the analysis of the nature and strength of these bonds have to be considered (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Additionally, Mattsson (1984) suggested that bonds have economic, social, technical, logistical, administrative, informational, legal and time-based dimensions. Strong bonds provide a more stable and predictable structure, and are potentially more resilient and can withstand change (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995).

The significance of methodologies focused on interactions and networks is that whilst they acknowledge business problems as being linked to the traditional marketing process, they focus on relationship as the focal unit, not the individual company (Håkansson ed., 1982; Håkansson and Johanson, 1992). They also provide constructs and barometers that enable the understanding of relationship interactions and their effects (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Importantly, the Interaction Approach provides the conceptual framework that enables the examination of a single relationship in the context of networks (Ibid.).

2.3.5 The Relationship Life-Cycle / Development Stages

Ford (1980) analysed the process of establishment and development of relationships over time, and suggested five key stages in relationship evolution. Dwyer et al. (1987) implied
an inverse relationship between cooperation and competition. The Relationship Life-Cycle Model presented in Figure 2.5 (Wilkinson and Young, 1994) was adopted collectively from these previous research outputs.

**Figure 2.5: The Relationship Life-Cycle Model**

(Wilkinson and Young, 1994, p68)

The five stages of relationship development as indicated by Ford (1980) are the pre-relationship stage, early stage, development stage, long-term stage and final stage. Throughout the evolution process, Ford (1980) used the variables of experience, uncertainty, distance, commitment and adaptations to examine relationship development. To a great extent, the first of these variables, namely experience, echoes the interaction process/exchange episodes identified in the Interaction Approach to explore the interactive activities involved. The remaining variables, i.e. uncertainty, distance, commitment and adaptations, largely reflected the ‘power distance’ between interactive
parties. These measures provide an assessment of the atmosphere and actor bonds of relationship interactions, and also determine at which stage the relationship development has reached, in response to the intensity of experience. Following such thinking relating to the interaction process and relationship development, Håkansson and Waluszewski (2005) reinterpreted the traditional marketing mix of 4Ps from a new perspective of relationship interactions as a dynamic process, and strongly suggested that value and resource creation could be embedded into the relationship development process.

Tähtinen and Halinen (2002) systematically reviewed existing publications focused on the ending of relationships, and suggested terms such as termination, dissolution, switching and exit could be used to further understand the various end-processes. Furthermore, Tähtinen and Halinen (2002) proposed the Stage of Business Relationship Model, which delineated seven stages – the assessment stage, decision-making stage, dyadic stage, communication stage, disengagement stage, aftermath stage, and network communication stage – and concluded that the end-process in a relationship is always both temporally and contextually embedded, and also largely actor-driven.

Dwyer et al. (1987) viewed the relationship life-cycle as consisting of five stages: awareness, exploration, expansion, commitment and dissolution. Wilkinson and Young (1994)’s analysis of relationships, as shown in Figure 2.5, indicates four distinct phases: pre-relationship phase, development phase, maturity phase, and decline phase. In principle, such research mirrors Ford (1980)’s proposal; nevertheless, it suggested that relationships may not finish or terminate, but potentially evolve to one of these four states via a circuitous route. In later years, Wilkinson and Young (1994) explained the cooperation-competition mix, and applied dance metaphors to describe the different types and quality-levels of relationships. Their further research, Young and Wilkinson (1997), developed a dynamic process model of inter-firm relationship as a basis for identifying the main factors driving relationship development. Additionally, the cooperation-competition mix not only enables an examination of inter-firm relationships (Dwyer et al., 1987), but also an exploration of the dependence and the culture associated with interactive actors (Young and Wilkinson, 1997). Therefore, following on from the
thinking of the Interaction Approach, the cooperation-competition mix largely represents the uniqueness of the micro-environment for interactive organisations, which potentially influences the relationship atmosphere and bonds between its interactive actors. It also reflects macro business environments, within which companies operate and interact with each other. Importantly, Schurr et al. (2008) defined interactions as the building-blocks of episodes, where patterns of episodes including critical events indicated the process and changes in a relationship. As customers and suppliers make changes to interactive activities and resource allocations, this redefines the overall structure of the relationship (Ibid).

In addition, the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982) recognised the key role played by individuals in organisational relationships, which could potentially impact on the activities of an organisation and its resource utilisation. Interpersonal contacts were also strongly argued by Cunningham and Turnbull (1982) in defining the atmosphere and in playing a critical role for inter-organisational relationships, in particular of reducing perceived risk. Most recently, Zolkiewski et al. (2008) reflected on different approaches (e.g. Perrien et al., 1995; Hocutt, 1998; Havila and Wilkinson, 2002; Tähtinen and Halinen, 2002), and investigated the effects of losing a key individual on both internal and external relationships.

In summary, the Relationship Life-Cycle Model should be viewed in-line with the Interaction Approach. The key elements of the Interaction Approach, i.e. the interaction process, could be seen principally as the pathway of the stages for relationship development. It is also essential to recognise that relationship development stages are interdependent; they are inter-connected, not only to organisations’ micro and macro environments, but also to the closeness of the relationship atmosphere/actor bonds (Havila and Wilkinson, 2002). Equally importantly, research has provided terminology for classifying relationship endings and has distinguished the stages in the restoration of a relationship (Halinen and Tähtinen, 2002), as well as suggested interaction episodes as being the ‘engines’ of relationship changes (Schurr et al., 2008). Collectively, the Relationship Life-Cycle conceptual framework, along with its comprehensive research
constructs and variables, may be highly relevant to the current doctoral study. Though, it is also crucial to be reminded that relationship development is complex, and does not always neatly follow defined stages and phases.

2.3.6 A Network Approach

A network approach has been developed from the idea that a business is not an isolated activity that occurs within independent organisations. Instead, a network consists of interactions and co-operation between inter-dependent companies, whether as customers, suppliers, development partners, facilitators or competitors (Axelsson and Easton, 1992; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Ford et al., 2006). A large number of research studies have investigated the interactions between individual companies and organisations, and the wider networks that surround them (including Cunningham and Homse, 1982; Dodgson, 1993; Day, 2000; Sivadas and Dwyer, 2000; Ford, et al., 2002, 2006; Zolkiewski and Turnbull, 2002; Ritter and Gemünden, 2003; Ford and Ritter, 2004; Håkansson et al., 2004; Ritter et al., 2004). The Interaction Approach and the formulation of the ARA Model jointly contributed to the development of the Industrial Network Approach (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). The significance of the ARA Model suggests that a single dyadic relationship operates, and should be viewed in the context of many other relationships (Håkansson and Johanson, 1992). The interdependencies and connectedness of direct and indirect business relationships are elements of a network structure, and are keys to the understanding of network dynamics (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). The interplay between the three layers (i.e. network of actors, network of activities, and network of resources) in business relationships, are considered three different parameters that are determinants of the values involved in a relationship (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995).

Chronologically, the original thinking relating to networks in business was initiated by Ford et al. (1986), who outlined a two-by-two matrix and illustrated a single dimension, as well as several dimensions, of relationship interactions co-existing, often referred as the complex, widespread interaction. Wilson (1995), from a value-creation perspective,
suggested that the synergistic combination of partners’ strengths enable each party to gain from the relationship; and although relationships are not always symmetrical, the benefits of networks and working together are too important to be ignored. Turnbull et al. (1996) explored interactions, relationships and networks from a strategic perspective, and suggested that development of relationship strategy principally depends on examining the company, its individual relationships, and its overall relationship portfolio and network position.

Blois (1998) extended Wilson (1995)’s supplier’s viewpoint, and argued that it is critically important for a supplier to understand how its customers’ evaluate the potential benefit of being in the relationship, in order to position themselves with prospective partners and to select the appropriate type of relationship. Additionally, Möller and Halinen (1999) strongly suggested that from the conceptual viewpoint, management needs to understand those relationships that constitute the network, in order to develop a strategic net, to navigate in a network, and also to change or balance power distribution in the network. Ritter et al. (2004) suggested five levels of relationship and network management, and incorporated intra-firm relations, along with four other types of firms and organisations (i.e. suppliers, additional customers, competitors and complimentors), as identified by Brandenburger and Nalebuff (1997), to form the value net of the company. In addition, network management involves matching the external arrangement of relationships to internal ones, in order to build a firm’s network ability and also to effectively respond to customer requirements (Ritter and Gemünden, 2003; Ritter et al., 2004).

A network approach also offers another strategic perspective regarding the significance of relationships and associations, suggesting that relationships are probably one of the most important assets of companies (Ford, 1997, 2002). Research has stressed that relationship building and management, along with co-operation among parties, potentially enhance an organisation’s competitiveness, effectiveness and profitability (Zolkiewski and Turnbull, 2002; Ritter et al., 2004). The development and continuous
management of relationships are a core activity and of vital importance to an organisation’s ongoing success (Cunningham and Homse, 1982).

2.3.7 The Strategic Perspective of Relationships and Networks

According to definitions given by Ford et al. (2002) and Ford and Håkansson (2006), a relationship is a mutually-oriented interaction between two reciprocally committed parties. Relationships matter when the value of the parties involved in an exchange stems from interaction in its entirety, rather than simply from the tangible resource transfer between those companies involved (Ford, et al., 2002, p. 66).

Furthermore, relationships allow for a more effective acquisition of resources (Hagg and Johanson, 1983), and are considered one of the most valuable available resources of an organisation (Ford, 1997, 2002). They affect the development and utilisation of resources in the company itself and in its counterparts (Håkansson ed., 1982). They also provide indirect benefits, since they grant access to other relations, organisations, resources and competencies (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Walter et al., 2001; Ritter et al., 2004). The added-value of relationships attracts companies to become coupled and clustered together (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). As a result, the business market itself becomes organised in a network-like structure, which is stable but not static (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Ford et al., 2002). Firms or companies exist and are embedded in a network of ongoing business as well as non-business relationships and interactions (Ford, 2002; Ford and Håkansson, 2006).

Given the importance of relationships as being a key organisational resource (Ford, 1997, 2002), and from viewing relationships as elements of network structure (Axelsson and Easton, 1992) as well as in terms of markets-as-networks (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Ford et al., 2002), a number of academic studies have extended the scope of analysis. Relationships have been researched as a core competence (Cunningham and Homse, 1982; Dodgson, 1993; Day 2000; Sivadas and Dwyer, 2000), as have managing business

Research findings suggest that an individual business relationship is determinant of its overall economic performance (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Additionally, the nature of the interdependences and connectedness means that the performance of certain relationships is dependent on other relationships (Håkansson ed., 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Therefore, the ability of a firm to manage its relationships, and its position in the business network, is a critical task on which its very existence stands or falls (Ford et al., 2002), and hence firm performance is strongly correlated to network competence (Wilkinson and Young, 2002; Ritter and Gemünden, 2003). Furthermore, research has stressed that a valuable arrangement of relationships and networks forms a company’s management strategies and tactics (Cunningham and Homse, 1982). It has also indicated that the development and continuous management of business relationships are a central and crucial activity of a successful organisation (Ford, 1997, 2002; Zolkiewski and Turnbull, 2002).

2.4 Research Gap and Conceptual Framework

2.4.1 Critique: The Relevance of the IMP Concepts

The IMP concepts have been widely used (e.g. Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Zolkiewski and Turnbull, 2002; Zolkiewski, 2004; Ford and Håkansson, 2006; Johnsen and Ford, 2006), and are usually investigated in the context of business-to-business (B2B) marketing. Håkansson and Snehota (1995), and Welch and Wilkinson (2004), argued that relationships and networks consist of interactions between and within firms, other types of organisations, as well as business and non-business activities. In addition, although the literature on value co-creation has traditionally taken a firm-oriented viewpoint, it has also suggested that value is jointly co-created through customer-firm interactions (e.g. Payne et al., 2008). Other research introduced a customer-oriented perspective, and demonstrated that value is co-created through customer-to-customer
(C2C) networks of interactions (Rowley and Kupiec-Teahan, 2007; Cova and Salle, 2008). Thus, the conceptual domains of relationship and network interactions (Håkansson ed., 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995) are expanding and greatly relevant to business-to-customer (B2C) marketing.

Despite the differences, the common challenge for both B2B and B2C marketers is to truly understand their customer needs, effectively communicate their products or service, and successfully achieve customer satisfaction, which then leads to business success (Ford et al., 2002). Furthermore, the literature review in earlier sections of this chapter reinforced that there is a need to seek an alternative conceptual underpinning that could sufficiently address the complex nature of the HE service, and as a result offer business management solutions from a long-term strategic perspective (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). The literature review in sections 2.3.2, 2.3.3, 2.3.4 and 2.3.5 illustrated the key elements and the theoretical ideas of the IMP approach, which could be characterised as interactive and inter-dependent, as well as longitudinal and long-term, along with single-relational and cross-relational. These concepts may be of great relevance to the HE sector.

Relationship interactions exist between students and institutions, and they are interdependent. It is no exaggeration to state that if there are no students, HEIs will cease to exist (Kotler and Fox, 1995; Anonymous, 2001). Increasingly students are proactively seeking information, and so interact with HEIs to facilitate their choices of degree programmes and desirable study destinations (Anonymous, 2011c, 2011d). The initiation and development of new courses could be driven by academics’ expertise, as well as by students’ interests (Anonymous, 2010e, 2011b). Thus, HE service provision is interactive and dependent by nature on the actors involved. If academics are not aware of course-related problems that existing students are experiencing, their reputation could be potentially damaged by negative WOM (Hart and Coates, 2011). Equally, it will be difficult to improve the students’ experience without receiving feedback on such academics’ performance (Palmer et al., 2011). In contrast, the review of existing literature into HE marketing was largely constrained to identify key factors influencing
student choice of HEIs (e.g. Mazzarol, 1998; Naude and Ivy, 1999; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002), and student satisfaction (e.g. Guolla, 1999; Elliott and Shin, 2002; Chadee and Naidoo, 2009; Voss, 2009). These investigations provided a superficial understanding of HE services associated with relevant office and departmental functionalities, instead of the nature of the interactions and interdependence between students and HEIs.

Interactions between an individual student and the HEI are longitudinal instead of transactional. The timeframe described by the existing literature relating to HE marketing was largely limited to a snap-shot view on student buying behaviour and satisfaction. However, course registrations result from continuous and on-going interactions between students and HEI personnel, these generally happening several months prior to the course getting underway. For example, a series of e-mail correspondences about course enquiries, or participation at Open Day events, or attendance at the HEI for interviews, are some of the short-term episodes which could then lead to an individual student’s motivations of choosing that particular institution (Anonymous, 2001, 2011c, 2011d). Therefore, touch-and-go enrolment is not as simple as tuition-fee transaction superficially leads one to believe.

Sheth (2002) suggested that the value exchange between two parties should be viewed from a longitudinal perspective, and could potentially have long-term implications. Hence, in the HE context, it is important to emphasise that prior to, and after the individual episode, the value exchange process itself is equally significant; if not more significant than the episode itself. For example, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) demonstrated that short-term episodes that occurred between the individual student and the institution could potentially be reflected afterwards through the student’s WOM, to become building-blocks of student satisfaction and loyalty towards the particular HEI.

It is extremely challenging to conduct research with the lifetime of an individual student as the analytical time-frame. However, it could be valuable to carry out research investigations from the longitudinal perspective of students’ experience with institutions. The temporal dimension of networks, i.e. the contextual time-space of past, present and
future (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005), are applicable to relationships operating in the HE context. Here, emergent roles can simultaneously be those of prospective student, current student and alumni. Therefore, the contextual time-space / longitudinal perspective, could potentially offer a fuller understanding regarding relationship interactions and interdependence between students and HEIs, in contrast to the transactional lens associated with more traditional marketing.

Traditional marketing tends to be constrained by its closed system perspective, and has focused on individual customer and single commercial exchange, i.e. the dyadic perspective (Kotler, 2003). The Interaction Approach, however, is fundamentally based on an open system view of the business world, and realises that single relationships between buyer and seller, as well as multiple relationships amongst business associates, co-exist, i.e. the multiple dynamic perspective (Håkansson ed., 1982). This understanding may be applicable to the HE service; since in the reality of the HE operation, an individual student has relational connections with different departments and personnel across the institution (Kotler and Fox, 1985). This could be viewed as a single relationship from the institutional perspective, or cross- and multiple-relationships from the individual’s perspective. Furthermore, an individual student also interacts with other existing students, businesses and industries, overseas partner universities for exchange programmes, etc, during his or her studies with the HEI (Anonymous, 2011b). These relationships co-exist and are interactive by nature, having been initiated and driven by either party or parties.

Totally different from the traditional marketing and buyer-behaviour approach, the IMP concepts offer a unique way of looking at the world. The Interaction Approach focuses at the level of the dyad; i.e. the relationship itself rather than the business unit (Håkansson ed., 1982). In contrast, a network approach emphasises that the single dyadic relationship operates in the context of many other relationships; i.e. the inter-connectedness of direct and indirect relationships becomes key to understanding network dynamics (Cunningham and Homse, 1982; Campbell and Cunningham, 1983). Therefore, the formulation of organisational strategies needs to take account of supplier-customer interactions, and
their interactions within the context of their network. This belief could have significant relevance to the HE sector. For example, HEIs do not operate in isolation; instead they develop cooperation with industries (e.g. Plewa et al., 2005), and their strategic alliances potentially provide direct and indirect benefits to the institution (Marginson, 2006), and can offer them a competitive edge over other rival universities (Anonymous, 2010e). Therefore, following the thinking of the IMP concepts, theoretically the effectiveness of HE management strategies may be influenced not only by the performance of relationships existing between students and an HEI, but also other complex relationships amongst students, HEIs and other business associates and stakeholders. There could be a necessity for HEIs to recognise that their interactions with students operate in a network of the HEI’s stakeholders, i.e. the context of the HEI’s business associations.

In summary, from a strategic stance, existing research in HE marketing has been predominantly built on a traditional marketing foundation. It has also herein demonstrated adoption of the Ansoff (1965) product-market strategy, through a combination of marketing penetration, market development, product development, and diversification of strategic components (e.g. Mazzarol and Hosie, 1996; Mazzarol, 1998; Mazzarol et al., 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). The IMP concepts could potentially overcome the constraints associated with both Traditional Marketing and Relationship Marketing in a HE context.

### 2.4.2 The Proposed Conceptual Framework

The theoretical background of this doctoral research is based on both the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982) and the Relationship Life-Cycle Model (Ford, 1980; Dwyer et al., 1987; Wilkinson and Young, 1994). Both models are fundamentally founded on an open system view of the business world (Ford et al., 2002), as determined from an ontological and epistemological perspective. These approaches are underpinned by two key assumptions: (i) the interactive and interdependent nature of ‘actors’ operating in the system (Håkansson ed., 1982); and (ii) the connectedness of relationships, directly and indirectly, within the business network context (Cunningham
and Homse, 1982; Campbell and Cunningham, 1983; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Potentially, investigations and knowledge gained of dyadic, as well as dynamic relationships, could help to understand the complex nature of HE. As a result, this could also be a mechanism to uncover the building-blocks that a HEI deploys in strategically establishing its organisational capabilities, and in successfully positioning itself amongst international HE markets and networks.

The adoption and integration of the Interaction Approach and the Relationship Life-Cycle Model into the following proposed conceptual framework for the current study is illustrated in Figure 2.6.
Figure 2.6: The Proposed Conceptual Framework for the Current Study
This potentially enables an exploration of the student experience with HEIs (i.e. the student-institution interaction process and interactive episodes) from a learner-centric viewpoint. This may be achieved by examining the dyadic relationship interactions and their interconnections and interdependencies with other stakeholders of HEIs, in order to gain a strategic solution on the value co-created between and among these actors (i.e. students, HEI, and multiple stakeholders), which are increasingly demanded by students in international HE markets. Additionally, it could also potentially enable the exploration of student-institution relationship life-cycle and influencing factors, which impact on each stage or phase of this relationship development.

This conceptual framework potentially contributes to strategic solutions of HE marketing, by adopting the IMP concepts and the belief of value co-creation, whilst at the same time moving away from traditional marketing tactics. Equally, this adoption connects the Interaction Approach into the HE service, which also means that it expands the IMP concepts further into B2C marketing.

2.4.3 From the Perspective of the Student as Focal-Actor

The establishment of the Interaction Approach and the ARA Model has led to different ways of viewing, as well as levels of managing, relationships and networks. These can be categorised in terms of the range of perspectives of the relationship and network; in terms of: actor (Ritter, et al., 2004); dyad (Håkansson ed., 1982; Johanson and Mattsson, 1987; Anderson, et al., 1994; Ford and McDowell, 1999; Möller and Halinen, 1999; Wilkinson and Young, 2002); portfolio (Ford, 1980; Easton, 1992; Mattsson, 1997); connected relations (Anderson et al., 1994; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Walter et al., 2001); and network (Johanson and Mattsson, 1987; Anderson et al., 1994; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Ford et al., 2002; Ritter, et al., 2004; Welch and Wilkinson, 2004; Ford et al., 2006).

Additionally, the problem of network boundaries relates to the difficulty of separating the content and context of business networks, thereby making any network boundary
arbitrary (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005; Hague et al., 2008). A structured approach which focuses on the unit of analysis enables a network to be delimited. Network studies could be carried out from four different perspectives; these being from the perspectives of either a focal actor, a micronet–macronet, an intranet, or a dyad-network (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005). Delimiting the case network may be achieved by adopting one of these viewpoints, which need to be linked with research objectives. In addition, boundary setting is essential for analytical purposes, and for defining case content and case context (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005; Hague et al., 2008). For this doctoral study, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex nature of the HE service, focal actor delimitation has been chosen, and is illustrated in Figure 2.7.

**Figure 2.7: Boundaries through a Focal-Actor Perspective**
(Halinen and Törnroos, 2005)

Furthermore, in response to the limited amount of existing research conducted and focused on the students’ perspective in HE (Trowler, 2010), and with recognition of the exploratory nature of adapting the IMP concepts into the HE service, the current study takes the student as the focal-actor perspective to investigate relationships in HE markets as networks. Given that students are the primary customer of HEIs, an examination of relationships and networks of the HE service from the perspective of the student as the focal-actor could potentially offer key threads to unpack the complex nature of higher
education, especially at students’ exploratory stage of interacting with an HEI. Additionally, from a strategic management perspective, investigations conducted through the lens of students aim to reveal which relationships matter most to them, what the added-value of these relationships are, and how these relationships interact. This could support HEIs in prioritising their resources, and in addressing issues which they were probably unaware of in the past, but which matter most to students. As a consequence, this would then be of benefit to identifying and constructing organisational resources strategically in the HEI, with a view to gaining competitive advantage in international HE markets and networks.

2.4.4 Units of Analysis: Two Strands of Relationships

The focus of this study is on relationships, not on an organisation (i.e. HEI) or on business transactions. It is essential to be precise in stating “just what we are studying”, especially when looking at relationships (Naude, 2005, p.869). For this research, the unit of analysis comprises two strands of relationships from the students’ perspective: (i) relationships between students and HEIs, and (ii) relationships between students and other stakeholders within the business network of the HEI.

Firstly, the research focuses on the single relationship between buyer and seller, given that students are primary stakeholders of HEIs (Modell, 2005), and increasingly with HEIs taking student-centric approaches that aim to put learners at the heart of their systems (Anonymous, 2011d). However, little existing research has been conducted and focused on the students’ perspective (Trowler, 2010). Secondly, due to the underpinning assumption of interdependencies and connectedness of business relationships, additional investigations of other multiple relationships, from a focal-actor perspective (i.e. with students as the main ‘actor’), reveal the complex nature of the HE service. As a result, this study seeks to provide a detailed understanding, and gain specific insights, into the types of relationships and their associated added-value perceived by students, as primary customers.
2.4.5 Timeframe of Analysis: Contextual Past, Present and Future

In parallel with theoretical objectives, the research attempts to overcome timeframe constraints associated with Transactional Marketing, as well as with Relationship Marketing. Instead, it uses empirical methods that provide a longitudinal understanding of relationship interactions between students and HEIs; from a contextual time-space of Past, Present and Future (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005). This is illustrated in Figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8: Timeframe of the Research
(adapted from Halinen and Törnroos, 2005)

[Diagram showing the timeframe of the research with stages from Prospective Student to Alumni, Past to Future, and Timeframe of the Research]

Relationships between students and HEIs, as well as relationships between students and other public stakeholders associated with HEIs, could only be viewed in contextual time-space. More precisely, drawing from suggestions of Al-Alak (2006) and Beneke and Human (2010), as well as expanding on their research, the timeframe of analysis adopted by this current study commenced from Present (with current students), to investigate current active relationships with their HEIs. It then stretched to the spectrum of History (with current students looking back on themselves being prospective students), to analyse their perceptions regarding past relationship interactions with their HEIs. Finally, this then extended to the spectrum of Future (with current students expecting themselves to be future alumnus), to explore their anticipation and expectations regarding future and potential relationships with their home institutions.
In addition, this contextual timeframe enables the investigation of different phases of the relationship life-cycle, in response to learners either being prospective students, current students, or future alumni, all during the interaction process and relationship development with HEIs.

In summary, the extended and comprehensive timeframe of analysis for this research provides a new approach, penetrating from the transaction point through to contextual time-space. It aims to encompass students’ experience with an HEI through a process that starts as being the prospective student, and then moves through as the registered student, and to finally becoming the alumni of the institution. It also aims to gain a better understanding regarding the different phases of the relationship life-cycle from the student-centric viewpoint.

2.5 Research Objective

The overall objective for this research is to contribute towards the development of a broader theoretical perspective on HE marketing strategy, and to gain a deeper understanding of the complex nature of the HE service, through empirically generating comprehensive pictures of a HEI’s relationships. This means that the research has both theoretical and empirical ambitions.

At the theoretical level, the research aims to adopt both the Interaction Approach and the Relationship Life-Cycle Model into the HE service, in order to test and comprehend these conceptual frameworks in a different sector. For instance, there are very few examples of applying aspects of IMP concepts to the HE context. Equally, the research shifts from the Economic-Based View (EBV), to seek alternative theoretical solutions for HE marketing strategy, through empirically validating the Inter-Organisational Theory (IOT) and Resource-Based View (RBV) from a customer-centric view, i.e. from the students’ perspective. The adaptation of the relationship interactions and network effects concepts into HE Marketing potentially provides a much needed theoretical framework
to sufficiently address the complex nature of the HE service, and offer strategic solutions which will equip HEIs with competitive advantages and assure long-term success.

At the empirical level, this research addresses the temporal dimension of relationships (Halinen, 1998; Halinen and Törnroos, 2005), as well as responds to the paucity of existing research conducted and focused on the HE students’ perspective (Trowler, 2010). The study also aims to present data relating to students’ relationships with a HEI, as well as students’ relationships with other key HEI stakeholders. This has the potential to form a toolkit for HE senior management when considering implementation of strategy.

2.6 Research Questions and Justification

As the motivation for this research has initially evolved, there has been a need to illuminate marketing strategy regarding how HEIs compete successfully in increasingly challenging international education markets. This is an ultimate question pursued by academic researchers, as well as by HE practitioners, given the increasing importance of international HE markets from a business perspective (Anonymous, 2007a; Chadee and Naidoo, 2009; Maringe and Foskett, 2010). This research has as its focus an investigation of relationship interactions and network effects that encompasses one of potentially many strands of answers to this main question.

From the viewpoint of business strategy, relationships are probably one of the most important assets of organisations (Ford, 1997, 2002) and one of the most valuable resources that a company possesses (Håkansson and Snehota, 2006). A firm’s ability to develop and manage successfully its relationships may be viewed as a core competence (Dodgson, 1993; Sivadas and Dwyer, 2000), and also as an important source of competitive advantage (Day, 2000). The role and importance of relationships in value creation and delivery were assessed in co-operative strategies and alliances (Contractor and Lorange, 1992, 2002), and in co-operation and competitive advantage (Dyer and Singh, 1998; Wilkinson and Young, 2002). There has also been an acknowledgement of
relational aspects and the rise of Relationship Marketing in consumer service industries (Berry, 1983; Möller and Halinen, 1999; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000).

Additionally, a business enterprise could be viewed as a network of exchange relationships (Ford, 1980; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995), with its individual relationships being a determinant of its overall economic performance (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). The interdependences and connectedness nature of relationships mean that in performance, a certain relationship is dependent on the other relationships (Håkansson ed., 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Furthermore, research (Cunningham and Homse, 1982) has stressed that a valuable array of relationships form management strategies and tactics. Research has also indicated that the development and continuous management of relationships are a core activity, of vital importance, to an organisation’s ongoing success, which potentially enhances its competitiveness, effectiveness and profitability (Ford, 1997; Zolkiewski and Turnbull, 2002; Ritter et al., 2004). Thus, principally, relationship development could be viewed as the intertwining of the single interaction, as well as multiple interactions, interconnected and interdependent with other actors in widespread networks.

Following these arguments, research questions for the current doctoral study have been formulated to investigate the following:

**RQ1: What are the relationship dynamics from a student perspective within an international higher education context?**

This is in response to the little existing research previously conducted and focused on the students’ perspective in available literature (Trowler, 2010). The research findings from the primary stakeholders (Kotler and Fox, 1985) / students’ focal-actor perspective (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005) would be valuable, and could enable HEIs to prioritise strategically their allocation of resources and to address relationship management that matters most to students.
**RQ2: How do the relationship dynamics impact on relationship development between students and their institution?**

This is in response to the paucity of evidence that provides an understanding of the influences the 16 HEI stakeholders (Kotler and Fox, 1985) have upon student satisfaction, since these stakeholders have been generally viewed as no more than a written list since they were identified nearly three decades ago (St. George, 2006). The interdependences and connectedness nature of relationships mean that, in performance, a certain relationship is dependent on other relationships (Håkansson *ed.*, 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995).

The current study focuses on investigating relationships between students and HEIs, as well as relationships between students and other stakeholders of HEIs, from the students as the focal actor-network perspective. Following the above argument, the research question for the current study could then be met through responses to sub-research questions listed below, on the basis that Actors, Interaction Process, Atmosphere and Environment, are substances and parameters of relationships (Håkansson *ed.*, 1982):

1) **Actors: What actors are involved from the perspective of students as focal actor?**
   Actors control activities and/or resources; these could be individuals, groups of individuals, parts of organisations, organisations, and groups of organisations (Håkansson *ed.*, 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995).

2) **Interaction Process: What episodes and activities are involved in relationship development between students and their institution, as perceived by students?**
   An actor that can be connected in various ways to other actors, as interaction episodes occur and a relationship formulates and develops (Håkansson *ed.*, 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). For instance, for this research, potentially, episodes and activities could be enquiries, applications, internships and overseas exchanges.

3) **Atmosphere: How do the relationship dynamics that correspond with the key interactive stages during the life-cycle of students’ experience with their institution**
impact on the different stages of relationship development between the students and that institution?

Atmosphere connects actors and influences how these actors perceive each other, and then subsequently forms their identities in relation to each other (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Bonds are established during the interaction process, and reflect the relationship atmosphere between actors (Håkansson ed., 1982). For instance, for the current study, potentially, actor bonds could be loyalty (from students) perceived by an HEI, and co-operation (from an HEI) perceived by students.

4) **Environment:** What is the nature of the environment within which the relationship dynamics and interactions between students and their institutions exist?

Following the thinking of the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982), while analysing a single relationship between student and HEI, or examining multiple relationships between students and other HEI stakeholders, the international HE business environment context, in which these relationships take place, is also of importance.

In summary, investigation and answers in relation to the above research sub-questions collectively help the researcher to gain a holistic and in-depth understanding of what relationships are important, why these relationships are important, as well as how these relationships interact and impact on overall student satisfaction with HEI service provision, all from the students’ perspective within the international HE context. Consequently, from a strategic management perspective, this investigation also provides an audit of HEI relationship and network management competencies underpinned by a focus on markets-as-networks (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Ford, et al., 2002, 2006). It also illustrates whether the institutions are well-equipped with valuable assets of relationships, to gain sustainable competitive advantages for long-term success (Cunningham and Homse, 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Day, 2000; Sivadas and Dwyer, 2000; Zolkiewski and Turnbull, 2002).
2.7 Correlation between the Research Questions and the Model

For this study, the correlation between research questions and the adaptation of the theoretical framework is summarised in Figure 2.9, in order to capture the specific focus and applicable emphasis; i.e. to conduct the investigation from the HE student’s perspective, with an examination of relationship interactions and multiple stakeholder / network effects within an international higher education context.

Figure 2.9: Research Questions and the Theoretical Framework
Chapter 3  Research Methodology

3.0  Introduction

Figure 3.1 presents the overview regarding the selection process of research methodology for the current study, and systematically outlines the key assessment factors applied.

Figure 3.1: The Map of Research Methodology Adopted for the Current Study
3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Stances

3.1.1 Reality and Knowledge: Paradigms of Social Research

Research is a systematic process of enquiry, which is expected to lead to the discovery of new knowledge. Kitchin and Tate (2000) illustrated that ideology is the purpose for which we are seeking knowledge; ontology is our view of reality, and the assumptions underlying our theories; epistemology answers how we acquire knowledge about a subject, the nature, sources and scope of knowledge; while methodology is the procedures for investigating a situation or phenomena. Ontology is reality; epistemology is the relationship between that reality and the researcher; and methodology is the techniques used by the researcher to discover the reality (Perry et al., 1999). Therefore, it can be argued that ideology, ontology, epistemology and methodology are the fundamentals of a systematic enquiry process, and that there are close linkages between these essentials elements of research.

Within the field of social sciences, researchers (e.g. Sayer, 1992; Jun, 2006; Cunliffe, 2008) believe that there is a reality in existence. Reality is structured and intransitive, as it is not reducible to the events of experience; and exists independently of our knowledge of it (Bhaskar, 1997, 1998). It is our curiosity as well as consciousness about reality that creates the basis of mainstream research and knowledge (Kuhn, 1962).

Philosophical understanding of the social sciences have largely followed the format of the natural sciences (Peterson, 1981; Whitley, 1984), and are concerned with the relationship between the individual and society (Schutz, 1964; Weber, 1978; Huff, 2011). It is difficult to precisely outline social science paradigms, due to their transitory character (Willmott, 1993; Kneebone, 2002). However, there are four central paradigms that are most widely used in social science research today. Table 3.1 highlights the different characteristics of each of these paradigms, as follows.
Table 3.1: Summary of Different Research Paradigms – (adapted from Sobh and Perry, 2006, p.1195)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>Epistemology</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Research Objectives</th>
<th>Researcher’s Position</th>
<th>Subject’s Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positivism</strong></td>
<td>Reality is an actual entity that can be known</td>
<td>Understanding and senses allow us to recognise and explain reality; findings are discovered through research</td>
<td>Strengthening and disproving of theories didactically; testing the relations between individual variables</td>
<td>Discovering the sources of phenomena and the reasons for them; predicting behaviour</td>
<td>The researcher holds the knowledge, and observes phenomena from the outside</td>
<td>Provides data anonymously, and has no voice of its own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructivism</strong></td>
<td>Reality is created by relations between subjects, according to the significances that the participants attribute to the phenomena</td>
<td>Understanding of reality is subjective and relativistic; research and writing produce findings</td>
<td>Findings are produced through induction, focusing on processes occurring in complete social units</td>
<td>Understanding phenomena; giving them significance</td>
<td>The researcher interprets the phenomena from the inside; he or she is close to the events, and may even participate in them</td>
<td>Presents and even sometimes participates in the writing; gets a voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pragmatism</strong></td>
<td>Reality is structured and reproduced by participants on the basis of class-power relations</td>
<td>Reality is explicated by understanding the power relations that shape human awareness; findings are mediated by values</td>
<td>Research of the historical conditions that are produced in the local context of the class structure</td>
<td>Exposing the power structures and the control methods at their foundation</td>
<td>The researcher is a social critic</td>
<td>A subject of criticism; gets a voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-Structuralism</strong></td>
<td>Reality is based on power relations established through discourse, and changes frequently</td>
<td>Knowledge of reality is based on power and on contextual understanding of differences; findings are tentative</td>
<td>Research of the discourse in a given historical and political context, and their historical progression</td>
<td>Understanding the way in which humans are established as subjects</td>
<td>The researcher has mutual relations with the research subjects, while reflexively examining his or her position</td>
<td>The subject is presented as an agent; with reality from its point of view</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positivism is the term originally used by Auguste Comte to describe a process by which scientific knowledge is generated (Watson, 1971). Although Comte’s orientation was rooted in the natural sciences, his positivist theory of knowledge was universal in its application (Mill, 2008), with an inclusion of the generation of knowledge in the social sciences. In positivism, social reality is such things as government, institutions and norms (Kneebone, 2002). The positivist approach, as regards ontology, sees reality as a real situation that exists on its own, independent from whoever observes it. As with natural phenomena, social phenomena are governed by laws (Willmott, 1993). It can be argued that positivism dwells on the socially-constructed nature of perceptions, and that general rules can be formulated from behaviour. From a methodological perspective, the positivist approach aims for a high degree of objectivity and repeatability in order to achieve insights about reality (Sayer, 1992). Additionally, positivism relies on empirical evidence (Hiles, 1999) to evaluate theories designed to test and summarise knowledge. Thus, research is proven through hypotheses and deduction (Sayer, 1992).

Constructivism rests on a phenomenological philosophy, and asserts that “people’s consciousness construct the social reality, through which they perceive the reoccurring characteristics of phenomena of daily life and transform them into a self-evident social order” (Schutz, 1967, p.77). Constructivists believe that the social reality is a product of social building, and that our reaction to another person is a consequence of the significance that we attribute to the actions of others (Shotter and Katz, 1999; Shotter and Cunliffe, 2002). From a methodological perspective, it can be argued that in contrast to positivism, constructivism asserts that reality is perceived subjectively. Reality, as noted by Cunliffe (2003), is shaped to a great degree by the way in which we perceive it, interpret it and react to it. Our perceptions define the reality, and are the basis for our social understanding. Therefore, research that rests on a constructivist approach is focused on interpreting the social events occurring in specific situations (Annells, 1996; Fletcher, 2006; Cunliffe, 2008).

The pragmatic approach has arisen to operate between the positivist and constructivist paradigms, largely following criticism towards the positivist view that science discovers
an actual reality (Badley, 2003). For example, Rorty (1999) and Brew (2001) argued that both literary criticism and physics produce truth, but this truth is not reality; it is intersubjective agreement. Additionally, from a methodological perspective, pragmatism notes that appropriateness of research method depends on the nature of the problem (Rorty, 1999). A qualitative and/or a quantitative research method could be adopted and applied to different stages or all phases of the research process, so that researchers understand complex phenomenon from a multi-dimensional perspective, and within its natural setting (Patton, 1990; Brewer and Hunter, 2005).

Post-structuralism emerged from the French structuralism of the mid-1900s. It rejected the theory of enlightened knowledge, and instead promoted rationalism; “neglecting the perceptions regarding the subjects (the person) shaping the object through the power of his / her intellect” (Lyotard, 1984, p.3). In contrast to a structuralist approach, post-structuralism aspires to disassemble phenomena into their components (O’Shaughnessey and O’Shaughnessey, 2002), and examine how these become a self-evident reality (Hiles, 1999). It can be argued that post-structuralism does not accept any situation as a given. From a methodological perspective, the post-structuralist approach is more likely to look favourably upon methods which seek to draw out, or elucidate, how an individual experiences reality; for example, by using questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and direct observation (Sayer, 1992; Humes and Bryce, 2003; Moisander et al., 2009). Furthermore, in order to overcome a dualist quantitative-qualitative debate, a triangulation of methods is often used (Downward and Mearman, 2007).

In summary, in broad terms, it can be argued that the social sciences are those areas of activity that aim for a rational and systematic understanding of human society. The overview of the four paradigms of social science research highlights that there is a shift in emphasis away from an object-centred account of reality towards a subject-centred account (Moscovici, 1988). Furthermore, in recent years, researchers (e.g. Katz et al., 2000; Shotter and Cunliffe, 2002; Cunliffe, 2008) have suggested that how the individual views reality is becoming more important than the possibility of making statements about objective reality. In addition, it can be argued that all four paradigms of social science
research share the same goal, which is to expand knowledge of the world through research and writing, despite each paradigm perceiving this knowledge differently and ascribing different functions to it (Sobh and Perry, 2006).

### 3.1.2 The Constructivist Stance and Its Relevance

Pinch and Bijker (1984, p.405) recommended that while trying to explain research questions and demonstrate research outcomes, “it is important that the researcher declares his or her stance and approach(es) to acquiring knowledge”. Following this suggestion, the choice of the constructivist approach for this research is as a result of the research assumption, which supports the existence of a relative ontology and an interactive epistemology. The reasons why the constructivist paradigm is more appropriate than others could be explained through answering two fundamental and inter-related questions: 1) What are the characteristics of reality?, and 2) What are the relationships between the one who knows, and the object that is known? (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.105). The illustration of these two essential questions in the current research context, provides the evaluation as well as the justification regarding the suitability and validity of the constructivist approach for this doctoral study.

On the basis of constructivism, there are multiple constructions of reality and its phenomena (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998), with reality being complex and full of mutual relations (Gergen, 1985). It can be argued that it is essential for researchers to recognise the research assumptions, as well as the complex and relational characteristics of reality and its phenomena under investigation. For the current study, the Interaction Approach (e.g. Håkansson ed., 1982) was adopted, in order to formulate a theoretical framework that encompasses an investigation of relationship interactions between students and an HEI in the international HE market context. The four basic elements of the Interaction Approach include: 1) the interaction process; 2) the participants in the interaction process; 3) the environment within which interaction takes place; and 4) the atmosphere affecting, and affected by, the interactions (e.g. Håkansson ed., 1982, p.24). These can be viewed as constructions of the industrial business world; i.e. the reality that
scholars of the IMP Group give focus to, and from which they gain knowledge (Ford and Håkansson, 2006). A business market consists of a process of interactions between supplier and customer; such interactions take place in a business environment; companies need to be aware of the business context in which they are operating. From the ontological stance of the Interaction Approach, the above four basics should be applicable to any type of relationship interaction: for example, business-to-business (B2B), or business-to-customer (B2C), or customer-to-customer (C2C). Regardless of the types of relationships under investigation, in order to understand relationship development, it is critically important to research the interaction process (i.e. relationship episodes), the relationship participants (i.e. actors), the macro and micro environment (i.e. context within which the relationship is developed), and the atmosphere (i.e. the inter-dependency level of the relationship).

For the current study, acceptance of the interactive and inter-connected assumption underpinning the Interaction Approach suggests that HEIs and students are interactive and dependent on each other; and that the HE service consists of a process of interactions between HEIs and students. Furthermore, such institutions need to recognise the marketisation and internationalisation of the HE context, which unavoidably affects, and is affected by, characteristics of the relationship atmosphere that abound between HEIs and students. Similar to the Interaction Approach, the network effect acknowledges multiple constructions of the business world and its complex nature, in which relationships are important assets. Most significantly, it recognises that supplier-customer relationships are inseparable from surrounding networks, and so should be viewed in the context of many other relationships (Axelsson and Easton, 1992; Ford et al., 2006).

Following this principle, arguably it is critical for the current research to not only investigate the important relationship between an HEI and students, but also to explore the existence of this institution-student relationship in the midst of other multiple HE stakeholders. HEIs need to recognise that they operate in a complex multiple stakeholder context, where they seek to serve the interests of students as their core business. However, HEIs should also understand that their relationship with students is
unavoidably influenced by other multiple engagements, due to the interdependencies and connectedness of direct and indirect relationships. Therefore, the adoption of both the Interaction Approach and the network approach is consistent with constructivism, noting that the characteristics of HE business reality are complex and relational (i.e. interactive and inter-connected).

The constructivist paradigm also considers the relationship between the one who knows and the object that is known, since the observer is part of what is observed and is not removed from it (Charmaz, 2000). The constructivist approach suggests that reality is created by the researchers, since what observers see as the research phenomena then defines the research questions, influences the selection of methods, and impacts on the analysis of findings (Fletcher, 2006). The current study not only recognises the complex and relational characteristics of the HE service, but also in particular supports the fact that current students are primary customers and that other stakeholders are secondary customers (Kotler and Fox, 1985; Modell, 2005; Marginson, 2006; Smart and Banks, 2006).

Following this viewpoint, the researcher consequently subdivided this thesis investigation into two parallel categories. One category is to study relationship interactions between students and their HEI; the other category is to investigate relationship interactions between students and the HEI’s other stakeholders that operate within the HE service context.

For the current study, the researcher aims to gain knowledge of the HE service world by selecting suitable and desirable methods, to explore from the students’ perspective aspects relating to the ‘what’, the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ of key relationship interactions that impact on their experience with HE service provision. Therefore, it can be argued that investigation of the HE service world is manifested in the researcher’s creation, and that this research process is the construction of HE service reality itself. Shotter (1999, p.143) suggested that “we are always in relation to others, regardless of whether they are in person or not.” Therefore, there is no “I” without “you”, as it tends to be difficult to
separate the researcher from the object being researched (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). It can be argued that researchers are considered in the phenomenon itself, related and inseparable from other actors or the objects under study. For the current investigation, the researcher interacts with students (i.e. the actors), in order to understand relationship interactions between two parties (i.e. student and HEI) or multi-parties (i.e. students and other stakeholders). In the context of the current study, the researcher is part of what is observed, co-creating and gaining knowledge of the HE service reality through interactive explorations predominantly with students (i.e. from the students’ perspective).

To conclude, on the basis of the above examination of these two fundamental questions, the answers confirm that the researcher supports a relative ontology and an interactive epistemology, and also believes that all entities are simultaneously shaping each other. It is impossible to distinguish causes from effects (Zikmund and Babin, 2006). Therefore, for this study, it can be argued that it is impossible to study relationships between students and an HEI, without also understanding relationship interactions between students and other multi-stakeholders within the HE service context. In addition, recognising the significance of adopting a subjective-centred account of reality (Moscovici, 1988) (i.e. acknowledging the views and interpretation of objective reality are more important), has led the researcher to adopt the constructivist approach, which is contended to be more appropriate than a positivist approach and other paradigmatic stances, for this research study. Importantly, the researcher, being the constructivist interpreter, aims for the voice of the subjects to be heard.

3.2 Research Methodology

3.2.1 Qualitative Approaches vs Quantitative Approaches

Research methodology is a practical branch of the philosophy of science, which consists of methods, systems and rules for carrying out research (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). It aims to achieve the objectives set out for a research project (Rorty, 1999). Research
methodology can be viewed as the procedures and techniques that are used to enable the systematic process of enquiry and discovery of knowledge.

In principle, research methodology comprises two divisions, namely qualitative and quantitative approaches (Stainback and Stainback, 1988). There have been ongoing debates over the last three decades focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of these two major approaches (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998), which consequently led to an array of qualitative-vs-quantitative differences having been identified and exemplified collectively. Table 3.2, which is adapted from suggestions of Stainback and Stainback (1988), provides a summary comparison regarding the main differences between the qualitative and quantitative research approaches.

Table 3.2: Differences in Quantitative and Qualitative Research
(adapted from Stainback and Stainback, 1988, p.8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Quantitative research</th>
<th>Qualitative research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conditions</td>
<td>Controlled</td>
<td>Naturalistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Subjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Particularistic – defined by variables studied</td>
<td>Holistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>Non-human</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Verification</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Prediction and control</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Stable – reality is made up of facts that do not change</td>
<td>Dynamic – reality changes with changes in people’s perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>Valid – the focus is on design and procedures to gain real, rich and deep data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Value-free – values can be controlled</td>
<td>Value-bound – values will impact on understanding the phenomena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewpoint</td>
<td>Outsider – reality is what quantifiable data indicate it to be</td>
<td>Insider – reality is what people perceive it to be</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are a number of key characteristics that distinctly set these two divisions of research methodology apart. Qualitative research approaches are heavily informed by a belief that social sciences deal with open systems rather than closed systems; hence they are not easily amenable to being conceptualised in the same way as natural sciences (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Research focusing on complexity is often associated with an approach that is qualitative, is case-oriented, has small sample sizes or uses intensive methods of investigation; whereas, research of a more general nature is often quantitative, is variable-oriented, has large sample sizes or is extensive (Sayer, 1992). Qualitative approaches focus on peoples’ experiences and the meanings they place on understanding phenomena (Miles and Huberman, 1994); while the opposite is the case in terms of a quantitative-based research methodology (Stainback and Stainback, 1988).

Quantitative approaches seek to confirm hypotheses about phenomena, with reality being objective and singular; whilst qualitative approaches seek to explore phenomena, with reality being subjective and multiple (Bryman, 1988; Creswell, 1998, 2003). With respect to categorising questions, quantitative approaches use a rigid style of eliciting and categorising responses to questions; qualitative approaches, on the contrary, use a more flexible and iterative style to such questioning (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). With respect to the researcher, s/he is independent from what is being researched in quantitative studies, and recruits research subjects; alternatively, in qualitative studies, the researcher interacts with what is being researched, and works with the research participants (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). In terms of methodological aspects, quantitative approaches are deductive, outcome-oriented, and context-free; also, their analytical objectives can relate to quantifying variation, to predicting causal relationships, or to describing the characteristics of a population (Sobh and Perry, 2006). In comparison, qualitative approaches are inductive, process-oriented and context-bound; whilst their analytical objectives can relate to describing variation, to illustrating and explaining relationships, to describing individual experiences, or to expressing group norms (Creswell, 1998, 2003).
In summary, the debates between the qualitative and quantitative divisions of research methodology were described as “wars between the followers of two divergent paradigms” (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2007, p.42). These ‘wars’ focus mainly on superiority and inferiority between the two paradigms, and subsequently present a rich comprehension of the key characteristics associated with qualitative and quantitative approaches.

### 3.2.2 Research Approaches and Philosophical Beliefs

Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) emphasised that the choice of research methods is collectively impacted by the four main paradigms of social science research, and by associated stances in terms of logic, causal linkages, epistemology, axiology and ontology. Table 3.3 provides a summary overview of the interconnectedness amongst these philosophical elements, as well as comparisons across the four important paradigms of social science research.

From Table 3.3, it is clear that the value of paradigmatic assumptions is to provide a basis that research studies can be built upon (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005; Alise and Teddlie, 2010). Additionally, with respect to the interconnectedness amongst the philosophical elements, many researchers (e.g. Sayer, 1992; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Rorty, 1999) shared a similar view that the differences setting apart qualitative and quantitative research approaches are predominantly rooted in epistemological, ontological and methodological beliefs and assumptions.

To conclude, by following Tashakkori and Teddlie’s (1998) viewpoint that research methods are impacted by paradigms of social science, it can be argued that the nature of the problem and the philosophical assumptions determine the choice and appropriateness of the research methodology.
3.2.3 Justification for Adopting Qualitative Approaches

For this research study, adapting constructivism means that it is fundamentally assumed that all entities are simultaneously shaping each other, and it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects (Cunliffe, 2003, 2008). The underpinning relative ontology and interactive epistemological stances suggest that the choice of a qualitative research
methodology is more appropriate. It can be argued that as relationship interaction is the focus for the current study, it is impossible to gain a holistic understanding of such interactions between students and an HEI without recognising the business context of the HEI. This research focuses on students’ (i.e. human rather than non-human) experiences, and the meanings students place on both their short-term exchange episodes of relationship interactions and the long-term relationship building process with HEIs. Additionally, the knower and known are inseparable. The researcher interacts and works with research respondents (i.e. students), in order to gain new knowledge of the HE service through these participants’ own words and perceptions. Therefore, it can be argued that both Table 3.2 (Stainback and Stainback, 1988) and Table 3.3 (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998) can be viewed as frameworks that provide an array of key assessment criteria to assure that the choice of qualitative research approaches are not random or predetermined by the researcher. Instead, the selection of qualitative methods is consistently and closely linked to the underpinning constructive assumption, i.e. the interactive and inter-connected relationships of actors in the HE service world.

In addition to the assessment criteria discussed above, Carson et al. (2001, p.63) suggested three reasons why qualitative research methodology is valuable in business studies: “1) Qualitative methodology focuses on acquiring a deep understanding of the phenomenon; 2) Qualitative methodology examines the phenomenon, without requiring the researcher to have any preconceived opinion; and 3) Qualitative methodology concentrates on the ‘how’ and ‘why’, in addition to the ‘what’, when trying to understand the phenomenon.” For the current study, firstly, one of the research objectives is to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex nature of the HE service through the perspective of relationship interactions. Secondly, due to the exploratory nature of this research, relationship interactions are to be understood through the views of students, these expressed in their own words, without the influence of the researcher’s preconceived opinions. Thirdly, the research questions aim to uncover what relationships are important from the students’ perspective. This offers a fuller lens to investigate the HE service research phenomenon, by concentrating on seeking answers relating to the
‘what’, the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ relationship interactions happen, all from the focal views of students.

To conclude, on the basis of the above illustrated reasoning and justification, the adoption of a qualitative research methodology is deemed to be the most appropriate to encompass the investigation and produce valid evidence within this thesis.

3.3 Case Study Research Strategy

3.3.1 Types of Qualitative Research Approaches

Qualitative research is defined as “a process of understanding based on distinct methodology traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem; the research builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). It can be argued that this definition echoes the standpoint of Van Maanen (1983) that the qualitative label has no precise meaning itself; instead it covers an array of interpretive techniques.

According to Tesch (1990), the main qualitative methodological tradition includes 31 different types of research approaches, which could be classified into four categories. As shown in Table 3.4, this classification focuses on: 1) the characteristics of language; 2) the discovery of regularities; 3) the comprehension of the meaning of text and action; and 4) reflection. There is nothing clear-cut between these four categories, as such, since this whole classification should be viewed as a continuum (Tesch, 1990).
Table 3.4: Types of Qualitative Research Approaches
(adapted from Tesch, 1990, pp.72-73)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The characteristics of language</th>
<th>The discovery of regularities</th>
<th>The comprehension of the meaning of text and action</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>Transcendental realism</td>
<td>Phenomenological research</td>
<td>Educational connoisseur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
<td>Ethnographic content analysis</td>
<td>Existential phenomenological psychology</td>
<td>Reflective phenomenology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography of communication</td>
<td>Event structure analysis</td>
<td>Empirical phenomenology</td>
<td>Heuristic research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethno methodology</td>
<td>Qualitative evaluation</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Life history</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emancipatory / critical research</td>
<td>Hemeneutical research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holistic ethnography</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational ethnography</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Naturalistic inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethno science</td>
<td>Ecological psychology</td>
<td>Dialogical phenomenology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural ethnography</td>
<td>Grounded theory</td>
<td>Experiential phenomenology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic internationalism</td>
<td>Phenomenography</td>
<td>Imaginal phenomenology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The current study aims to provide an in-depth understanding and gain new knowledge of the complex HE service world. This is to be achieved through investigation of relationship interactions from the viewpoint of students. Hence, the category of qualitative research approaches indicated by Tesch (1990, pp.72-73) which focuses on “comprehension of the meaning of text and action” is most appropriate for the current investigation. In particular, the case study is chosen to produce valid evidence for this research work. The justifications for this selection are explained in the following sections, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the case study research strategy.
3.3.2 Justification for Selecting the Case Study

The current study adopted the suggestions of Creswell (1998) i.e. using five factors to select a suitable research strategy, thereby providing a set of assessment tools to guide the choice and justification for selecting the case study. The five questions drawn from Creswell’s (1998) work, and answers applicable to this research, are shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Five Assessment Factors for Selecting the Case Study
(adapted from Creswell, 1998, p.57-62)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Assessment Factors</th>
<th>Application in This Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the research focus (i.e. on what is the research strategy meant to focus)?</td>
<td>The current study is focused on relationship as the unit of analysis, rather than on HEIs themselves, providing an advantageous research approach to explore the HE service from a student perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Research shows that qualitative data are more likely to hold clues about people’s real feelings, views and likely behavior (Skinner et al., 2000, p.176).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The case study is more likely to uncover some of the important reasons why an individual chooses a certain option, and the factors which influenced their decisions (Eisenhardt, 1989).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The case study provides a holistic view through participants own words and perceptions (Miles and Huberman, 1994).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the most widely used research strategies in the area (i.e. what is the target audience of the research)?</td>
<td>Survey questionnaire and interviews are the dominant research strategies in HE marketing research (Young, 1997; Hamley-Brown and Opland, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Literature review demonstrated that there had been a paucity of adoption of the case study research strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The holistic case study strategy would enable combined data collection methods to be adopted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Given the exploratory nature of the current investigation, using interview and documents jointly are deemed more appropriate than survey questionnaires to unveil an in-depth understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the researcher’s background (i.e. what is the researcher’s specialty and what kind of training has he/she had)?</td>
<td>The researcher has 14 years direct experience in the UK HE field, as well as established expertise of international HE market from a China perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The researcher’s practical experience enables a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon, by taking both holistic and focused approaches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the literature in this area (i.e. what research strategy will make the most significant contribution to the field)?</td>
<td>Development of the theoretical framework for the current study is rooted in the Interaction Approach which has been originally explored and empirically tested through a case study research strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Given the exploratory nature of the existing research and the paucity of evidence in adopting the Interaction Approach and network effect in the HE service, the case study is more advantageous than other available research strategies, and will make the most significant contribution to the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the researcher’s personal inclination (i.e. does the researcher feel more comfortable with a structured approach or a less structured approach)?</td>
<td>It must likely that target research respondents would prefer to participate in research processes where they are aware of the procedures, and in which they have confidence in the researcher’s knowledge and experience (Choo, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In deploying both the case study strategy and in-depth interviews as the major techniques, this is more likely to address these concerns and enable the research to be conducted in the most time-efficient fashion (Choo, 2007).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By applying these five assessment factors, the case study research strategy has demonstrated a strong and evident suitability for the current investigation.

3.3.3 The Case Study Research Strategy: Strengths and Weaknesses

There are a range of available research approaches including experiments, surveys, histories, analyses of archival information and case studies (Yin, 2011). The case study is viewed as a scientific methodical collection of data, whose concern is the interaction between factors and events (Yin, 1981; Dey, 1993). In addition, Stake (1994, p.48) emphasised “in-depth understanding in qualitative research derives from detailed knowledge of a particular experience in its context”, i.e. the researcher’s interpretation and understanding of the subjects and phenomena under investigation.

Characteristics of the case study as a research approach are distinct and set it apart from the others. For example, researchers suggested that the case study investigates contemporary phenomenon, especially with less boundaries between phenomenon and context (Yin, 2003), and concentrates on understanding the dynamics demonstrated within a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989). In addition, the case study research approach is preferred and adopted to answer ‘how’ or ‘why’ types of questions, and to produce valid evidence (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, Creswell (1998, p.64) illustrates the case study as an exploration of a “bounded system”, and explains that case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental in terms of understanding the system under investigation. Moreover, Gummesson (2001) affirmed that cases are not ‘anecdotal evidence’; instead they can be used for exploration, description, explanation, theory generation and theory testing.

The case study research approach is chosen for the current exploration of the HE service phenomenon. It aims to address the ‘what’, ‘how’, and ‘why’ types of research questions, and thus provides a comprehensive investigation of relationship interactions between students and a HEI that exist within a multiple stakeholder context. The current research focuses on contemporary issues. It suggests that an understanding of the added-value
associated with key relationship interactions, as well as with managing relationships from a student-centric perspective, potentially enables HEIs to respond to changes and challenges in the international HE market, thereby achieving competitive advantage and long-term success. The case study approach is suggested to be most suited for capturing the complexities and dynamics of relationships that are inseparable from its context (Gummesson, 2003; Halinen and Törnroos, 1998, 2005).

From the perspective of evaluating strengths and weaknesses, as illustrated in Table 3.6, the case study approach is advantageous in exploring new research phenomenon and providing in-depth understanding, despite its limitations in scientific generalisation.

Table 3.6: Strengths and Weaknesses of the Case Study Research Approach
(adapted from Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003, 2011; Easton, 1992; Halinen and Törnroos, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths of the Case Study Research Approach</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Case studies are more suitable for studying processes that are emergent and not sequential, without clear endings and beginning.</td>
<td>✗ Findings form case studies provide a richer and more detailed view of issues under investigation, i.e. the great strength of the case study is that it offers depth and comprehensiveness for understanding the specific phenomenon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Case studies are particularly suitable in new research phenomenon, where only little is known and in situations where current theories seem inadequate.</td>
<td>✗ Case studies have great advantage over other research approaches particularly in the exploratory nature of research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The case study up-scales illustration alone, and conveys the same verities of relevance and realism.</td>
<td>✗ The case study delivers similar, if not better research quality and validity as other research approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Case studies are more suitable for studying relationships and networks.</td>
<td>✗ Case studies enable holistic investigations of a contemporary phenomenon which is difficult to separate from its context, but necessary to study within such a context, in order to understand the dynamics involved in the setting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaknesses of the Case Study Research Approach</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✗ Concerns are over the lack of rigor and biased view of case study</td>
<td>✗ Numbers of case selected are limited, and the researcher’s interpretation influences the direction of the findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Case studies provide little basis for scientific generalisation</td>
<td>✗ Case studies are limited to analytic generalization, i.e. generalizable to theoretical proposition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Case studies take too long and result in massive documents</td>
<td>✗ Case studies take a long time and are written in lengthy narrative.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4 Case Design and Selection

3.4.1 Multiple Case Studies

Yin (2003, p.40) distinguishes between four types of case study designs, namely ‘single holistic’, ‘single embedded’, ‘multiple holistic’ and ‘multiple embedded’. Single case designs usually rely on cases conserved very typically or uniquely. In contrast, multiple cases aim to cover different examples within a particular context (Perry, 1998). The difference between holistic and embedded case study designs lies in the need for analysis of specific embedded components or within the holistic context (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Kohlbacher, 2006). Due to the exploratory nature of the research herein, the single holistic case study design in principle would be sufficient. However, the findings of multiple case studies are in many instances recognised as more compelling and robust in comparison to a single case study (Yin, 2003, 2011). Furthermore, by comparing cases, one can establish the range of generality of explanations and findings, simultaneously pinpointing the conditions under which these findings will occur (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Hence, multiple cases offer greater explanatory power, in contrast to a single case study. A multiple holistic case study was adopted for the current investigation. This makes the exploratory interpretation of cases less vulnerable, and also provides the possibility of evaluating causal powers of objectives and relations across case comparisons (Yin, 2003).

Case research is also considered more valuable when investigations trace links over time, go into detailed analysis, and follow through from the actual to the real domain (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). For the current study, the researcher has aimed to disentangle the complexities of dynamic relationships, from the perspective of the student being the focal actor. Additionally, the adaptation of the contextual time-space viewpoint (i.e. past, present and future of relationship development) enables a longitudinal exploration of the student experience with a HEI, as well as a holistic examination of key relationship interactions from the students’ viewpoint.
3.4.2 Case Sampling

Using the international education market as the broad context, the focus of this research was on business schools as the cases, rather than on the HEIs as a whole. This was because they tend to attract the most international students, and contribute significantly to institutional revenue, being the building blocks of successful international marketing (De Onzono and Carmona, 2007). In international education markets, business schools, to a great extent, have been perceived to be the forerunner to the implementation of internationalisation across the HE sector in many countries (Floyd and Owens, 2006; Bennett and Kane, 2009).

Amongst international business schools (IBSs), variations exist in the portfolio of postgraduate taught (PGT) degree programmes on offer, and there is also a lack of globally-recognised benchmarks of quality associated with these PGT courses, except for Masters of Business Administration (MBA) programmes (Anonymous, 2012e). The provision of MBA courses across internationally-reputable IBSs share a largely similar core curriculum and offer consistently high standards (Hawawini, 2005; Davies and Thomas, 2009). Therefore, IBSs offering globally-established MBAs became the predominant sample population. Table 3.7 illustrates the key references used and guidelines considered during this process.
Table 3.7: Case Sampling – Key References and Guidelines Adopted

- **Key Sources and References**
  2. References to Business Week’s rankings and league tables of Business Schools and MBA programmes [http://www.businessweek.com/b-schools/02/full_time_rank.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/b-schools/02/full_time_rank.htm)
  5. General references to the Washington Post [http://www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

- **Additional Sources and References considered**
  1. Informal conversations with academic colleagues and Marketing Officers at Manchester Business School, to gain an informal list of competitive international Business Schools from the practitioner’s perspective.
  2. Informal conversations with MBA students at Manchester Business School, to gain an informal list of competitive and desirable International Business Schools from the customer’s perspective.
  3. References to both the Russell Group [http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk](http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk) and the 1994 Group [http://www.1994.group.ac.uk](http://www.1994.group.ac.uk) of research-led UK universities.
  4. References to both the Worldwide Universities Network (WUN) [http://www.wun.ac.uk](http://www.wun.ac.uk) and the Universitas 21 (U21) [http://www.universitas21.com](http://www.universitas21.com) global university strategic alliances.

- **Social Research Association (SRA) Guidelines and Accessibility considered**
  1. Listed existing and direct contact persons’ name, e-mail and phone numbers, with whom communications were initiated, in order to seek access approval.
  2. Compiled indirect contacts and recommendations via University of Manchester academic networks, in association with suitable cases.
  3. Held formal and informal discussions with fellow researchers to gain an in-depth understanding regarding SRA guidelines and their implications to the current study.
  4. Put together contingency plans to ensure the allocation of sufficient time and finance, in response to individual suitable cases.
  5. Held meetings with supervisors to explore tactics for case access, corresponding with lessons learned from the pilot study.

The case sample population was principally driven by ‘The Financial Times’ global MBA rankings. Cross-referencing of other sources was considered, to reflect the trend of HE marketisation and internationalisation in English-speaking as well as non-English speaking countries. Case accessibility and the Social Research Association’s (SRA’s) ethical guidelines (Anonymous, 2003d) were also drawn upon as supplemental procedures applied throughout this process.
### 3.4.3 Case Selection Process

Table 3.8 systematically illustrates the selection process, and highlighted the key criteria that are linked to sample population guidelines, literature reviews, along with measures used to narrow-down and streamline case choices. The final cases selected were distinctive representatives of IBSs underpinned by case validity and accessibility.

#### Table 3.8: Case Selection Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Population</th>
<th>Narrowing-Down</th>
<th>Streamlining Comparable Cases</th>
<th>Pilot Case (Accessibility)</th>
<th>Final Cases (Accessibility and Comparability)</th>
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<td>(Top 40 in the FT rankings between 2010 and 2012)</td>
<td>(Representative countries of HE Internationalisation / LR)</td>
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<td><strong>English Speaking Countries</strong> (including samples within from the USA, Australia and the UK)*</td>
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<td>Harvard Business School</td>
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<td>Stanford University: Graduate School of Business</td>
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<td>University of Chicago: Graduate School of Business</td>
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<td>Australian Graduate School of Management</td>
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<td>City University: Cass</td>
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<td><strong>Focus on IBSs from the UK:</strong></td>
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<td>12 Months MBA</td>
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<td>• Rotterdam School of Management (Holland)</td>
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<td>• CEIBS (China)</td>
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<td><strong>Focus on IBS from China:</strong></td>
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<td>12 - 16 months MBA</td>
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<td>• CUHK Business School (HK, China)</td>
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<td>18 months MBA</td>
<td>CEIBS (China)</td>
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* MBS (18 month duration, and from the UK education and business cultural background)

* WBS (18 month duration, and from the UK education and business cultural background)
At the beginning of the selection process, the sample population of IBSs was compiled, being derived from ‘The Financial Times’ global MBA rankings and by cross-referencing of other sources (as in Table 3.7). English-speaking as well as non-English speaking countries were included to reflect the trend of HE internationalisation (Chen and Zimitat, 2006; Wood et al., 2006; Anonymous, 2012a). The sample population predominantly included IBSs which were consistently ranked as one of the top 40 Global MBA providers in ‘The Financial Times’ league tables between 2010 and 2012, and consisted of not only leading international HE recruiters from the USA, UK and Australia, but also fast-growing competitors from Europe and China (Ibid.).

The literature review suggested that the UK and China are successful players in the international HE market, and are well-recognised representatives of being HE exporters and HE importers in English speaking and non-English speaking countries respectively (Mazzarol et al., 2003; Teichler, 2004; Johnstone et al., 2010; Maringe and Foskett, 2010; Ryan, 2011). As the current study took a primary interest in the strategic positioning in the global HE market of these two countries, the narrowing-down process of case selection was systematically limited to those IBSs based in the UK and China.

Following the compiling and narrowing-down processes, the suitable IBS cases were then streamlined on the basis of further consideration of data validity and knowledge contributions (Bradshaw, 2007). For example, both Cambridge and Oxford were excluded, because they have profound histories, with the development and funding structure of their business schools being very unique, in comparison to other elite ones in the UK (Davies and Thomas, 2009). Additionally, the selection of the China Europe International Business School (CEIBS) as the representative case for China, to a great extent determined the benchmark criteria being applied to finalise the UK-based case. In particular, the 18-month global MBA programme offered by CEIBS has strong implications in analysis of relationship interactions and development from a contextual time-space perspective. Other IBSs were not selected due to their incompatibility in terms of different MBA programme durations.
The suitable IBSs from the UK and China were put through a trial process of establishing initial contacts and engagement, as gaining accessibility to desirable cases hugely impacts on final case selection (Perry et al., 1999; Peters, 2007). Between April 2008 and February 2009, over the period of ten months, the researcher encountered challenges of case access. In particular, no responses were received from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) after several contacts had been made. The researcher was therefore advised to take a more focused approach, with efforts being channelled into securing both Manchester Business School (MBS) and CEIBS as the paired-up compatible cases between China and the UK. This decision was made in recognition of time constraints under the requirement of a doctoral award, as well as financial limitations of this research which was self-funded. As CUHK had to be abandoned for its unsuccessful access, as well as its similarity to the UK education system under the British colonial influence, it was subsequently decided to use Warwick Business School (WBS) as the pilot study.

These three IBS cases (i.e. WBS, CEIBS and MBS) served a different but important purpose, in their own right for the multiple holistic case studies undertaken by the current research (Stake, 2005). The pilot study at WBS contributed to the development of a clearly structured approach for identifying key interactive stages during a student’s experience with their associated IBS. Subsequently, this approach was implemented during the formal data collection process, as well as reflected in the formal data. Section 4.2 (in the next chapter) illustrates the pilot study of WBS and its contributions in detail.

3.4.4 Selection of Research Respondents

3.4.4.1 Justification of Existing MBA Students as Research Respondents

As students are the primary customers of HEIs (Kotler and Fox, 1985; Modell, 2005; Marginson, 2006; Smart and Banks, 2006), this research investigation focused on their perspective. Therefore, following the case selection criteria, i.e. focusing on IBSs offering globally-established MBA programmes, existing MBA students enrolled with the selected cases of MBS and CEIBS were chosen as research respondents.
The current research adopted the contextual time-space approach (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005) with the aim to uncover key events that occurred in the past; especially, processes and activities that had played an important role in how major relationships and networks had been constituted, managed, and most likely will be continued. The individual research respondents, i.e. existing MBA students, at the time of interviews possessed multiple temporal dimensions relating to themselves; in being a prospective student (of the past), a registered/existing student (of the present), and also a graduate or prospective alumni (in the near future). All of this illustrated a fuller picture of the complex and dynamic relationship interactions between MBA students and their IBSs.

It is acknowledged that other potential respondents from selected IBSs could be considered, due to the dyadic as well as dynamic nature of relationship interactions (Håkansson ed., 1982; Axelsson and Easton, 1992; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). These potential respondents could be MBA programme academics, as well as administrators from a variety of service areas, including marketing and recruitment, applications and admissions, career management, alumni and external relations; which all interact with existing MBA students. However, since limited existing research has been conducted and focused on the student perspective (Trowler, 2010), HEIs potentially may lack specific insights regarding the value of relationships perceived by their students, and as such could have made assumptions from hearsay or anecdotal examples (Coombs, 2004). Therefore, the empirical data obtained from students’ own words and opinions about relationship interactions and development within a HEI business network context can be extremely valuable, if not more valuable than views from HEI staff members relating to such interactions. In short, HEI management would potentially benefit more from the students’ insights. In addition, due to commercial sensitivities, it would be relatively easy to gain access to student respondents in comparison to obtaining access to IBS staff members.

In summary, on the basis of the above explanation and justification for the current research, it is the existing MBA students from the two selected IBSs, (i.e. MBS and CEIBS), whom are most suitable as the research respondents.
3.4.4.2 Sampling Method, Size and Procedures

Sampling decisions are principally determined by the feasibility of putting together the sample as a whole, as well as the suitability of generating relevant and in-depth information (Flick, 2006). The current study was initially set to adopt a random sampling strategy and apply it during the pilot study at WBS. Reflections and lessons drawn from the initial research study revealed the reasons behind the low participation rate, i.e. the accessibility and availability of research respondents. Subsequently, convenience sampling was applied to the existing MBA student population from both MBS and CEIBS during the process of research fieldwork.

Immediately after gaining access approval from the two chosen IBSs, a pre-drafted introduction letter to the MBA class (see Appendix B) explaining the current research was disseminated through e-mail to all existing full-time MBA students by the institutions’ Marketing and Admissions offices. Unfortunately, the response rate from this intervention strategy was extremely low. Research respondents who volunteered for the semi-structured interviews revealed that two main reasons had prevented potential MBA students from participating in this research: the lack of a face-to-face introduction being made to them, as well as the fact that potential respondents had busy MBA programme schedules. Collectively, established networks at the IBSs facilitated the solution to combat the challenge of low participation rate: that of using the endorsement of the MBA teaching staff to potentially help demystify likely concerns amongst MBA students, such as their reluctance to comment on the School’s service provision while being on the programme. A face-to-face introduction of the research project that took place through the facilitation of the academic staff at MBS and CEIBS helped make a personal connection between the researcher and potential research participants, and also provided an academic endorsement of the current research. This strategy was implemented through the researcher being given five minutes at the end of a class, at both MBS and CEIBS, to communicate a summary of the doctoral research project. This proved to be effective, as it assisted in terms of approaching MBA students on a one-to-one basis later in the university café, restaurant and during breaks from classes, in order
to secure individual interview appointments. The brief introduction in a classroom setting, through a professional lecturer, not only helped to break the ice, but also engendered trust between informants and the researcher, as MBA respondents recognised that they were contributing to the work of a fellow student.

It was anticipated that the implementation of random or convenience sampling strategies could potentially have suffered from high cancellation rates and multiple instances of interviewee appointment rescheduling. Snowballing techniques, such as recommending a fellow MBA student/friend to participate in this research, were thus adopted to ensure that sufficient numbers of MBA respondents were approached to yield relevant and in-depth information (Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Flick, 2006).

Convenience sampling strategy and snowballing methods are often associated with disadvantages, in that they might be biased by volunteers, as well as there being the potential risk that the sample might not represent the research population as a whole (Seale et al., 2004; Flick, 2006). As all MBA students had already over eight-months of study experience with their IBSs by the time data collection took place, this enabled research respondents to share their views about their own personal experiences of the IBSs’ services provision from a much more longitudinal perspective. The decision to interview student respondents who were nearly half-way through their MBA studies, instead of the ones who were freshly enrolled, enabled the participants to share sufficient examples of their relationship interaction episodes and to focus on their own experiences. The narratives from their own experiences potentially reduced the risk of hearsay and the level of bias. Additionally, the researcher was also persistent to ensure that the representativeness of the research respondents reflected the key barometers of the MBA cohorts, such as gender and nationalities, and that the overall participation rates were compatible between the two chosen IBSs. Overall, the current research was set to represent a minimum of 30% from the MBA student population at MBS and CEIBS respectively, in order to ensure that rich and relevant information was to be collected through the appropriate sample size. Details of the research respondents’ profiles at
CEIBS and MBS are presented in section 5.2 (pages 160 to 164) and section 6.2 (pages 211 to 213).

In summary, the above sampling principles, techniques and procedures were adopted during the data collection process. Prolonged engagement in the field for research collection, checking the audit trail, researcher reflexivity and peer debriefing were procedures adopted to assure data validity and credibility (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Relevant examples could be found in Table 3.9 (page 124).

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 A Qualitative Focus on the Cases

Whilst evidence for case studies can come from many sources (Yin, 2003) within the qualitative research arena, data in its most basic form consists of words, which are derived mainly from interviews, focus groups and documents (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994). It is worth remembering that one method of data collection is not inherently better than another (O’Leary, 2004). The selection of a data collection method would largely depend upon the research goals and (dis)advantages associated with each method.

This research investigation has selected the semi-structured interview as the main provider of evidence, with documentation as a second important source. The following sections explain the justification of adopting the semi-structured interview (i.e. an individual in-depth interview), its suitability and advantages over focus groups; and also illustrate the necessity and benefits of supplementary or secondary data, which has been collected from written documents and online sources, such as the internet.
3.5.2 Main Source of Data Collection – Semi-Structured Interviews

Qualitative interviews can be categorised in a variety of ways and cover a broad range of techniques (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Crabtree and Miller, 1999), which could be loosely differentiated as unstructured, semi-structured and structured (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

At the highly structured end of the spectrum, interviews consist of standard questions, in which all respondents are asked the same questions with the same wording and in the same sequence, with the intention of ensuring a uniformity of interview topics (Bryman, 2001; Corbetta, 2003; Dearnley, 2005; Seidman, 2006). Structured interviews are constrained by rigidity and lack of possibilities for probing, especially when respondents may not understand the question or have insufficient information to answer the question (Corbetta, 2003; Seidman, 2006). Nevertheless, the strengths of structured interviews are recognised for their comparative ease of analysis, coding and data comparison, as a result of their uniformity. At the other end of the spectrum, unstructured open interviews are more akin to a conversation than a structured and formal interview (Corbetta, 2003; Gray, 2004; Seidman, 2006). In contrast to using a detailed guide, unstructured interviews enable the researcher to have control over the topic and the format of the dialogue (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). The quality of the unstructured interview is essentially underpinned by the ability of informants to understand the research issues and narratives, and to compose answers themselves openly and frankly (Gudmundsdottir, 1996; Corbetta, 2003). A major strength of unstructured interviews is that no restrictions are placed on questions, with their flexibility enabling the researcher to investigate underlying motives. However, a drawback of unstructured interviews is that respondents may talk about irrelevant and insignificant issues. In addition, since each interview is different, it is potentially difficult to code and analyse the resultant data (Corbetta, 2003; Gray, 2004).

Distinct from structured and unstructured approaches, semi-structured interviews are non-standardised and are frequently used in qualitative analysis (Corbetta, 2003). Semi-
structured interviews usually consist of a set of predetermined open-ended questions, often in the form of a list of themes and issues to be covered (Corbetta, 2003; Gray, 2004). While conducting semi-structured interviews, the order of the questions can be changed depending on the direction of the interview, and potentially other questions emerging from the dialogue can be asked (Ibid.) Therefore, the strengths of semi-structured interviews are in the provision of guidance as well as flexibility for establishing a conversation, in order to explore, probe and ask questions with the focus on a particular predetermined subject (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990; Patton, 2001). Semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with the possibilities to prompt and probe deeper into the situation of a respondent for further explanation. It should be noted that for the researcher in this investigation, their first-hand experiences of being an international student and an International HE Marketing Officer prior to embarking on this doctoral study, provides relevant background knowledge and a familiarity of the HE services to effectively ask questions and probe into the personal experiences of MBA student respondents. Therefore, the selection of semi-structured interviews as the main data collection method is determined by the exploratory nature of the current investigation, as well as from an understanding of the advantages of this interview method compared with both structured and unstructured approaches.

3.5.2.1 Semi-Structured Individual Interviews vs Focus Groups

Often when selecting the method for primary data collection, with the aim of seeking complete responses and insightful understanding, interviews and focus groups are potentially more advantageous than surveys in providing in-depth information (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994). In addition, both interviews and focus groups are arguably the most appropriate method to resolve seemingly conflicting information, since the researcher has direct opportunities to seek further explanation from respondents regarding apparent contradictory issues (Ibid.)

In the context of the current investigation, the sensitivity of revealing personal experiences within the HE service, to a great extent, has discouraged the use of focus
groups, since it is anticipated that student respondents will feel more at ease in sharing their personal stories and views in a one-to-one trusted setting (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994). In addition, the student respondents who would participate in focus groups may not share the same emphasis, or may imply an emphasis that is misleading due to group dynamics. By and large, this can be linked to differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultural environments, which impact on mental programming of activities, motivations and values (Hofstede, 1991). It is possible that student respondents from CEIBS in China would tend to be more agreeable with other members in focus groups, while being more reluctant to frankly and openly voice personal opinions about their institutions in front of their peers, due to the collectivistic cultural influence (Ibid.) Therefore, focus groups are less appropriate in providing credible data for the current investigation. Furthermore, the selection of individual semi-structured interviews, instead of focus groups, as the primary data collection method is also determined by sensitivity of the research issues, preference of respondents, as well as awareness of cultural impacts.

3.5.2.2 Correlation between Initial Interview Questions and Theoretical Framework

During the pilot study a mixture of unstructured and semi-structured interviews were carried out informally and formally, and tested predominantly amongst MBA student respondents at Warwick Business School (WBS), in order to explore their appropriateness for primary data collection respectively. The initial questions are listed in Appendix C1, and correlation between the questions and key constructs of the theoretical framework summarised in Appendix C2.

The initial data collection process demonstrated that whilst research respondents were keen to share stories and views about their personal experiences regarding the WBS service, during unstructured open interviews large volumes of irrelevant and insignificant issues were also voiced, such as relationship interaction episodes of buying mobile phones, opening bank accounts, etc. In addition, it was evident that student respondents required the interviewer’s guidance and explanation to fully understand the research
issues. Only then could they sufficiently answer the core set of questions related to their own personal experiences, and elucidate relationship importance and the reasons behind it. For example, relationship interactions during the processes of application and admissions, as well as with career development services.

3.5.2.3 Reflections from the Pilot Study

On the basis of the above assessment, individual semi-structured interviews appeared to be more suitable and advantageous as the principle data collection method for the current investigation. However, the pilot study at WBS also served as an important test-run of data collection methods, and enabled the researcher to reflect on their appropriateness.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest that interviews in case study research are likely to be more fluid than rigid, as well as conversational rather than structured. Nevertheless, drawing from the valuable lessons learned during the pilot study at WBS, semi-structured interviews were found to be the most appropriate for aspects of the formal data collection in this investigation, due to the complex, sensitive and contemporary nature of the research phenomena (Gudmundsdottir, 1996; Mason, 1996; Yin, 2003; Seidman, 2006). In addition, during the pilot study, it was also evident that student respondents were reluctant about the idea of participating in focus group discussions, as a means to share personal views of their experiences with the WBS service provision.

The student respondents preferred and responded well to individual semi-structured interviews, which each lasted over 90 minutes and provided in-depth information. Furthermore, these interviewees also confirmed the practical difficulties for MBA students when participating in focus group discussions, due to their commitment to multiple group projects and course time constraints (Simpson et al., 2009; Blackburn, 2011). Instead, having an appointment for a one-to-one interview proved to be more realistic when attempting to arrange meetings with individual MBA student respondents.
To conclude, for this research, semi-structured interviews were adopted as the essential method for collecting case study evidence. As such, this provided important insights and interpretation of research phenomena through the eyes of individual existing interviewees. This was achieved by MBA students describing their first-hand experiences of relationship episodes; in terms of their relationships with IBSs, as well as their relationships with other stakeholders within the IBS business network context.

3.5.3 The Process of Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the selection of individual semi-structured interviews as the main source of evidence gathering for this research, five sets of key guidance were applied during the data collection process (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994), as indicated in Table 3.9.
### Table 3.9: Key Guidance Applied During the Data Collection Process

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<th>Key Guidance</th>
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| **The Terminology** | • During the course of individual semi-structured interviews, the researcher carefully guided student respondents when necessary, offering new perspectives in order to help them develop a narrative (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Cunliffe, 2008). For example, key questions of the interview were linked with the adapted theoretical framework, noting what actors are involved through the perception of the student as focal-actor, and what the associated activities are.  
• The terminology understood here proved to be difficult for student respondents to grasp during the pilot study. However, when explanations were given, they were then able to quickly link the interview questions to their own experiences of relationship interactions. Respondents replaced or interchanged this terminology during the interview process into other phrases, which were easier and closer to their own words and understanding. For example, the term actors was replaced by other party (parties), and activities was interchanged with events, while focal actor was rephrased for a student perspective.  
• This enabled the researcher to refine explanations of such terminology during the formal data collection, so that student respondents from CEIBS and MBS could clearly and quickly understand. |
| **Interview Duration** | • As research respondents, MBA students are experienced and mature business professionals, who are generally under pressure from the intense schedule of their study programme, and as a result are extremely constrained by their availability of time (Simpson et al., 2009; Blackburn, 2011).  
• In knowing that 90-minute semi-structured interviews would be perceived by respondents as challenging and time-consuming, the researcher drew from her professional knowledge and direct experience in the international education markets of the UK and China, to entice interviewees with free information regarding relevant differences between the British and Chinese education systems.  
• Interviewees were generally interested in the research subjects, and extra information shared with them proved effective in helping MBA respondents devote the required time for interviews. As a result, by gaining the commitment of respondents, the interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes.  
• An informal relationship was established through providing a briefing of the research study, which was circulated prior to the meeting. This proved beneficial in putting interviewees at ease, in clarifying their understanding about the investigation, and helped them to reveal their thoughts and opinions. |

90 minutes are generally considered to be the optimal duration for a detailed research interview (Jarrett, 1995). Those lasting less than one hour do not usually enable informants to explain their story fully, to place it in the appropriate context and reflect upon its significance (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Interviews lasting two hours or more were noted as taking too long for most interviewees (Gil et al., 2008).
**Organisational Structure**

- Stewart and Shamdasani’s (1990) suggestions were applied in designing the protocol for the semi-structured interviews.
- To build rapport, inverted-funnel types of questions were included in the interview guide, and the researcher asked interviewees about their academic and professional background in relation to their MBA programme. For the majority of informants, this was sufficient for them to engage in dialogue and develop the subject, while only a small number of interviewees needed help of guiding questions. The style adopted for this study mirrored Patton’s (1990) suggestions for qualitative interviews, employing a flexible outline of topics and questions.
- During each interview, theoretical questions were carefully explained, to open up discussion topics, and to facilitate an understanding of research narratives (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Cunliffe, 2008). A large part of the interview was set aside as ‘time for detailed questions’, i.e. the list of core questions applied to each interview, with the aim of engaging deeper discussions on subjects that were brought up through illustration of a respondent’s personal experiences, or through their understanding regarding the research phenomenon (Gudmundsdottir, 1996).

**Ethical Guidance and Confidentiality**

- Interviewees were asked to provide the interviewer with permission to record their conversations at the beginning of each session (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994).
- During the research, all respondents were assured that the interviews would remain confidential (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Once the data was coded, any connections back to individual participants would not be traceable (Ibid.).
- Additionally, although meetings were conducted with individual respondents, concept generalisation for the current investigation relied on the views of the entire MBA student community interviewed, which formed the central focus of this research study. Hence, the identification of an individual participant was not paramount (Glaser, 1992).

**Prolonged Engagement and Collaboration**

- Feierman (1989) suggested that working with informants for long periods gives the research validity.
- Creswell and Miller (2000) showed that building trust with participants through disclosing information, offers credible accounts.
- Although it was recognised that data collection can often be a difficult process (Corbetta, 2003; Gray, 2004; Seidman, 2006), this extensive interviewing in two continents proved to be necessary as well as rewarding. Such benefits were also considerable, given the advantages of a face-to-face semi-structured approach over telephone interviews, and following the challenges that were encountered during IBS case selection, and in implementing valuable lessons from the pilot study at WBS.

Being on the campuses of both UEIBS and MBS also enabled the researcher to emerge herself into the phenomena under investigation, as well as to connect elements of the adopted theoretical framework to such phenomenon especially during the process of data analysis. This also proved to be the best way to find ‘gatekeepers’ to allow access and build trust with research respondents.
|   | The researcher speaks both English and Chinese, with Chinese Mandarin being the mother tongue. When conducting interviewing at CEIBS, respondents from mainland China shared the same native language with the researcher, and preferred to use Chinese Mandarin to express their views, opinions and feelings more precisely. Chinese informants perceived their English language abilities as slightly imperfect, and declared that English could potentially hinder them providing detailed information and expressing their views in-depth. Hence, Chinese Mandarin was naturally used to conduct interviews with the 18 Chinese respondents at CEIBS.
|   | This language transition demonstrated significant value in understanding and unveiling what was really happening at CEIBS, and greatly contributed to the interpretation of case content and context. These 18 interviews were transcribed in simplified Chinese, and key paragraphs were then translated into English by the researcher during data analysis. |
To conclude, the individual and face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted by adhering to rigorous guidance and protocols, in order to enhance the overall research validity and reliability of the current study (Seale, 1999; Golafshani, 2003; Yin, 2003).

3.5.4 Other Sources of Data Collection – Documents and the Internet

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, secondary and supplementary sources of data for this research were provided by documents and associated internet sources (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Brannen, 2005a, 2005b). For the current investigation, documents, inclusive of key sets of information from both CEIBS and MBS, were collected.

Such documents not only helped in gaining a background understanding of specific cases, i.e. the context of CEIBS and MBS, but also in guiding the researcher through semi-structured interviews to raise deeper questions, to be more inquisitive about causal powers, and to seek answers in terms of the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ behind phenomena (Carson et al., 2001; Yin, 2003).

This was especially important in the formation of questions and probes, which compelled the researcher to clarify and prioritise information required from the first interview that was conducted, through to the very last interview (Corbetta, 2003; Gray, 2004). For example, both CEIBS and MBS placed strong emphasis on their outstanding academic staff profiles, as well as the track-record of each of their career development services for MBA students. Thus, the semi-structured interview guide included questions relating to student respondent views of their relationship interactions with academic staff and the careers service.

Given the dyadic and dynamic nature of business relationships, documents gathered from CEIBS and MBS provided an understanding of relationship interactions and network installations from the perspective of the service providers (i.e. CEIBS and MBS respectively). This was especially the case with internal memos that set the business
environment of the global HE service sector and markets more broadly. Despite the current research being predominately focused on the viewpoints of students, as a means of unveiling key relationship interactions within the context of the HE business network, the documents that were collected provided supplementary information that enhanced understanding and uncovered potential gaps for future research.

A wide range of documents were gathered, from a variety of sources (Yin, 2003; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Brannen, 2005a, 2005b). For example, institutional documents and those specific to the HE sector provided an overview from a macro perspective of the business environment, whilst internal memos and meeting minutes from CEIBS and MBS offered insights into the micro perspective of their business planning and operations respectively. In addition, documents relating to the career development services at both CEIBS and MBS provided a checklist of organised activities, and importantly identified other stakeholders, such as alumni and MNCs, which were deemed worthy to explore during semi-structured interviews with students, in order to further clarify their importance and influencing factors. Furthermore, in conjunction with individual semi-structured interviews, the researcher treated all documents collected with caution, taking care that interpretation was judicious, having the understanding and recognition that materials were written at a specific time, within a specific context, for a specific purpose, by a specific person(s), for a specific audience (Yin, 2003). The researcher was mindful of potential drawbacks of gathered documents, and as a consequence applied caution in their use.

In summary, gathered documents and the internet were deemed to be important supplementary sources of data collection for the current research. They proved to be valuable aids for understanding relationship interactions/management within the international HE business network context, as well as the individual case context. They also helped to reveal environmental, cultural and other conditions linked to an individual case, which potentially impacted on relationship interactions. Furthermore, documents provided an overview of the multiple layers of interactions operating within each selected case. They also helped in raising questions tactfully with informants, for verification,
during the process of semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the multiple data collection methods adopted, i.e. semi-structured interviews and gathered documents, arguably enhanced overall research validity and reliability of the current study (Seale, 1999; Golafshani, 2003; Yin 2003).

3.5.5 The Process of Gathering Documents

Due to the importance of documents as explained above, i.e. in being supplementary data for the current investigation, the researcher aimed to collect a broad range of materials, through formal desk research, as well as by using established personal contacts within the HE sector. For example, the researcher gained access to a wide variety of institutional and HE specific documentation that was in the public domain, through websites and published promotional materials. Additionally, a significant amount of time and effort was invested in gaining access to summary reports and meeting minutes, deemed critical to building an understanding of the rationale of relationship interactions within particular CEIBS and MBS operational contexts. Furthermore, face-to-face meetings with key personal contacts also enabled accessibility to specific confidential and commercially-sensitive information of both institutions. The majority of documents obtained through desk-research were stored in electronic format for easy access and retrieval (Brannen, 2005a, 2005b). Hard copies or executive summary pages of certain commercially-sensitive materials were obtained. In addition, summary notes were taken during the meetings to capture their essence. The process of gathering documents and note-taking enabled the researcher to think reflectively (Brannen, 2005a, 2005b), and then to implement additional questions in designing semi-structured interview guides, as well as in conducting the interviews. Tables 3.10a and 3.10b summarised the list of documents gathered from CEIBS and MBS respectively.
Table 3.10a: Documents Gathered for the CEIBS Case Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents Gathered from CEIBS</th>
<th>Predominantly between January and March 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) International Students Recruitment Marketing Plan 2009/10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) List of overseas exchange partner universities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) List of MNC vacancies for 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Flyers of workshops taking place in March 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Hard copies of Information Packs of MBA programme information: (<a href="http://www.ceibs.edu/pdf/mba/mba_brochure.pdf">http://www.ceibs.edu/pdf/mba/mba_brochure.pdf</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Report: Managing online applicant communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Scholarship allocation guidelines for 2010/2011 intake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Beyond Classrooms document for IB5: (<a href="http://www.ceibs.edu/pdf/mba/classroom.pdf">http://www.ceibs.edu/pdf/mba/classroom.pdf</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) CEIBS Careers Service publication: (<a href="http://www.ceibs.edu/mba-yourcareerrecruiters/index.shtml">http://www.ceibs.edu/mba-yourcareerrecruiters/index.shtml</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) Chase Dreams at CEIBS promotional: (<a href="http://www.ceibs.edu/download/99-63930.shtml">http://www.ceibs.edu/download/99-63930.shtml</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.10b: Documents Gathered for the MBS Case Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documentation Gathered from MBS</th>
<th>Predominantly between November 2009 and November 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Internal Summary Reports: Attracting International Excellence - Indian and Chinese Employment Fairs 2009 (by Careers Service)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) List of overseas exchange partner universities for 2010 intake from MBA Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) MNCs with internships and global projects, from MBA office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) MBS Careers Service Advantages document: (<a href="http://www.mbs.ac.uk/programmes/mba/transform-your-career/global-career-service/">http://www.mbs.ac.uk/programmes/mba/transform-your-career/global-career-service/</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Profiles of Vital Topic guest speakers / key MBA workshops 2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Hard copies of Information Packs of MBA programme information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Meeting Minutes of the UoM Recruitment Task Group Review of International PGT recruitment 2009 /2010 intake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) MBS Full-Time MBA Admissions Strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Strategic documentation: Advancing Manchester 2015: (<a href="http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display/DocId=11015">http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display/DocId=11015</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) MBA Blogs: (<a href="http://mbalblogs.mbs.ac.uk/">http://mbalblogs.mbs.ac.uk/</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Website of Transferring Management: Original Thinking Applied: (<a href="http://tm.mbs.ac.uk/Home.aspx">http://tm.mbs.ac.uk/Home.aspx</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) Profile of Vital Topic guest speakers / key MBA workshops 2012/13 - gathered in 2013*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5.6 Note-Taking and Interview Transcriptions

Further to the five sets of key guidance applied during the data collection process, note-taking of key issues during interviews helped in understanding the research area (Corbetta, 2003; Gray, 2004). For example, while semi-structured interviews were being recorded with permission given by student respondents, the researcher also wrote down key issues that had been revealed during each interview. This approach helped in unpacking key issues and gaining insightful understanding. Improvement of interview questions and guidance before and after the WBS pilot study is evident, as illustrated in Appendix C1 and Appendix D. Furthermore, interview notes were organised according to the logic of the analysis results, or the logic of the message (Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

3.5.7 Data Validity and Credibility

There is a general consensus in qualitative inquiries that the researcher needs to demonstrate data validity and credibility through procedures including trustworthiness and authenticity (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Disconfirming evidence, prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation, member checking, the audit trail, researcher reflexivity, collaboration, and peer debriefing were the validity procedures suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000) within qualitative research.

For the current study, the research adopted some of the recommended procedures. Relevant examples can be found in Section 3.4.2, Section 3.5.3 and Section 4.3, which start from the compilation of the case sample population, to design of the semi-structured interview protocol, through to the presentation of the comprehensive narrative interpretation of the MBS and CEIBS cases studies, so as to assure the overall research quality of the current study.
Chapter 4  Data Analysis

4.0  Method of Data Analysis and the Pilot Study

This chapter explains the choice of template analysis (King, 1998, 2004), and its advantages in comparison to content analysis (Berelson, 1952; de Sola Pool, 1959). Three key steps of the coding process are demonstrated systematically, with the illustration of core codes linked to the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982) and emergent codes derived from the empirical data. It is followed by the explanation of how codes and themes formulate template development.

Data analysis of the pilot study at Warwick Business School (WBS) was a test-run of research methods adopted herein. The themes and the initial template derived from this initial study also proved to be critically important for gaining the practical understanding of time / space in the context of student’s experience with WBS. It enabled the researcher to categorise the processual experience with the IBS into key interactive stages.

The end of the chapter explains the guidelines followed, and measures that were implemented during the research process, to ensure the overall research quality of the current study.

4.1  Method of Data Analysis

4.1.1  The Template Analysis

The choices of the constructivist epistemological stance, as well as the qualitative-based case study research method, in principle determined template analysis to be the means adopted for data examination and interpretation of this investigation (King, 1998, 2004). This analytical approach was applied to textual data collected through semi-structured
interviews (i.e. interview transcripts), as well as from gathered documents (i.e. websites, internal meeting minutes, memos, etc).

Template analysis was developed by King (1998), and has been widely established in healthcare research studies (Sandelowski, 2000; Riley and Hawe, 2005). The term ‘template analysis’ (King, 1998) or ‘template method’ (Crabtree and Miller, 1999), refers to a particular way of thematically analysing qualitative data, which are usually interview transcripts or any kind of textual data. King (1998) explains that ‘Themes’ are features of participants’ accounts characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences that the researcher sees as relevant to the research question; and ‘Coding’ is the process of identifying themes in accounts and attaching labels (codes) to index them.

Template analysis involves the development of a coding ‘template’, which summarises themes identified in the empirical data through careful reading and re-reading of the text. Such themes are organised in a meaningful and useful manner due to their importance in a data set (King 1998, 2004). In addition, because of an increasing desire to develop greater depth of understanding in business research (Yanamandram and White, 2006; Waring and Wainwright, 2008; Burton and Khammash, 2010), as well as the growing acceptance of utilising qualitative interpretive approaches (Nadin and Cassell, 2006), template analysis is generally growing in popular use.

In comparison to content analysis (Berelson, 1952; de Sola Pool, 1959) and interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, 2004), template analysis can be viewed as a combined top-down and bottom-up approach. It provides an initial analytical structure (King, 1998); simultaneously, offering the flexibility to alter the template as more key themes are derived from the empirical data coding and analysis process (King, 2004). It is also well-suited to the exploratory nature of the current study, as it allows students’ words and perceptions about their relationships with HEIs, and with other HEI stakeholders, to formulate key patterns and tell the stories themselves.
In addition, distinct from certain forms of phenomenological analysis (e.g. Hycner, 1985), template analysis enables a prior number of themes directly relevant to the research objective to be identified through a literature review (King et al., 2002). For this research, the literature review provided a number of prior themes and key codes for the template formulation. Then as the data were analysed, emergent codes were added to the template, resulting in a revised template as output.

It should be noted that template analysis focuses on richness of textual data and in-depth understanding, rather than on numerical comparison (King, 2004). The richness of data generated from semi-structured interviews in this investigation comes from the 29 interviews with MBS respondents and the 33 interviews with CEIBS respondents. The sample size was deemed sufficient, as King (2004) suggests that between 20 and 30 interviews are common for research studies.

4.1.2 Core Codes and Emergent Codes

Table 4.1 provides examples of core codes and emergent codes. The coding process enabled the researcher to assess the meaningfulness of each code, regardless of whether they were prior or emergent in nature. The core codes were linked directly to prior themes that had been principally characterised, and corresponded with key issues identified in the literature review. It also gave due recognition to important emergent codes in relation to new themes that arose from the empirical data.
Table 4.1: Examples of Core Codes and Emergent Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No.</th>
<th>Core Code Names</th>
<th>Developed from the Literature Review and from Relative Theoretical Models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>Actor(s)</td>
<td>Key constructs of the Interaction Approach (Håkansson, 1982) and of the Industrial Network Approach (Axelsson and Easton, 1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>Activity Links</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>Resource Links</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>Atmosphere / Actor Bond</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>Relationship / Interactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>Network(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>008</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>e.g. Leavitt, 1980; Mills et al., 1983; Kotler and Fox, 1985; Conway et al., 1994; Armstrong, 1995; Hill, 1995; Guolla, 1999; Swanson and Davis, 2000; Emery et al., 2001; Modell, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009</td>
<td>Other HE Stakeholders</td>
<td>e.g. Kotler and Fox, 1985; Bogler and Somech, 2002; Modell, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>010</td>
<td>WOM / EOM</td>
<td>e.g. Gelb and Sundaram, 2002; Hemmings-Thurau and Walsh, 2003; Naidoo and Wu, 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Core Code Names</th>
<th>Developed from the Interview Transcriptions / the Student Experience Map</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>011 Enquiries Stage</td>
<td>These new emergent codes developed from the pilot study at WBS, taking cognisance of a paucity of existing key literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>012 Applications and Acceptance Stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>013 Registration and Orientation Stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>014 Studying and Living Experience Stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>015 Careers Development Service Stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>016 Graduation / Alumni Stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>017 Values of Relationships Perceived</td>
<td>This core code developed from pilot study, and consistently appeared in MBS and CEIBS case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>018 Technology</td>
<td>This core code developed from CEIBS and MBS case studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, the Careers Service was an emergent code created to reflect its relationship and network importance from the standpoint of MBA students interviewed during the WBS pilot study. Prior codes which were less relevant to the current study were also discarded during the data analysis process. For instance, Local Community, General Public and Mass Media were prior sub-codes that were noted under the core code ‘Other HE Stakeholders’ (Kotler and Fox, 1985) (see Core Code 009, in Table 4.1). However, as the coding progressed, these sub-codes became less important. As a result, for the purposes of this investigation, these three sub-codes were initially listed but then
eliminated during the template analysis, as they demonstrated to have little relevance to
the themes and research objectives (King, 1998).

4.1.3 The Coding Process

The coding process involved three key steps, including: 1) line-by-line reading and
coding; 2) reducing phrases, clustering and creating codes; and 3) creating linkages
between codes and themes. These are illustrated in subsequent schematics, as Figure 4.1,
Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3 respectively.

Line-by-line reading of the collected data initiated the process of template analysis. This
was the first step for engaging and interpreting data. The process involved highlighting
meaningful words and phrases, that were then tagged with established codes or sub-
codes. Additionally, King (1998, 2004) suggested that this repetitive reading and re-
reading process enables the researcher to be very familiar with data, in order to develop
emergent codes and to be able to create linkages between codes and themes. Figure 4.1
illustrates the line-by-line reading and process of highlighting.

![Figure 4.1: Coding through Line-by-Line Reading](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1: Example of Data Sets with Line-by-Line Reading and Highlighting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Manchester Business School I know it very well and I have quite good friends over here. So I know it’s a really good school. I kind of know the programme very intimately.” (For example, tagged with Code 001 (Actors), and sub Code 001 Friend, as well as Code 004 (Atmosphere) and Code 005 (Environment))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The most important one was career opportunities. Second was good teaching and interesting classmates that I can learn from. It’s all about group work that helps to build hard as well as soft skills.” (For example, tagged with Code 001 (Actors), and sub Code 001 classmate, Code 015 (Career Development Service Stage), Code 014 (Studying and Living Stage), with sub Code 014 Group Work, and Code 006 (Relationship), with sub Code 006 Amongst Students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“MBS net is really good. I felt like I know some people personally because they just kept posting so much, so it was like “Oh, you’re that guy!” Everybody seems to know you, you know? Because everybody had reached everyone else. So “Ooh, you are tall.” “That’s Daniel, let’s be friendly with him.” (For example, tagged with Code 004 (Atmosphere / Actor Bond), Code 006 (Relationship), with sub Code 006 Amongst Students, and Code 018 (Technology), with sub Code (MBS Net)).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following King’s (1998, 2004) suggestion, the second step involved the reduction of phrases and clustering sentences or paragraphs in some cases, in order to tag existing codes as well as developing new codes. Figure 4.2 illustrates the phrase reduction, clustering and code creation process.

Figure 4.2: Reducing Phrases, Clustering and Creating Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Reduced Phrases</th>
<th>Clustering</th>
<th>Codes and Sub Codes (Key Elements of Interaction Approach)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In general, the requirements are pretty much the same. I would not be surprised if CEIBS has kind of looked over the shoulder of the better Schools in the US and copied the requirement.</td>
<td>Code: Activities / Interaction Episodes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And like anything else in China, that is the fact that people are in general very willing to do their best. It is often the system, the managers of that system, who are at fault. It’s not the employees.</td>
<td>Code: Environment; with sub-code: Internationalisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My impression was more of you just do it yourself; you fix it yourself; and if you can’t fix it yourself, it’s really not our problem.</td>
<td>Code: Environment; with sub-code: dynamics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Code: Actor; with sub-code: organisational structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Code: Actor Bonds / Atmosphere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third step of template analysis was to identify and create linkages between codes and themes, as illustrated in Figure 4.3. These were the mechanics of formulating the initial template, and in enabling development of the final template. From a constructivist viewpoint, the linkages between codes and themes were causal powers, which enabled the researcher to understand the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of questions. This also allowed reliable interpretations of key issues, and helped deepen the understanding of research findings.
4.1.4 The Process of Template Development

When it comes to the identification and justifications of prior themes, these are influenced by two sets of guidance. Firstly, King (1998) suggested that prior themes arise from a researcher’s engagement with textual data, as he or she attempts to address a particular research question. King (1998) also emphasised that when deciding whether and how to define themes, a researcher needs to consistently ask whether coding the text in this way is likely to help build their understanding of the data. Secondly, using a prior theme can be influenced by the importance of certain issues being researched, and if these are so well-established, one can then rightly expect them to arise in the data (King, 1998; King et al., 2002).
The creation of the initial template, as illustrated later in Section 4.2.5 and in Figure 4.7, is an outcome of the WBS pilot study, as well as a comprehension of literature relating to relationship interactions. It covered the main thematic areas that emerged from a preliminary analysis (King, 1998, 2004; King et al., 2002). Authenticity and representativeness of the initial template was achieved through organising and re-organising core themes and sub-themes that were derived from interview transcriptions. Any fine distinctions, at fourth, fifth or even lower levels of the coding hierarchy, were not of concern at the initial template formulation stage (Ibid.), with a recognition of complex and dynamic relationships within the HE business network (Kotler and Fox, 1985).

The template, as illustrated in Figure 4.7, is as a result of further expansion of the original template that was developed during the case studies. It was linked back to the research questions, to ensure that the usefulness of codes and the meaningfulness of themes were assessed by corresponding directly with the research objectives (King, 1998, 2004). The template consisted of key themes applicable for both the CEIBS and MBS case studies, providing a framework for case comparisons. Rigorous iterative processes for amending and refining themes were carried out. Critical advice was obtained from supervisors and academic colleagues who were experienced in the business management research field, to improve the overall research validity and reflexivity (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

4.1.5 Writing-Up: Descriptive Interpretation

The formulations of both initial templates and final template were a powerful reflective process, which enabled the identification of lists of themes, and a means of prioritising them with openness (King, 1998). Given the exploratory nature of the current study, the researcher could have been hindered in all the individual themes, and found it difficult to see the bigger picture. The initial template (i.e. Figure 4.7, and Appendix E), and the final template (i.e. Appendix F) however, assisted the researcher through the data interpretation and writing-up process, and enabled the thematic presentation of findings.
Strauss and Corbin (1994) suggested three approaches in relation to writing qualitative research reports, these being the documentary approach, the descriptive approach, and the theoretical approach. As this research aims to explore the phenomena of relationship interactions from a constructivist epistemological stance, it is a sense-making process, by focusing on responsive dialogue and conversations between people (Shotter, 1993; Cunliffe, 2002). Therefore, the writing-up needs to convey the interviewees’ own language at centre stage, with the researcher’s own understanding and interpretation of key categories and themes stemming from the empirical data. For this study, the descriptive approach was adopted, as it shares the same essences of “rich description”, which present the storyline created during the focused analysis (Geertz, 1973). King (1998, 2004) highlighted the pros and cons of three recommended approaches when writing-up research studies based on template analysis; as illustrated in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Pros / Cons in Writing-Up Using Template Analysis**

– adapted from King (2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three Broad Approaches</th>
<th>Pros and Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Focus on individual case studies, followed by a discussion of differences and similarities between cases | **Pros**: Gives the reader a good grasp of the perspective of individual participants. Ensures that the discussion of themes does not become too abstracted from participants’ accounts of their experiences.  
**Cons**: Tends to take up a considerable amount of space, so can be difficult to use where word limits are tight. The reader can get bogged down in all the individual detail, and find it hard to see the wider picture. |
| An account structured around the main themes that had been identified, drawing illustrative examples from each transcript as required | **Pros**: A good way to produce a clear and succinct overview of the most salient findings for the thematic analysis. Useful when word limits are tight.  
**Cons**: Can encourage over generalisation. Can lose sight of the individual experiences from which the themes are drawn. |
| A thematic presentation of the findings, with a small number of full case studies to illustrate key themes | **Pros**: A useful synthesis of the previous two approaches.  
**Cons**: Can be hard to decide on criteria upon which to base a selection of cases. |
Given the exploratory nature of these case studies, the first recommended approach of King (1998) was deemed to be the most appropriate, since the investigation involves two International Business Schools. Each case gives the audience an in-depth understanding of the perspective of MBA student relationship experiences collectively as one respondent group, within the specific context of their institution.

In summary, this research seeks to interweave theories, quotes and the researcher’s own interpretations, in order to enrich the descriptive narrative of the investigation; through individual case studies, as well as by case comparisons. Both empirical and theoretical objectives of this investigation can be achieved, by generating comprehensive pictures of an HEI’s relationships, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the complex nature of the HE service.

4.2 The Pilot Study at Warwick Business School (WBS)

4.2.1 Background of WBS

Warwick Business School (WBS) is a university-based Business School situated in the heart of England, having a green-field campus environment. The 2012 ‘Financial Times’ Global Full-Time MBA Programme league table placed WBS 27th in the world, 9th in Europe, and 4th in the UK (Anonymous, 2012f). WBS has a strong reputation in finance and business research. Its provision of a twelve-month full-time MBA programme attracts students from 18 different nationalities, with an average age of 30 years old, and an average of 6 years of managerial work experience (Anonymous, 2012g). Documents collected revealed that WBS places a strong emphasis on one of its unique selling points, the Practice of Management. This enables MBA students to act as a consultant to a real organisation, thereby facilitating graduates to progress quickly in their career development. Promotional information on the WBS website confirmed that it also offers international exchange opportunities, as well as internships as an extension of the twelve-month MBA programme. The aim here is to enable graduates to experiment with new
business sectors, new environments or a new country to enhance their work experience (Anonymous, 2012h).

4.2.2 Data Collection Process and Lessons Learned

The process of undertaking the pilot study served as a test-run for the fieldwork, enabling techniques to be refined and implemented during the remainder of the data collection. The pilot study at WBS proved to be very informative and invaluable. It provided not only a reality check of case accessibility, but also helped the researcher to seek possible solutions, tackle problems, and minimise risks in advance of conducting the formal field research (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003; Peters, 2007).

The pilot study process started with the researcher making extensive contacts with WBS, drawing on established networks through their recruitment office and academic communities. Three onsite visits and meetings were held during November 2009 and March 2010, with its Senior Marketing Officers and Programme Director, to gain approval for carrying out the research on campus. The researcher temporarily lodged within walking distance of WBS campus from 15th to 27th April 2010 for data collection, and adopted a snowballing technique to identify MBA student respondents (Cassell and Symon, 2004). As a result, four interviews were conducted with MBA students, including one unstructured interview lasting about 20 minutes, and three individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews lasting between 45 and 60 minutes each. In addition, informal conversations took place lasting around 10 minutes each, with two WBS academics, one Marketing Officer, and one Careers Service Officer, while the researcher was onsite at WBS campus.

The data collection process was a real struggle on many fronts; nevertheless, valuable lessons were drawn from the pilot study. For example, seven interview meetings with MBA students were scheduled, but five of these were then subsequently cancelled and rescheduled by the interviewees. This experience of cancellations, postponements and rearrangements of interview appointments by MBA student respondents enabled the
researcher to reflect on the appropriate time and locations to conduct interviews (Corbetta, 2003; Gray, 2004). It was evident that an individual face-to-face approach was necessary, instead of being desirable. In addition, it was critically important to conduct interviews almost immediately, or within 24 hours, after initial introductions had taken place, as this proved to be an effective solution to the problem of low participation rates. The availability of the researcher at the campus premises provided flexibility to suit the busy lifestyles of MBA student respondents, which enhanced not only the interview participation rate, but also the overall interview quality. Consequently, student respondents gained prime control regarding when, where and how the interviews took place. This settled the interviewees and put them at ease at the start of their interviews, encouraging them to be more open and frank with their thoughts and opinions of the research issues. More importantly, the reality check of gaining access to WBS and their MBA students urged the researcher to take a more realistic approach to the target number of interviews and overall participation rate. This enabled the researcher to focus on getting sufficient depth and detailed data from a smaller pool of potential interviewees.

The pilot study process was successful in designing and refining the semi-structured interview protocols, as well as improving the researcher’s skills in asking prompt questions and of probing for further explanations (Corbetta, 2003; Gray, 2004; Brannen, 2005a, 2005b). The refining exercise that started during the pilot study was then implemented during the rest of the data collection. This process consequently encouraged a fluidity of conversations (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), and enabled respondents to reveal their own views and reflections (Miles and Huberman, 1994) of personal experiences beyond simple descriptions of relationship episodes.

The pilot study at WBS assisted in developing a critical appraisal of the process of data collection, prior to undertaking the main research investigation. It also ensured that a holistic approach was taken regarding issues associated with the practicalities and techniques of using semi-structured interviews as the main source of evidence gathering (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln and Guba, 2000), and consequently assured research rigour (Bell and Bryman, 2007).
4.2.3 Data Analysis Process

The analysis of the pilot study data was invaluable. It enabled the researcher to gain further understanding of the template analysis method, particularly regarding relevant terminology, such as ‘coding’, ‘themes’ and ‘template’ (Ibid.) In addition, the hands-on experience of attaching codes, identifying linkages, characterising themes and developing templates (King, 1998, 2004), served as an essential test, by systematically analysing the relatively small amounts of data involved. This process equipped the researcher with essential skills and a list of core codes, sub-codes and prior themes, and effectively contributed to the formulation of the initial template (see Figure 4.7). Last but not least, the data collected from a range of WBS respondents provided a tangible and enhanced understanding of the complex and dynamic relationships that exist within the HE service, beyond the initial comprehension that was gained from the literature.

4.2.3.1 The Codes and Coding Process

The data coding process reinforced the linkages between the core codes and sub-codes adopted from the literature review, as well as compiled new codes derived from empirical data. Table 4.3 illustrates these linkages.
### Table 4.3: Examples of Actor(s) as Core Codes and Linkages with Sub-Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Codes</th>
<th>Sub-Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Constructs</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Interaction Approach (e.g., Håkansson, 1982) | 16 public stakeholders (Kotler and Fox, 1985) | 1) Interviews with 4 MBA students  
2) Informal conversation with 2 academics  
3) Informal conversation with 1 marketing officer and 1 careers service officer |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor(s)</th>
<th>Modification of Sub-Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Alumni</td>
<td>Remained as Alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Parents of students</td>
<td>Were modified to Family and Friends, as referred to by interviewees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Current students</td>
<td>Were defined more precisely as current students from the same MBA cohort, instead of current student studying in the same school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Faculty staff</td>
<td>Were defined more precisely as Professors/Lecturers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Administrative Staff</td>
<td>Were defined more broadly as General Administration Service Staff, working in areas of accommodation, library, sports, on-campus catering, etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.2.3.2 Derived Themes

The other significant contribution of the pilot study at WBS was the derivation of key themes. This subsequently enabled the formulation of an initial template, and captured the key components and their linkages regarding the complex and dynamic relationships existing within the HE service.

During the pilot study, multiple strands of relationship interactions were revealed by MBA student respondents, WBS academics and administrators. As such many themes were derived from the interview transcripts and from summary notes, resulting in the researcher having to go backwards and forwards to cross-check against empirical data interpretations, key theories and literature (Strauss and Corbin, 1994; Glaser, 1992). Table 4.4 provides the summary of these key themes and their interpretation, with supporting evidence from interviews and documents from the WBS website.
Table 4.4: Summary of Themes Derived from the Pilot Study at WBS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Themes Derived</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Empirical Data / Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **B2C Relationship between WBS and Students**          | • At the early stage, relationship-building is predominantly established between the MBA Marketing and Admissions Office and individual students, unless the individual student wants to contact other parties (including existing students, academic staff or alumni). | • “We aim to build positive relationships and WOM with students from first point of contact” – Marketing Officer  
• WBS MBA USPs and admissions procedures: (http://www.wbs.ac.uk/students/mba/ft)                                                                                                                                 |
| **Multiple Relationships and Network Approaches**      | • Once an offer-holder confirms acceptance, then relationship interactions between WBS and students become dynamic, i.e. students interact with a broad range of actors/parties,  
• These relationship interactions include students and professors, students and administrators, students and students, as well as students and alumni. | • “After registration, we are programmed to network with everyone. Professors, MBA office administrators, career advisers, alumni mentors, etc” – MBA student  
• “Designed to develop your skills in managing yourself, other people, groups...” (http://www.wbs.ac.uk/students/mba/ft/pom.cfm)                                                                 |
| **Dual Role of Students**                              | • It was clearly identified and confirmed that students are both customers and products.  
• Registered students can be used as an influential and powerful marketing force.                                                                                                                                  | • Executive alumni of WBS: (http://www.wbs.ac.uk/alumni/executive.cfm)  
• MBA Class profile: (http://www.wbs.ac.uk/students/mba/ft)  
• “I could not help but feel as a product of WBS, as I am passing through a fine-tuned educational machine, to become more attractive to future employers” – MBA student |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transactional or Relational Approaches Coexist</th>
<th>Student Experience and Interactive Touch-Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • It confirms that WBS does undertake relational approach with students.  
  • Students felt less a customer after enrolment, and felt that the school could offer more and hear what they require. | • It was clearly identified that students’ experience with WBS is processual, and involves key interactive touch-points.  
  • Some of these touch-points are in-line with WBS service functional units; including Admissions, Careers Services, etc. |
| • “The WBS Alumni Association offers various careers resources and services, as well as networking opportunities…” (http://www.wbs.ac.uk/students/mba/develop/career-services.cfm)  
  • “After enrolment, I feel more like a student than a customer. They will make you fit into the institutional system.” – MBA student  
  • “The School has to assure that students have a positive experience. Given the importance of the NSS, we could not afford not to respond to students’ views. We gear up our service provision towards their needs and wants.” – Marketing Officer  
  • “Students are paying fees; they demand us to focus on their needs.” – Academic Staff | • “Your application to us will be handled by our Admissions Team. They will help you with any queries you may have…” (http://www.wbs.ac.uk/students/mba/apply/)  
  • “Our Professional Careers Development Team complements our academic programme…” – Careers Service Officer  
  • “Orientation Week is essential, and one of the highlights” – MBA student  
  • “I felt well supported during my applications and admissions. The Registration and Orientation Week were well organised. Right now, it is all about studying and job opportunities.” – MBA student  
  • “It’s a very decentralised and operational fine-tuned organisation.” – Academic staff |
4.2.4 The Initial Findings: Key Interactive Stages and Time-Space

The interviews with WBS student respondents revealed the key interactive stages that took place during their experience with the institution. In addition, informal conversations with WBS academic staff and administrators also echoed their professional roles and defined core responsibilities for MBA students. Examples, presented in Table 4.3, are evidence for these interpretations. Furthermore, this understanding also corresponded to the organisational structure of WBS, which was illustrated by documents gathered from the internet. Therefore, the initial findings from the pilot study provided a holistic understanding of the relationship interactions existing between students and HEIs at the operational level from the students’ perspective.

These key interactive stages emerged from the empirical data, including Enquiries stage, Application and Acceptance stage, Registration and Orientation stage, Studying and Living stage, Career Development stage, and Graduation / Alumni stage; see Figure 4.4.

The interactive stages, illustrated in Figure 4.5, represents the processual framework of the student experience with the WBS service provision, from the perception of contextual time-space.
Figure 4.4: Key Interactive Stages during the Students’ Experience

Figure 4.5: Timeframe of the Current Research
(adapted from Halinen and Törnroos, 2005)
The refinement of the semi-structured interview guide and its operation were also enhanced during the formal data collection, in response to these key interactive stages through further modification of interview questions and their sequences. This is explained in section 4.2.5 that follows.

The multiple roles of students as clients, products, customers and producers (Hill, 1995; Guolla, 1999; Brooks et al., 2012), were also raised by interviewees. These different identities referred to by research respondents were subsequently adopted as core codes during the data analysis. Interviewees, especially academic and administrative employers of WBS expressed concerns regarding the international phenomenon of marketisation as well as globalisation in the HE sector, and the unavoidable potential impact on HEIs such as WBS. This reinforced the challenges that HEIs could no longer be seen solely as a knowledge provider (Jongbloed, 2003; Marginson, 2006; Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2007), but also as business entities that have to attract students and meet the needs and demands of students (Mazzarol, 1998; Brookes, 2003b; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Maringe, 2005, 2006; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006).

4.2.5 Improvements to the Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The draft version of the semi-structured interview guide (as in Appendix C1) used during the pilot study at the WBS was refined on the basis of the first-hand experiences gained from engagement with research respondents. It was further improved and modified by embedding the key interaction stages and key relationship themes derived from the initial research findings. The revised semi-structured interview guide is given as Appendix D.

Table 4.5 outlines the correlation between the improved version of semi-structured interview questions and the key constructs of the Interaction Model that were emphasised in the four sub-research questions. In addition, it delineates the correlation between improved semi-structured interview questions and the key interactive stages during the students’ experience (as highlighted in Figure 4.4), as mapped against the contextual time-space of past, current and future.
Table 4.5: The Process of Improvement and Modification of Semi-Structured Interview Questions
– corresponding to: Key Constructs of the Interaction Model, the 4 Sub-Research Questions, the Key Interactive Stages and the Timeframe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Constructs of the Interaction Model and the 4 Sub-Research Questions</th>
<th>Improved Semi-Structured Interview Questions</th>
<th>Key Interactive Stages</th>
<th>Contextual Time-space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Please could you share with me some personal profile prior to enrolling onto the MBA programme; for example, how many years of experience, level of management position, and age? * Opening question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) <strong>Actors:</strong> What actors are involved?</td>
<td>2. Could you recall the reasons why you were interested in the MBS / CEIBS programme? 3. How did you enquire about the MBA programme with the International Business School? 4. Are there any specific interaction episodes that you could recall? 5. <em>You mentioned that you enquired about the MBA programme with the alumni? Why is that important?</em> 6. <em>How did you gain information or interact with alumni?</em></td>
<td>Enquires Stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) <strong>Interaction Process:</strong> Which episodes and activities are involved?</td>
<td>* Probe questions (#5 and #6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) <strong>Atmosphere:</strong> How do the relationship dynamics correspond?</td>
<td>7. What did the IBS do to facilitate your application process? 8. Why do you think that you needed little support from the IBS during this process? 9. <em>How information exchange took place with alumni and others; please could you explain in more details?</em></td>
<td>Application and Acceptance Stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Probe question (#9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) <strong>Actors:</strong> What actors are involved?</td>
<td>10. From your viewpoint, what is the added-value of the Pre-MBA Programme(s)? 11. Whom did you interact with the most? Why do you think it is important? 12. <em>What was your experience about the Orientation Programme?</em></td>
<td>Registration and Orientation Stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) <strong>Interaction Process:</strong> Which episodes and activities are involved?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) <strong>Atmosphere:</strong> How do relationship dynamics correspond?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) <strong>Actors:</strong></td>
<td>13. What do you enjoy the most about the learning process on the MBA programme?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What actors are involved?</td>
<td>14. What has contributed the most to your learning experience?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) <strong>Interaction Process:</strong></td>
<td>15. <em>What could have helped to enhance your learning experience?</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which episodes and activities are involved?</td>
<td><em>Probe question (#15)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) <strong>Atmosphere:</strong></td>
<td>Studying and Living Stage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do relationship dynamics correspond?</td>
<td><strong>Current</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1) **Actors:** | 16. What have the IBS done to help your career management? |
| What actors are involved? | 17. What has contributed the most to your career prospects? |
| 2) **Interaction Process:** | 18. *What could have helped?* |
| Which episodes and activities are involved? | *Probe question (#18)* |
| 3) **Atmosphere:** | **Career Development Stage** |
| How do relationship dynamics correspond? | |
| 4) **Environment:** | |
| What is the nature of the environment? | |
| 1) **Actors:** | 19. Looking into the future, would you feel you are a product, producer, client, or customer of the IBS; and why? |
| What actors are involved? | 20. Would you recommend this IBS? How would you like to get involved when you are alumni? |
| 2) **Interaction Process:** | **Graduation and Alumni Stage** |
| Which episodes and activities are involved? | |
| 3) **Atmosphere:** | |
| How do the relationship dynamics correspond? | |
| 4) **Environment:** | |
| What is the nature of the environment? | |

| 1) **Actors:** | 21. What are the important relationships that you interact with the most? |
| What actors are involved? | 22. What are the values that these relationships offer? |
| 3) **Atmosphere:** | **Overview** |
| How do the relationship dynamics correspond? | |
| 4) **Environment:** | **Past / Current / Future** |
| What is the nature of the environment? | |
The terminology used in qualitative research is dependent on the informants’ language used to conduct the interviews (Cunliffe, 2002). During the course of individual semi-structured interviews conducted at WBS, key questions of the interviewees were linked to the adapted theoretical framework, noting what actors are involved through the perspective of the students as focal-actor, and what the associated activities are. Such terminology proved to be difficult for student respondents to grasp during the pilot study. However, when explanations were given, they were then able to quickly link the interview questions to their own experience and develop a narrative of relationship interactions (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Cunliffe, 2008). Thus, the improvements and modifications to the semi-structured interview questions adopted phrases that were easier and closer to research respondents’ own words and understanding.

To build rapport, inverted-funnel types of questions were included in the interview guide, such as question 1. Probing questions, for example, numbers 5, 6, 9, 15 and 18, were also included in the semi-structured interview guide, these designed and set aside to engage deeper discussions on subjects that were brought up through illustration of a respondent’s personal experience, or though their understanding regarding research phenomenon (Gudmundsdottir, 1996).

Importantly, the improved version of the semi-structured interview questions were organised in logic that related to the results of the analysis or the message (Lincoln and Guba, 2000), in correspondence with the adapted theoretical framework (see Figure 2.6) and the key interactive stages during the students’ experience (as seen in Figure 4.4). Additionally, the fragmented understanding of the complex nature of the business networks that had been gained through empirical data analysis of the WBS pilot case study revealed that multiple stands of relationships coexist and are cross-relational. Instead of losing sight within dynamic relationships, the research was able to consistently examine emerging issues and themes from the students’ perspective, importantly linking ‘how’ and ‘why’ types of questions to the personal experiences of individual students, such as in question 8.
In summary, the initial study at WBS proved to be very informative, and particularly was invaluable in terms of enabling the researcher to develop and improve the semi-structured interview questions for the formal data collection at CEIBS and MBS. Consideration and techniques applied during this modification process assured the research rigour for the current study.

4.2.6 The Initial Template

The above process of analysis and interpretation of empirical data assisted the researcher to formulate the initial template. Importantly, it also enabled the researcher to focus on the students’ perspective, regarding key relationship interactions within the WBS business network context.

The very first template, see Figure 4.6, was solely based on an understanding of the literature review.

Figure 4.6: The Very First Template Derived from a Literature Review
The initial template that subsequently followed, see Figure 4.7 (and also in Appendix E), was the revised template which was developed during the data analysis of the WBS pilot study. It helped the researcher to gain a general understanding of the range of dynamic relationships existing within the WBS business network context. The fragmented understanding relating to the complex nature of relationship interactions and networks obtained through the pilot study, forewarned the researcher of the potential scale, as well as the interweaving strands or relationships. Importantly, the pilot study and the identification of key interactive stages during the student experience (i.e. Figure 4.4) affirmed the importance of adopting a student focus. This provided a clear structure for analysing complex relationship interactions between students and their institutions, as well as the dynamic network effects during the formal CEIBS and MBS case study process. This initial template was further expanded during the formal data analysis. The further refined version, which resulted in the final template as output (as presented in Appendix F), was then adopted for the CEIBS and MBS case studies.
4.3 Research Quality

4.3.1 The Researcher’s Advocacy Experience in the HE Field

The researcher’s previous dual roles, of being an international student and a HE practitioner, enabled her to be fully acquainted with selected cases and research respondents. Furthermore, such knowledge and experience enabled the researcher to identify key categories and themes that emerged from the data that was collected,
essentially giving her a ‘sharp pair of eyes’ and critical thinking for the research investigation. Collectively, the semi-structured interview data collection methods, along with supplementary documents gathered, were coupled with the researcher’s experience in the international HE sector. This arguably sought to deepen understanding, instead of examining surface features, in relation to different aspects of relationship interactions between students and IBSs. This was especially the case with the key interactive stages during the student experience, as well as within the broad HE business network context (Cain and Finch, 1981; Johnson, 1997).

The researcher’s contacts in both the UK and Chinese HE sectors (from previous work experience) proved to be invaluable during the research fieldwork, and enhanced the process of gaining access to the selected IBSs for this investigation. The researcher’s knowledge of the UK HE sector and international HE markets was an asset. This further enhanced the capability to select authentic, credible and representative reports and internal memoranda from institutions/IBSs, and to use transcribed interviews, for conducting content analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994; King, 1998; Crabtree and Miller, 1999; Seale, 1999). Practical experience in the HE sector was a strong advocator, which enabled the researcher to maintain trustworthiness and rigour in this research process (Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

4.3.2 Ethical Guidelines and Considerations

Although all areas of scientific studies could be influenced by potential conflicts of interests and affiliation bias, scholars are increasingly required and encouraged to seek research rigour (Bell and Bryman, 2007). While maximising the core nature of management studies, e.g. where there is close congruence between practitioners and academics, it is of vital importance that scholars clearly outline research rationales, publication conditions and any potential conflict of interests and affiliation bias (Bell and Bryman, 2007). This ensures that the research work is reviewed in light of these conditions and research limitations, as well as maintains the researchers’ trustworthiness.
to their audiences, peer groups and future fellow researchers (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

The ethical considerations in this research were constructed mainly on the basis of the published Social Research Association’s (SRA) ethical guidelines (Anonymous, 2003d), as well as the University of Manchester’s ethical procedures. Four major areas, as outlined in these guidelines, were specifically addressed in the research process; these delineated in more detail in Table 4.6 overleaf.

In summary, this research was conducted under the SRA’s ethical guidelines (Anonymous, 2003d). Additionally, the researcher responded to recommendations in Lincoln and Guba (2000), focused on increasing credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability in social research.
Table 4.6: Four Areas of Ethical Consideration for the Research Investigation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Areas of Ethical Consideration</th>
<th>Applications in this Research Investigation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Obligations to Society</td>
<td>Following SRA ethical guidelines (Anonymous, 2003d), the researcher pre-empted likely mis-interpreations, and counteracted them when they occurred during the research inquiry. For example, the researcher agreed to provide case study samples, i.e. two selected IBSs, with an executive summary of the research findings before the final thesis is to be made available for access. Also, due to the time span of this research project, any commercially sensitive information at the time of data collection may not now be directly relevant after three years, or could not be easily imitated by other organisations within a short time frame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Obligations to Sponsors and Employers</td>
<td>This project was constructed to fit a PhD degree as a purely academic research exercise. The practical contributions derived from the research aim to encourage best practice within the HE sector; and are not for competitive or commercial purpose of any particular organisation, including the two case study institutions, MBS and CEIBS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Obligations to Colleagues</td>
<td>There was no single source of information providing details of IBS leagues tables. The researcher had to seek suggestions of scholars specialised in similar research fields, and to compile potential research samples from a combination of sources. Peer researchers critically examined a reduced list of IBSs, and provided constructive feedback to improve consistency in methodological criteria. From constraints – i.e. case sample accessibility, the researcher’s financial, geographical and language limitations; and the time to complete the PhD degree – two IBSs were selected. The wider sampling criteria and compiled IBS lists remain accessible for future researchers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Obligation to Subjects</td>
<td>As a result of commercial sensitivity, the researcher sought active steps to address confidentiality in field research; e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Before embarking on data collection, informed consent was obtained from MBA Programme Directors and from Chairpersons of student associations at the hosting IBSs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Prior to meetings with interview participants, a one-page briefing note outlining informed consent was prepared for them. This summarised the research purpose and explained confidentiality issues; confirming that interviewee names were to remain anonymous, and that the data gathered was to be kept confidential, and therefore not to be shared or accessible to their academic supervisors and subordinates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• During face-to-face interview meetings, interviewees were given the right and many opportunities to ask questions regarding how an individual’s privacy and confidentiality were to be protected. The interview recording device was switched off whenever participants had potential anxieties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• After interviews, participants were reassured of the use and dissemination of all the information collected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5 Case Study of CEIBS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a holistic analysis of important relationship dynamics, as perceived by MBA students at China Europe International Business School (CEIBS), during the life-cycle of their experiences with the institution.

5.1 Background of CEIBS

CEIBS was established in 1994. Despite its relatively short history, CEIBS is one of the most successful institutional examples to emerge from the programmes of both reform and internationalisation in China HE (Mok, 2005; Anonymous, 2013a). The achievements of CEIBS also place it in the elite category of world-class business schools, recognised internationally, and particularly in Asia and across China (Anonymous, 2012i).

Currently, CEIBS is the only Asian business school to have achieved outstanding global rankings consistently across its provision of MBA, EMBA and Executive Education programmes. For example, its MBA course has been ranked in the top-25 of global business schools within ‘The Financial Times’ annual league table for nine consecutive years, between 2005 and 2013 (Anonymous, 2012i).

5.2 Summary of CEIBS Student Respondents’ Profiles

The profiles of the CEIBS respondents were summarised in Tables 5.1 and 5.2.
Table 5.1: Profile of the Chinese Respondents from the CEIBS 2012 MBA Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student No.</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Work Experience</th>
<th>Type of Companies</th>
<th>Level of Management</th>
<th>City of Origin in China</th>
<th>Number of IBS Applications</th>
<th>Lead-time of Admissions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Maanshan</td>
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<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Shanghai</td>
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<td>1 months</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Private</td>
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<td>Shanghai</td>
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<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Senior / Sole owner and entrepreneur</td>
<td>Guangzhou</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
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<td>MNC</td>
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</tr>
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<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>MNC</td>
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<tr>
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<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>JVC</td>
<td>Senior / Co-owner &amp; entrepreneur</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Middle</td>
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<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Suzhou</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>JVC</td>
<td>Senior / Co-owner</td>
<td>Lanzhou</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>MNC</td>
<td>Senior</td>
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<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
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<td>Middle</td>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
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<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary Notes:** Female slightly more than Male
Avg. 29.2
Avg. of 6.95 years
MNC predominantly
Senior and Middle Management
Mega cities and Shanghai, predominantly
Avg. 1.4 including CEIBS
Avg. of 2.1 months
Table 5.2: Profile of the International Respondents from the CEIBS 2012 MBA Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student No.</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Work Experience</th>
<th>Type of Companies</th>
<th>Level of Management</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Number of IBS Applications</th>
<th>Lead-time of Admissions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>MNC</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Junior</td>
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<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
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<td>Government</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
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<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>32</td>
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<td>MNC</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3 / with PhD</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>JVC</td>
<td>Senior / Co-owner and entrepreneur</td>
<td>Germany / Living in China</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>USA / Living in China</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>JVC</td>
<td>Senior / Co-owner and entrepreneur</td>
<td>Demark / living in China</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3 / with two Bachelor degrees</td>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary Notes:** Male predominantly Avg. 27 Avg. of 6.3 years MNC and JVC Junior and Middle Management Asia and EU with China experience Avg. 1.1 including CEIBS Avg. of 4.9 weeks
According to information relating to a promotional presentation and prospectus gathered from the Marketing and Admissions Department at CEIBS, the generic profile of MBA 2012 enrolment was characterised by students from 15 countries, with an average age of 29 years. For the current case study, 33 respondents representing 12 nationalities out of the existing 15 in the full MBA cohort were interviewed in 2012. This research sample was split between 15 international students from 11 countries and territories, and 18 students from mainland China. Their average age across all nationalities came to 28.1 years. In addition, it was recognised that CEIBS MBA enrolment consisted of a strong representation of Chinese nationals. Furthermore, since different cultural backgrounds imply varied psychological programmes that govern activities, motivations and values (Hofstede, 1991), it was deemed applicable and valuable to investigate relationship interactions in light of a different cultural context. Thus, this led to a sub-division in presenting background information associated with both the groupings of Chinese and international interviewees.

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 demonstrated that whilst there were not huge variations between Chinese and international students in terms of their average ages and years of work experience, it was clear that the profile of Chinese respondents was more consistent in these two categories respectively, with an age range from 26 to 33, and work experience of between 4 and 11 years. Conversely, international respondents in these groupings displayed wide dissimilarities, as their age range was between 24 and 38, and their work experience being mixed, varying from 2 to 15 years. Additionally, Chinese students were predominantly from a MNC background, and so had achieved largely senior and middle management positions prior to their MBA studies at CEIBS. In contrast, international students were recruited from comparatively more mixed backgrounds, including MNCs, joint-ventures companies (JVCs), government organisations and small private firms.

The Chinese sub-sample tended to come from mega-cities, with the majority from around Shanghai, in which CEIBS is located. Noticeably, the participation of the international sub-sample also echoed the representation of a high percentage of enrolments from European and Asian countries, where the reputation of CEIBS is well-known, due to its
partnership with the European Foundation for Management and Development (EFMD) or from Chinese historical, cultural and global business linkages, to which international students had their own attachment. The admissions lead-time varied from 2.1 months for Chinese respondents, as compared with 4.9 weeks for international students. Importantly, despite nationality differences, the majority of respondents had predominantly chosen CEIBS as their sole study destination, with only a very few number of interviewees in each sub-sample as exceptions.

5.3 Data Analysis at CEIBS

5.3.1 Actors Involved during the Students’ Experience at CEIBS

Figure 5.1 provides an overview of the patterns of actors and networks involved whilst the students were at CEIBS. Data analysis of the interactive episodes was principally evaluated from the perspective of student respondents. This enabled a fuller understanding to be obtained of the HE service from a viewpoint of relationships and network interactions, and an in-depth interpretation to be gained of student needs from a contextual standpoint. The following sections provide explanations of each of the interactive stages in the process that were identified.
Figure 5.1: Actors Involved during the Students’ Experience at CEIBS

S: Student(s)  SP: Sponsors  BA: Business Associates  PE: Previous Employers
ES: Existing students SA: Student Ambassadors AS1: Administrative Staff AS2: Academic Staff
AL: Alumni MNC: Multi-national Company DI: Overseas Exchange Partner Institutions IS: Inspirational leaders
FP: Family and Friends PC: Personal Contacts/Network EM: EMBA Students
CM: Current MBA cohorts PS: Prospective Student(s)
5.3.1.1 Actors Involved during the Enquiries Stage

From a students’ perspective, it was both alumni and existing students who were the principal actors. Figures 5.2a and 5.2b illustrate the groupings of all the actors who were involved during the enquiries stage.

Figure 5.2a: Actors Involved during the Enquiries Stage – from the Perspective of International Student Respondents at CEIBS

Figure 5.2b: Actors Involved during the Enquiries Stage – from the Perspective of Chinese Student Respondents at CEIBS
Differences emerged between international and Chinese respondents, in terms how they classified alumni and existing students. International respondents categorised in a comparatively broad sense both CEIBS alumni and existing students with whom they had chosen to interact, i.e. as long as they were from the same country or same geographic regions. In contrast, Chinese nationals took a relatively narrower and focused approach. From Chinese students’ viewpoint, CEIBS alumni they chose to interact with during the enquiries stage were not only graduates of the institution, but more directly business associates from similar commercial sectors whom they had known for years. Chinese student respondents confirmed that they predominantly interacted with CEIBS alumni who were also their schoolmates or friends whom they had made during their undergraduate study days. The following examples echoed such understandings:

“\textit{I contacted an existing German student, and also spoke with another Spanish guy who had studied at CEIBS a few years back and now works in Shanghai.}”

(International respondent #11)

“\textit{One of my good friends and college mates studied MBA at CEIBS... Business Development Director Xie from Huawei, we worked in the same sector for years. He was also a CEIBS alumni and mentor... I went to these good friends of mine for information.}”

(Chinese respondent #5)

The respondents also interacted with other actors during the enquiries stage. International students tended to initiate a wide range of relationship interactions, including friends and family members working and living in China (e.g. in the cases of international students #11, #12 and #13), previous and current employers (e.g. international students #5 and #8), business associates (e.g. international students #11 and #13), and sponsors (e.g. international students #10 and #11). Conversely during the enquiries stage, Chinese respondents had limited interactions with their previous and current employers. To a great extent, they tended to guard their study plans from their superiors until the very last minute, prior to joining the MBA programme; doing so after their course resignations had been accepted and their notice periods at work were completed. Often this was either one or no more than two months before the CEIBS MBA course got underway. Distinctively, Chinese students chose to share their deep thoughts exclusively with friends they had known for years, including those having similar ambitions, and who had
first-hand experience of studying the MBA programme at CEIBS. These points are evidenced below:

“I worked for Samsung when I enquired to my employer about studying at CEIBS. They seemed to agree that CEIBS was a good place.”

(International respondent #8)

“I shared my deep thoughts and study ambitions with my good friends, who I can trust and who had been there before [i.e. studied at CEIBS].”

(Chinese respondent #17)

“I kept very quiet about my study plans... I resigned in June and finished my contract in August, and only told my boss about me studying for an MBA at CEIBS at the last minute, when he asked me whether I had changed my mind and where my next career move was going to be.”

(Chinese respondent #12)

The Chinese respondents were self-funded; therefore, distinct from their international peers, they had no interactions with sponsors. Additionally, the majority of international respondents had no China-relevant experience, except in the cases of students #11, #12 and #13. As such, during the enquiries stage, international applicants contacted their friends and families who had personal experiences of working and living in China. By contrast, there was little evidence that Chinese respondents had interacted with their friends and families in such a sense. These points are confirmed in the comments below:

“My cousin visited China in 2005 and then came back and started working in China since 2008. He is one of the locals with a white face, as they say. I was relying on him a lot.”

(International respondent #9)

“It’s not a big deal for any Chinese to settle in Shanghai; even if s/he was not born here. There is little need to ask for help from friends/family, as lifestyle in Chinese big cities is very similar.”

(Chinese respondent #3)

There were very few interactions between respondents and staff members of CEIBS during the enquiries stage, regardless of being a Chinese or international applicant, especially when it came to face-to-face contact. Any indirect interactions with CEIBS staff were mainly channelled through the institution’s own website and the ‘Chasedream’ public website (see section 5.3.4.4).

In summary, Chinese interviewees suggested selective members of CEIBS alumni and existing students, with whom they had established friendships in the past through
academic or professional life, as their main contacts. The WOM of these actors was their preferred trustworthy information source. International interviewees had a broader set of contacts, including alumni and existing students of CEIBS, with whom they interacted during the enquiries stage. This also illustrated the importance of WOM as a reliable source for obtaining information about direct experiences of studying at CEIBS. These dynamic relationship interactions facilitated the initiation of relationship developments between the MBA students and CEIBS.

5.3.1.2 Actors Involved during the Application and Acceptance Stage

Whilst continuing onto the application and acceptance stage, the interactions of students remained similar to those that had operated at the enquiries stage. Nevertheless, one emergent theme from an analysis of the interviews demonstrated increasing interactions between students and CEIBS administrative staff, in particular with the recruitment and admissions team within the MBA Office. Figures 5.3a and 5.3b illustrate the key actors involved during the application and acceptance stage.

Figure 5.3a: Actors Involved during the Application and Acceptance Stage – from the Perspective of International Student Respondents at CEIBS
Direct interactions between students and CEIBS increased during the application and acceptance stage. In particular, the MBA Office at the institution (mostly the recruitment and admissions team) was identified as another key actor. Documents gathered from the CEIBS website, as well as one of its MBA promotional events (e.g. an informational session in which the researcher participated) organised by the CEIBS MBA Office, confirmed that Chinese and international respondents were considered as one prospective student grouping from the institution’s viewpoint; this was in order to meet published MBA admissions requirements and to go through online application procedures. However, further investigation of application and admissions interactive activities obtained through interviews revealed that operationally, prospective international students were treated preferentially. For example, from Tables 5.1 and 5.2 it is evident that the lead-time for the admissions process varied from 2.1 months for Chinese students to 4.9 weeks for international students. The data showed that there was a clear division between international students and their Chinese peers in the frequency of their relationship interactions with CEIBS, and demonstrated that the institution was more aligned to international students in order to facilitate its ambition of furthering internationalisation. The following quotation illustrates this difference:
“It took me three weeks. I was surprised to know that my Chinese classmate had to wait over two months to get their CEIBS offer.”

(International respondent #2)

Another noticeable theme suggested that alumni and existing students with whom Chinese and international respondents chose to interact during this stage was broader than that in the previous stage.

For example, from the perspective of international respondents, interactions with alumni and existing students were not restricted to simply those who were of the same country or similar regions. Similarly, from the viewpoint of Chinese respondents, they no longer limited their interactions with alumni and existing students to their close circle of friends. The following quotations demonstrated this insight, as well as confirming that relationship interactions made with alumni and existing students during the application and acceptance stage were highly-valued:

“I was very impressed with the CEIBS alumni at the networking event... Some are really senior, though also very approachable people, and are very open to share their experiences and contacts... CEIBS did a great job in organising that particularly relevant event.”

(Chinese respondent #8)

“... A Chinese student ambassador, Hugh, took me for lunch at CEIBS, and we chatted a lot when I visited the business school last October.”

(International respondent #10)

5.3.1.3 Actors Involved during the Registration and Orientation Stage

Whilst prospective students became enrolled during the registration and orientation stage, the investigation of their interactions unveiled various actors that differed from the previous stages. Figures 5.4a and 5.4b illustrate that both groups of respondents interact with the administrative staff members at the MBA Office, as well as with other students from their cohort.
For example, the administrative staff in the MBA Office were widely viewed as professionals providing a one-stop-shop service for anything that took place on-campus during the registration and orientation stage. Characteristically, the interactions between
students evolved into patterns of one-to-one, as well as one-to-many. It was also recognised that international respondents seemed to have more awareness and appreciation of the institutional buddy-system, since four such students (i.e. respondents #5, #9, #10 and #15), in comparison to no Chinese respondents, used this scheme. The following quotation illustrated this:

“Wang volunteered for the buddy-system. He was great, and met me at the airport. He showed me around and talked to me about everything that I needed to know while we were on the pre-course activities.”

(International respondent #10)

Figures 5.4a and 5.4b also illustrate that international and Chinese respondents carried forward their relationship interactions with existing students and alumni into the registration and orientation stage, whilst they started direct interactions with CEIBS on all fronts (i.e. with various service departments of the institution). Despite the usefulness of the CEIBS information pack, the interviews confirmed that except for international student #4, the remaining 14 from that sub-sample either used the buddy-system or had close access to their friends and families during the registration and orientation stage. 11 out of the 18 Chinese respondents also confirmed that they had gained assistance from alumni and friends with their arrival. The following response epitomised this interpretation:

“The CEIBS information pack was useful, but I did not need it much. Instead, I had my friend, who had already been on the MBA course since last year, who helped greatly with my arrival.”

(Chinese respondent #5)

The interviews revealed that respondents were aware the MBA Office had purposefully designed a range of services to help students settle into the studying and living environment of the business school. All in all, it aimed to formally establish and harness relationships between students and CEIBS, as well as amongst students, prior to the formal start of the MBA programme.

Whilst the critical importance of the pre-MBA programme and the orientation week were widely understood and recognised, respondents’ perceptions regarding the added-value of CEIBS service provision varied. For example, Chinese students felt strongly regarding their own competencies and familiarity with logistical arrangements, which was evident
in them down-playing the necessity of the buddy-system from the viewpoint of a service receiver. However, 18 respondents who had not attended the pre-MBA programme, placed great expectations upon the administrative competencies of the MBA Office in facilitating, as well as leading, service provision across various institutional centres and departments. Respondents evaluated CEIBS service efficiency and deficiency through the MBA Office, despite the fact that relationship interactions had actually been carried out with other units, such as the accommodation or the finance office.

5.3.1.4 Actors Involved during the Studying and Living Stage

When the interviews were conducted, all respondents were immersed in the study and living experience stage. Whilst they continuously interacted with the different offices and personnel of CEIBS, the academic staff and their student classmates were the principle actors recognised. Figure 5.5 illustrates the key actors involved during the studying and living stage.

Figure 5.5: Actors Involved during the Studying and Living Stage – from the Perspective of Current Student Respondents at CEIBS
Student respondents emphasised that one of the perceived added-values of the MBA programme was to fulfil their desire for both an in-depth and breadth of knowledge. They relied on the academics’ expertise both in theory and business practice to rapidly boost their accumulation of knowledge during the programme. The blended learning approach, the international scholarly profile, and importantly the combination of research expertise and business insights, were all key attributes to the inspirational interactions with academic staff. The interviews also showed that CEIBS students were very appreciative towards their academic teachers, as evident through a selection of student comments that follow:

“We have some really amazing professors. They are experts in their own research field, and also have a great deal of practical knowledge and experience. They strike a good balance of theory and practice, or combined.”

(Chinese respondent #9)

“They [the academic staff] try to blend. I think they do a good job, better than I’ve seen before and expected. It is difficult to get economics, macro-economics or micro-economics to become interesting, but the academics here have done a great job.”

(International respondent #7)

“Confucius said: ‘Respect your teachers as your own parents’. This is embedded in Chinese culture.”

(International respondent #8)

During the studying and living stage, interactions between and amongst students intensified. Interviewees explained why the student(s)-to-student(s) relationship was critically important to their satisfaction with the institution and the perceived added-value of the MBA programme. The following comment illustrates this:

“During the group projects, you learn the craft of communication, of cultural differences; you appreciate an individual’s strength, share knowledge and experiences. Also, you learn through comparing and reflecting on different approaches adopted by different classmates when dealing with problems and issues. These are the great benefits of being on the course.”

(Chinese respondent #6)

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 revealed the division of profiles between Chinese and international sub-samples in terms of their professional backgrounds. International respondents praised the work experiences of their Chinese peers as being inspirational, and Chinese students valued their international classmates for bringing both cultural diversity and personality dynamics into their interactions. Interviewees also explained that English
language deficiency in the cohort was one of the key reasons causing dissatisfactions and group conflicts, and held CEIBS responsible for diluting the MBA quality by enrolling such weak students.

Amongst student(s)-to-student(s) relationships, close interactions also led to the development of friendships, especially amongst Chinese students. Interviewees also emphasised the continuity and important value of this network long-term. The following examples reinforced this interpretation:

“It’s a great advantage to have Chinese as the dominant nationality on the course, since building professional relationships and friendships are huge assets for our future career development.”

(Chinese respondent #13)

“By seeing and working with each other every day on the course, the friendships and our network actually got strengthened. I believe that these friendships and network will last, and are valuable in the long-term.”

(Chinese respondent #7)

In summary, during the studying and living stage, students placed great importance on the quality of their key counterparts, i.e. academic staff and their classmates from the same cohort, and perceived these major actors as individuals as well as part of CEIBS.

5.3.1.5 Actors Involved during the Career Development Stage

When interviews took place, all respondents were 10 months into their MBA studies and after three months had received careers advice. This means that career service provision of CEIBS, i.e. during the career development stage of the student experience, co-existed alongside the studying and living stage. Data analysis revealed that respondents interacted with a wide range of actors, led by the Careers Development Centre (CDC) at CEIBS, as well as initiated interactions with other actors either on-campus and/or off-campus. Figure 5.6 illustrates the actors who were involved during the career development stage.
Interviewees explained that the CDC proactively engaged with them three months after enrolment. The annual report and promotional leaflets of CDC also jointly revealed that its service provision was designed to encourage students to ‘think, plan and manage’ their career development, with a view to maximise and seize career opportunities while on the MBA programme. Respondents also perceived CDC administrative staff to be professional, exemplified in the following quotation:

“I think that CDC staff members really have the skills and knowledge relevant to our needs. They are brilliant in what they do. “

(International respondent #6)

Interviewees confirmed that the CDC managed a one-to-one mentoring programme as a significant careers counselling service, jointly delivered through alumni volunteers. After initial match-making meetings and formal introductions had been endorsed by CDC, this relationship then took place directly between the student and the assigned alumni. Evaluation reports from 2010 and 2011 of this mentoring initiative demonstrated that there was a 100% participation rate from MBA cohorts. This programme was also recognised amongst respondents as part of their MBA curriculum, represented as an
elective course unit worth 10 academic credits. The data suggest that there was strong enthusiasm and willingness amongst established alumni and recent graduates to volunteer for the mentoring programme, as reiterated in the comment below:

“My impression of the mentoring programme is fantastic. My alumni contact is so experienced. There is a great willingness that you could sense, and he seems to consider it really important to make sure I can get good jobs.”

(Chinese respondent #5)

Respondents also explained that the CDC managed an overseas exchange programme, involving a number of world-reputable business schools. Although this initiative was not compulsory, it was considered as one of the distinctive features of the CEIBS MBA programme amongst students. Interviewees revealed that the CDC placed applicants strictly according to academic performance set against pre-requisites of the overseas partner institutions. Once exchange positions were allocated, the relationship then took place directly between the students and the assigned exchange partner institution. The comment below exemplified this understanding (See Appendix G for examples of CEIBS MBA exchange partners):

“CEIBS have really impressive exchange partners. I would have never dreamed that I could sit in Wharton. I have been placed to study there next semester. It’s a lifetime dream coming true.”

(Chinese respondent #4)

Interviewees appreciated that CDC has strong relationship engagement with companies, especially MNCs operating in China. A number of international students suggested that CEIBS could potentially offer more job opportunities outside of China. Such points are illustrated below (with examples of CEIBS’ main MNC recruiters given in Appendix H):

“I think generally the CDC has high access to the best companies in China. So, at least, they are getting big companies through the door and are doing a good job in providing that for us. “

(International respondent #3)

“For a very small business school like CEIBS, they are bringing in a lot of heavy-weight corporations. So, no complaints on what I’ve seen up to now to help with career development.”

(Chinese respondent #7)

“CEIBS could have done more for international students. As not all of us are going to stay in China at the end of the course, CEIBS should have made more effort to increase their recruiters’ network outside of China or Asia.”

(International respondent #15)
Respondents were impressed by the world-leaders and influencers that CDC engaged with, in order to continuously inspire CEIBS MBA and alumni. Archived news and events since 2007 were critical supporting evidence that showcased the broad range of networks which CDC had established. For example, a speech given by former Italian Prime Minister and European Commission President, Romano Prodi, on 1st March 2009; a talk by the CEO of Anheuser-Busch InBev Global, Carlos Brito, who visited CEIBS and spoke on ‘Dreams, People, Culture’ on 1st September 2009.

Additional to the above frequent and multiple interactions that were taking place directly and indirectly between students and other actors through the proactive facilitation of the CDC, current students also initiated and drove interactions with alternative stakeholders. Interviewees emphasised that they formed on-campus networks with students from the EMBA programme and other MBA cohorts, as well as with alumni who had not been directly assigned as their mentors. They also explained that they had been equally busy making use of their comprehensive networks off-campus, including friends, family, sponsors (i.e. in the specific cases of international students) and their extended personal associations. Respondents confirmed that these extensive networks off-campus were considered as critical and trustworthy sources, and were regularly used as sounding-boards regarding their career development options, for example:

“‘I keep my old personal contacts close to me, as they are my critical friends who I trust the most, especially when it comes to obtaining relevant and effective careers guidance and advice.’”

(Chinese respondent #5)

“My network of contacts has expanded ten times bigger from being on this MBA course. I am not talking about the number of people whom I have met. I am referring specifically to people whom I now consider as friends and could really trust and confide in.”

(International respondent #14)

5.3.1.6 Actors Involved during the Graduation and Alumni Stage

When the interviews took place, respondents were existing MBA students, hence Figure 5.7 outlines the major actors who were anticipated to be involved during the graduation and alumni stage of the process.
All interviewees confirmed that they would definitely recommend CEIBS to prospective students, and expressed a willingness to become volunteer mentors and attend CEIBS-organised promotional events.

Respondents emphasised that their interactions with fellow students would continue and expand with time – not only with students from their current MBA programme, but also with the wider CEIBS alumni network. They also highlighted that the Chasedream website and its associated extensive network were virtual places to meet up.

Interviewees indicated that their friendships with fellow students and their personal experiences gained at CEIBS were unforgettable to them. The Chinese sub-sample especially shared a sense of duty or responsibility towards the future development of the institution. For instance, whilst expressing their gratitude, Chinese interviewees frequently used the word ‘family’ to describe their commitment to CEIBS (i.e. 13 out of 18 Chinese respondents). Student satisfaction with their experiences at CEIBS fundamentally drove current students and alumni to willingly interact with prospective students of the institution. See examples below:

“I would definitely recommend CEIBS. I am very pleased to be part of CEIBS; to be a member of this family.”

(Chinese respondent #9)
“Most of us from the MBA class are going to be in China after graduation. The friendships will continue on naturally. It’s great to be part of the big CEIBS alumni network.”

(International respondent #7)

5.3.2 Interactive Activities Involved during the Students’ Experience at CEIBS

Figure 5.8 captures the patterns of interactive activities involved throughout all six of the stages that comprise the students’ experience at CEIBS. Data analysis revealed the range of activities organised by the institution, as well as those initiated by the students. These are described in the following sections.
Figure 5.8: Interactive Activities at CEIBS

Student Experience with CEIBS

1. Open day
2. Public seminars
3. Social networking session
4. Ambassador Programme
5. On campus visit
6. PR and advertisement (FT rankings)

The Enquiries Stage
1. CEIBS website
2. E-mail communication
3. Telephone conversation
4. Face to face meeting
5. Chasedream public website
6. Open day
7. Public seminars
8. Social networking
9. Information session
10. Ambassador Programme
11. On campus visit
12. PR and advertisement

The application and Acceptance
1. Pre-MBA Course
2. Orientation Week
3. Buddy System
4. Arrival information Pack
5. Social event (organized)
6. Email Communication
7. Telephone communication
8. Face to face communication
9. CEIBS website
10. Chasedream public website
11. Social events (ad hoc)

The Registration and Orientation Stage
1. In classroom
2. Open-office hours
3. Compulsory assigned groups
4. Non-compulsory study groups
5. Non-compulsory social activities
6. Library
7. Accommodation
8. Sports service
9. Catering service
24/7 or 10/6 interactions

The Studying and Living Stage
1. CV writing
2. Career counseling service
3. Campus recruitment
4. Job posting
5. Recruitment fairs
6. Summer internship
7. Workshop
8. Company visit
9. Overseas MBA exchange programme
10. Executive Forum
11. Art appreciation week
12. Beijing global responsibility conference
13. Green campus
14. Innovate 21 China
15. Shanghai night
16. China discovery

The Career Development Stage
1. Mentoring programme
2. Alumni event
3. Promotional events
4. Chasedream public website
5. Personal network
6. CEIBS network

The Graduation Alumni Stage
5.3.2.1 Interactive Activities Involved during the Enquiries Stage

Analysis of the empirical data demonstrated that respondents were passively engaged with CEIBS administrative staff. The following quotations confirm that students felt strongly that there was no real need for them to initiate interactions with CEIBS during the enquiries stage:

“... I got all the information I needed from the Chasedream website. I did not feel the need to contact CEIBS. My own alumni contacts were very helpful.”

(Chinese respondent #11)

“I pretty much found all essential information on the internet [the CEIBS website]. I also talked with my boss, who thought CEIBS has a good reputation...and Korean friends who are living in China, they were very helpful, too.”

(International respondent #6)

In contrast, students proactively interacted with other actors, i.e. alumni and existing students, in establishing a more visible contact – through e-mail communications, telephone conversations, and face-to-face meetings – as vital interactive activities with which to seek first-hand and trustworthy information.

Despite interviewees’ inclination regarding the actors and the activities that they had chosen to interact with during the enquiries stage, documents collected (e.g. the CEIBS MBA information pack) demonstrated that a wide range of activities were purposefully organised by CEIBS to attract and interact with prospective students, either directly or indirectly. These activities included open days, public seminars, information sessions, social networking, ambassador programmes, on-campus visits, PR and advertisements. From the CEIBS viewpoint, there was no clear division regarding which institutional activities were designed for the enquiries stage, and which activities were arranged for the forthcoming application and acceptance stage. Figure 5.9 outlines these interactive activities.
Publicity by CEIBS in the 2011 ‘Financial Times’, gathered to complement the interview data, demonstrated that CEIBS regularly placed adverts for its MBA and EMBA programmes where there was a direct association made to its high position in MBA global rankings. CEIBS also profiled itself through interviews with influential executives who were alumni, and these were mainly promoted in management articles and well-established business magazines in both China and Asia; see Appendix I.

International respondents (#1, #2 and #4) from Taiwan and Hong Kong, either read business magazines or watched TV programmes or chat shows focusing on international education and global business schools, in which CEIBS was favourably regarded as one of those most internationally-recognised in Asia. CEIBS’s year-on-year improvement in ‘The Financial Times’ rankings of the ‘Top-100 Global MBAs’, in particular from 2005 onwards, provided a growing endorsement of the institution as one of the leading IBSs. The following sample quotes from interviews illustrate this:

“I learned about CEIBS from the annual FT global ranking. I would not have chosen to come here if it was not high up there with other top-20 American-based MBA programmes.”
(International respondent #14)

“CEIBS is the best [international business school] in Asia. It was ranked 11th in the FT league table. This is absolutely amazing!”
(Chinese respondent #9)
It was also evident that both the CEIBS website and the Chasedream public website were perceived as important by international and Chinese students, despite few direct interactions between respondents and CEIBS taking place through these technology-facilitated interactive platforms.

For example, Chinese interviewees indicated that they were self-motivated and browsed for information provided by Chasedream, which was widely known amongst people who were interested in MBA programmes. They had all followed frequent blogs provided on that particular website, considering this type of information-sharing as an important resource to facilitate their decision-making both during the enquiries stage and the application and acceptance stage. It was also evident that Chinese respondents favoured this latter public website over that of CEIBS. Conversely, international students mostly used the CEIBS website, as Chasedream was principally driven by Chinese users and so required good Chinese language proficiency in order to engage effectively. The following comments confirm this analysis:

“... It [Chasedream] is a very popular website. I did not participate in discussions, but just [by] reading the information and following the conversations, I got loads of information. For me, it was more than sufficient.”

(Chinese respondent #4)

“I am aware of the Chasedream website, but my Chinese language was not so good... Instead, I thought the CEIBS website was pretty good, and certainly adequate for my needs.”

(International respondent #1)

Interviews showed that both the CEIBS and Chasedream websites were used by respondents not only during the enquiries stage, but also during the subsequent application and acceptance stage. To a great extent, these technology-facilitated online interactive activities were acknowledged to be sufficient for the purposes of seeking course information:

“CEIBS choose big and influential websites like Chasedream to announce its promotional activities. Student ambassadors blogged about CEIBS, and answered questions that prospective students raised. It was sufficient to gain all information needed without contacting the School.”

(Chinese respondent #1)
5.3.2.2 Interactive Activities Involved during the Application and Acceptance Stage

In comparison to the enquiries stage, interactive activities during the application and acceptance stage remained largely the same, including continuous interactions with alumni and existing students of CEIBS through e-mail, telephone and face-to-face communications. Both the CEIBS and Chasedream websites maintained their preferential positions amongst such interactive activities. However, CEIBS application and admissions processes were additional interactive activities during this stage. Data gathered from the interviews also showed variations between Chinese and international peers regarding the frequency and preference for using this mixed range of activities organised by CEIBS. Figure 5.10 shows these existing and newly emergent themes, and how these codes differed from the perspective of international to Chinese students.

For example, interviews with Chinese respondents revealed that 3 out of the 18 students in that sub-sample had attended an open day or had made a campus visit prior to application submission. In addition, 5 of them had attended public seminars, and only 2 had used the CEIBS recommended ambassador programme. However, 12 out of the 18 in the Chinese sub-sample had attended social networking events, and were impressed with
some of the distinguished profiles of CEIBS successful and influential alumni, as exemplified below:

“... CEIBS alumni are heavyweight business leaders... I felt two inches taller just being in the same room with them!”

(Chinese respondent # 3)

In contrast, interviews held with international students revealed that 9 out of these 15 respondents had travelled from overseas to visit the CEIBS campus, prior to submitting their MBA applications. The on-campus visit was tied in either with their holidays or a business visit to China, from which they had obtained direct experience and interactions with student ambassadors, existing learners, as well as staff at the MBA Office. The on-campus visit was pre-arranged and tailored to the individual respondent’s own requests and needs. The example of the visit programme strongly suggests that it was well thought-through by CEIBS, to maximise the provision of value-added information and a customer-relevant service on the day. Any follow-up enquiries were also carried out through e-mail and telephone correspondence between the international applicant and their initial contacts, who were either a staff member of the MBA Office or the student ambassador, who had organised and jointly hosted the visit.

A high proportion of international respondents took an on-campus visit to obtain first-hand information, in contrast to Chinese respondents. It could have been assumed that given the geographic distances and the financial implications, it would have been logical that a higher number of Chinese students should have visited the CEIBS campus prior to application submission. The following quotations illustrated that the Chinese students knew that ‘government focus’ meant that CEIBS would have high quality facilities, whilst the international students needed reassurance about these:

“No doubt CEIBS’s facilities and environment have to be good, as they are under the focus of government constantly.”

(Chinese respondent #15)

“It’s such an important investment; I had to really see the facilities and study environment with my own eyes, before confirming my application [to CEIBS].”

(International respondent #13)
Despite the fact that both Chinese and international respondents had acknowledged their awareness of CEIBS’s consistently high MBA rankings in ‘The Financial Times’, the interviews illustrated that Chinese students placed a strong emphasis on their trust in authority and its assessment. In contrast, international students put greater trust in their own evaluations.

Respondents’ profile summaries (in Tables 5.1 and 5.2) indicate that the lead-time for admissions between Chinese and international students varied immensely. Interviews also revealed that students were concerned about CEIBS admissions practice, as prospective candidates from China were under more scrutiny. In contrast, CEIBS applied a more relaxed admissions approach to international applicants, as explained in section 5.3.1.2.

In summary, during the application and acceptance stage, whilst the breadth of interaction was extended, new and important activities also emerged. They were all designed to convert the enquirer into an applicant, thereby facilitating prospective students through the application and acceptance process. Importantly, data analysis showed that there was a clear division between Chinese and international students regarding their preferred choices of interactive activities.

5.3.2.3 Interactive Activities Involved during the Registration and Orientation Stage

Interviews revealed that significant interactive activities took place in the registration and orientation stage. As summarised in Figure 5.11a, this consisted of a wide range of activities organised by the institution; from the most essential and structured ones (i.e. the pre-MBA course and orientation week), to the least structured ones (i.e. social events). Figure 5.11b, presents a broad array of activities initiated by students themselves, including e-mail, telephone, and face-to-face communication with actors whom they had already established one-to-one relationships. Students also continued to connect to other online networks (i.e. CEIBS and Chasedream websites), and organised social gatherings.
The CEIBS-organised activities were more planned and structured, in comparison to those that were student-initiated. However, the data suggested that some activities were considered more valuable than others. For example, Chinese and international interviewees appreciated the comprehensive information packs provided on arrival, and
they were aware of the buddy-system. However, given the latter, amongst all of the 33 interviewees, only 4 international students (i.e. #5, #9, #10 and #15) used the buddy system. In contrast, 15 out of the 33 in the full sample (i.e. 11 international and 4 Chinese respondents) had been on the pre-MBA course, which consisted mainly of between one and three months of language programmes, these designed to improve English proficiency for Chinese registrants, as well as abilities in Mandarin for international registrants. Documents collected from the CEIBS MBA Office (i.e. introduction to the pre-MBA course), along with all of the interviews, confirmed that traditionally, and presently, over one quarter of the cohort had been on the pre-MBA course. It was emphasised collectively that their early arrival and lower levels of study related pressures, along with the tailored language provision, had enabled these pre-MBA students to have time and space to get to know the different CEIBS service units, as well as their fellow students. By the time the formal orientation week started, they were very familiar with CEIBS and ready to engage themselves with broader academic faculty and the rest of the MBA cohort. The comment below echoed such assurances:

“I met near forty people on the pre-MBA course. By the time the orientation week got underway, I knew everything about the business school. I met more than sixty people from the MBA cohort in that week... That pre-course really helped me ease comfortably into my MBA studies.”

(International respondent # 9)

Interviewees also clearly understood the purpose of orientation week. Nevertheless their personal experiences and views were varied; from one end of the scale some respondents were very satisfied with its usefulness (e.g. Chinese respondent #5), to the other end of the spectrum where certain respondents had been very unsatisfied and had noted its “messiness” (e.g. International respondent #13).

5.3.2.4 Interactive Activities Involved during the Studying and Living Stage

The analysis of empirical data demonstrated that there were a number of activities during the studying and living stage predominantly driven by interactions between students and academic staff, and by interactions between and amongst students from the same cohort. Figure 5.12 outlines this assortment of interactive activities.
For example, interviewees confirmed that activities between students and the academic staff mainly took place in classroom settings. The academics’ open-office tutorials were viewed as supplementary arrangements that existed outside the classroom, and driven by students’ needs, which were offered on an ad hoc appointment basis. The level of expertise represented by the academics was also mirrored in students’ satisfaction, as indicated in the following quote from the interviews:

“Professor X, he has a super mind and is a genius. The theory and teaching materials, after attending his class and listening to his illustration, from what I have learned in the past and what I have yet to know, suddenly became structured and clear. The impact of the way he teaches and the way he approaches a question, really opens your mind and is inspirational.”

(Chinese respondent #11)

Data analysis revealed that interactive activities between and amongst students were mostly constant and continuous, taking place in classrooms, assigned teams, volunteer study groups and other social activities. All interviewees expressed that their studying and living experience was predominantly taken over by their assigned team interactions:

“For group work and team-based activities, we live and breathe with our student groups throughout our MBA studies.”

(International respondent #5)
Students also explained the added-value of the other volunteer study groups and social activities. For example, the volunteer study groups were initiated and organised by MBA students who were business professionals in specialist areas, including accounting, finance, marketing, etc. Such group leaders were respected for their unselfishness in sharing knowledge and in helping answer questions raised by fellow students outside the classroom environment, who had either never studied these subjects or had perceived themselves as being slightly weak in such academic areas. Interviewees also revealed that social activities were formulated on a spontaneous basis, and took place around holidays, birthdays or in response to ad hoc suggestions to inject time for relationship building and to shake-off some of the stresses of the intense MBA programme; as noted in the following interpretation from the interviews:

“Through group work, I get a better understanding of the lecturers. The volunteer study groups are super-valuable. I could not help but show my gratitude towards the group leaders naturally. Social activities are also fab, as we need to switch-off at times when it all gets too stressful.”

(Chinese respondent #3)

Interviewees also confirmed that their daily interactive activities with administrative staff were mainly taking place through CEIBS’s library, accommodation, sports and catering services provision.

5.3.2.5 Interactive Activities Involved during the Career Development Stage

During the career development stage interactive activities became more complex and dynamic than any other previous stages of the process, and could be thematically categorised into two groups – CDC-organised and student-initiated. Table 5.3 highlighted certain examples. See Appendix H for examples of CEIBS associated MNCs, which attend campus recruitment activities and fairs organise by CDC at CEIBS.
Table 5.3: Examples of Interactive Activities during the Career Development Stage
– from CEIBS Promotion Leaflets / Website in 2011 and the On-Site Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of Activities Organized by the CDC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Campus Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus presentation was viewed as one of the most effective ways to create awareness among students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Job Posting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted on CDC Intranet and open for all graduates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Recruitment Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted not only on-campus, but in mega cities including Shanghai, Beijing or Shenzhen, to facilitate companies and students who are planning to develop careers in that geographic area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Summer Internship Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of hands-on experience and substantial contact with decision-makers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aimed to enhance MBA students’ job market information and job searching skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Company Visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewed as one of the best ways for recruiters attracting qualified candidates, and enabling students to have a better understanding of the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Executive Forum and the Inspirational Speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Italian Prime Minister and European Commission President, Romano Prodi, on 1st March 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Overseas Exchange Partner IBs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, Kellogg School of Management, NY University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example of Activities Initiated by Students

| 9) Student /Study clubs on Campus         |
| e.g. Green Campus, Innova Tec China, Beijing Globally Responsible Conference; Art Appreciation week |
| 10) Extended social clubs                |
| e.g. China Discovery Week, Shanghai night |

5.3.2.6 Interactive Activities Involved during the Graduation and Alumni Stage

During graduation and alumni, as the last stage of the student experience with CEIBS, interactive activities were drastically reduced. Interviewees confirmed that in the future they will contribute in the following ways: by supporting CEIBS-organised promotional activities, by volunteering for the mentoring scheme, by participating in alumni events, and by sharing their personal experiences with prospective students either directly or through the Chasedream website virtually. To borrow the student respondent’s words:

“MBA graduation is a defining moment. It is the starting point of a new beginning”.

(Chinese respondent #7)
5.3.3 Atmosphere Surrounding Students and CEIBS

5.3.3.1 The Students’ Perspective of Evolving Relationship Atmosphere

The Interaction Approach recognised the importance of activities (Håkansson ed., 1982), and emphasised that an assessment of the strength of activities enabled an explanation of the nature of relationships and its effects, i.e. the relationship atmosphere (Håkansson ed., 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995).

The analysis of activities involved during the students’ experience with CEIBS, (see section 5.3.2 and Figure 5.8), illustrates that, from the learners’ standpoint, interactive activities were changing. Consequently, the relationship atmosphere between students and CEIBS were not static but evolving, in response to the six key interactive stages of the educational process.

Relationship atmosphere defined by the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982) can be described in terms of power distance between two interactive parties; it is the product of the relationship, as well as the mediator that influences the relationship interactions. The current study confirmed that relationship atmosphere was conditioned by the interactions between students and CEIBS, and that these interactions shaped the atmosphere between two parties. Data analysis also demonstrated that the understanding of relationship atmosphere, from the student respondents’ viewpoint, was defined as the state of their relationship with the institution, rather than through evaluating the power dependence, as explained below.

From the perspective of students, there was little evidence of closeness between the MBA cohort and CEIBS during the enquiries stage. This resulted from the few interactions that took place between prospective applicants and administrative staff at CEIBS. In contrast, interactions between prospective students and alumni and existing students were initiated and driven by respondents during that enquiries stage. The
relationship atmosphere demonstrated a nature of closeness, due to the dependency, trust and long-lasting friendships that had been previously established:

"I talked with a lot of people, alumni, a number of Europeans and Americans on the course; I counted on them for sharing their experiences and views."

(International respondent #9)

The relationship atmosphere between students and CEIBS (i.e. the administrative staff from the recruitment and admissions team) during the application and acceptance stage was co-operative. Both sets of respondents were fully aware of the straightforward entry requirements and application procedures; as a result, they needed little support from CEIBS. The interviewee statement below echoed this point:

“CEIBS’s programme structure, curriculum, teaching methods, as well as the admissions requirements, are all very much in-line with overseas universities.

(International respondent #14)

It was evident that students started formal interactions with CEIBS on most fronts during the registration and orientation stage. The relationship atmosphere remained co-operative, as students hung onto their established networks. However, relationship interactions between and amongst students were greatly accelerated and the atmosphere was close. This in turn influenced the on-going development of relationship atmosphere between the students and CEIBS:

“In this new environment [the pre-course], your peers became close to you. You don’t stop, but deepen that relationship into friendships."

(Chinese respondent #1)

Once the studying and living stage was reached, the relationship atmosphere between the students and CEIBS (i.e. with the academic staff) involved dependency, inspiration and appreciation. The relationship interactions amongst students that existed were intensified, and led to the development of friendships; as the comments from interviews testify:

“If it’s not 24/7, it’s 18/6. That’s how close the cohort has been and still is. Our schedule says it all.”

(International respondent #9)

"Respecting and appreciating your teachers are important aspects of Chinese culture. They are brilliant minds; and we could not help but to show our gratitude towards them naturally."

(Chinese respondent #11)
During the career development stage, the relationship atmosphere between students and CEIBS (i.e. the administrative staff at CDC) was perceived by respondents as being close and appreciative. Interviewees also emphasised that by building on the close relationship between students, it was common to see friendships formulated and deepened:

“CDC put a lot of effort into supporting the School, in which we get a lot of advantages in terms of future career development.”

(International respondent #11)

During the graduation and alumni stage, the relationship atmosphere between students and CEIBS were anticipated to remain close by respondents, resulting from the overall satisfaction of their experiences with the institution. This is reinforced in the comment below:

“I will recommend CEIBS no doubt. I know for sure that I will miss our professors; I will miss my mates here. This period in my career is so special; we call it the days of our lives. “

(International respondent#12)

5.3.3.2 Different Expectations between Chinese and International Students

There was strong evidence that students placed great expectations on their institution, which partially formed the evolving relationship atmosphere and influenced the overall relationship interaction with CEIBS. Research data suggested that students’ expectations varied between Chinese and international respondents. Figure 5.13 compares the themes in relation to the added-value of CEIBS service provision to be expected, as well as their perceived hierarchy of importance.
For Chinese students, the strong recognition of the CEIBS brand, and an associated desire of accessing and formally becoming part of the institution’s alumni network, was the number one reason that had fuelled their expectations of CEIBS service provision. For example, Chinese interviewees consistently quoted CEIBS’s rankings in league tables and emphasised its brand prestige. Additionally, by referring to the profile of Chinese respondents (i.e. Table 5.1), it was obvious that for most, if not all, CEIBS was the sole business school that interviewees applied to. These Chinese respondents all considered the CEIBS alumni network as being an extremely valuable asset, which could offer great opportunities to gain access to broader business connections. Also, becoming a CEIBS alumnus was considered prestigious and reflected social status in the Chinese business world, which was perceived to be increasingly globalised and reported to be lacking in senior professionals with an international experience or outlook. Such Chinese respondents emphasised the inner-circle Guanxi (Hofstede, 1991; Ryan, 2011) that would be derived from the CEIBS alumni network, which had strong added-value dimensions for their career prospects, both short-term and long-term. The following quotation echoed the above statements:
“When you get your foot into CEIBS, you maintain good friendships and brotherhood with CEIBS alumni, and then you will be fine. In fact, you will be more than fine. It’s not only about obtaining the CEIBS qualification; it’s about the shared identity and who [whom] you know through their extensive alumni database of contacts and business leaders.”

(Chinese respondent #15)

The Chinese students confirmed that their expectations for the CEIBS MBA programme had been based on a desire for deepening their expertise in specific subject areas, or in broadening their knowledge in business management generally. This was associated to personal career aspirations, which were either linked to continuous promotion or to an exploration of different professions after completion of MBA studies. For example, consistently, Chinese interviewees referred to CEIBS as the best business school in China, and emphasised that its MBA qualification was extremely highly-valued amongst MNC employers and business associates in the country, given the fast development and importance of the Chinese economy in a global context. Respondents also felt strongly that they needed to top-up their knowledge through structured and real-world learning programmes. Being away from busy professional life and studying full-time, it was argued by interviewees, enabled them as middle and senior managers to reflect on and consolidate their expertise before launching themselves into roles with more responsibilities after MBA graduation. The following examples illustrate this:

“China is a big market, developing at a fast pace and full of opportunities. CEIBS offers the most recognised MBA in China, and is the ultimate choice to help my career development.”

(Chinese respondent #2)

“I was a middle-level manager [before joining the programme], looking for further career development at a much senior level, since I felt that something was missing. I strongly believe that the CEIBS MBA is helping me freshen- and top-up my management knowledge.”

(Chinese respondent #5)

Chinese student expectations were largely due to a shared common view amongst such respondents that the institution was an effective gateway for internationalisation, from the dual perspective of academic studies and personal experience. For example, interviewees revealed further reasons why they only applied to CEIBS and not to other places such as Peking University and Fudan University, despite the fact that these institutions have profound histories and strong global brand recognition. 

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interviewees strongly believed in, and were drawn to, the international side of CEIBS. This was reflected in the higher percentage of international students studying at CEIBS, the well-established international faculty in MBA disciplines, and the higher volume of international business professionals enrolled onto the MBA programme. Also, all CEIBS programmes were taught in English, instead of partially or entirely in Chinese, and more importantly there were well-established bilateral educational exchange programme with over 30 leading business schools across the globe. The following student statement is of relevance in this respect:

“Imagine I have the opportunities to sit in Wharton; this is mega major, especially speaking for myself. I am grateful to CEIBS, possibly for the rest for my life.”

(Chinese respondent #14)

For international students, the expectations of CEIBS service provision came from a combination of three reasons. Firstly, it was centred on a strong interest in China. For example, all international respondents expressed that their choice of CEIBS had been mostly driven by their personal interest and passion in getting to know China in broad terms; including its business opportunities resulting from the fast economic growth in the country, along with its extensive culture obtained from Chinese people through personal experiences of studying and living in China. For example:

“Definitely it’s about China. Ask any of the foreigners on the MBA programme, and at CEIBS. They are certainly here because of China.”

(International respondent # 5)

Secondly, they had a strong desire to access the extensive series of CEIBS networks. For example, 14 out of the 15 international respondents strongly believed that CEIBS currently attracted the potential business leaders or influencers of China. They felt that the accessibility of CEIBS’s networks, including the current MBA cohort, and the alumni network, along with MNC and JVC associations of foreign companies investing and operating in China, would not only broaden their knowledge, but also importantly open up multiple career development prospects:
“What’s happening in the world, every company is expanding to China. That’s also true for Korean companies. If I have the CEIBS certificate and its extensive business network, and have the China experience, I will get a different and much better job.”

(International respondent #6)

Thirdly, similar to Chinese students, international interviewees shared a strong desire to obtain structured knowledge and a recognised qualification focusing on business management. Importantly, they had very little awareness about other rival MBA programme providers in China, except for only three respondents, from the USA, Denmark and Germany, who had been living and working in China for between two and ten years prior to their application to CEIBS. In principle, international interviewees confirmed that their choice of MBA had been narrowed down by an exploration of ‘The Financial Times’ global MBA rankings. For example:

“I would not choose to come here if it [CEIBS] was not high up in the FT rankings for MBA programmes. I am from an engineering background, and so know nothing about accounting and marketing. The CEIBS MBA is 18 months; I am learning all the things that I need to know about business management. It’s good, and really great for my future.”

(International respondent #14)

In summary, despite the different expectations between Chinese and international students for CEIBS service provision, the essence of these expectations has influenced the development of relationships between students and CEIBS, as well as other relationships between students and stakeholders of the institution.

5.3.3.3 The Relationship Life-Cycle of the Students at CEIBS

Relationship atmosphere connects actors, influencing how two parties interpret situations and form their identities in relation to each other (Håkansson ed., 1982). Therefore, in conjunction with the analysis of actors involved during the students’ experience with CEIBS (in section 5.3.1, as summarised in Figure 5.1), the relationship atmosphere provided essential insights into understanding the relationship life-cycle of the student at CEIBS.
Figure 5.14 illustrates the above understanding of the four phases of the relationship life-cycle between a typical student and CEIBS, in response to the six key interactive stages that learners experience with the institution. It also acknowledged that relationship(s) interactions and development were underpinned by student expectations of knowledge enrichment and employability enhancement.

**Figure 5.14: The Relationship Life-Cycle of the Students at CEIBS**

The relationship atmosphere showed little evidence of closeness during the enquiries stage, and was co-operative during the application and acceptance stage. Submitting an application and admissions also required both CEIBS and prospective candidates to invest time and resources without financial commitment (i.e. the application fee being trivial, in comparison to deposit payment and full-tuition fee costs). Therefore, these two interactive stages could be categorised as the pre-relation phase.

During the registration and orientation stage, as well as the studying and living stage, the relationship atmosphere evolved rapidly towards being dependent and close.
Interviewees revealed that they had resigned from their previous employment and settled their tuition-fee payment in full. Given the time and financial implications, they had to be committed to relationship development with CEIBS in meeting their expectations regarding this transforming educational process. Importantly, interviews revealed that respondents were aware of the shared goal of formally establishing and harnessing the relationship, in particular to fulfil the value-creation of knowledge enhancement. Therefore, these two interactive stages could be categorised as the development phase.

During the career development stage, the relationship between students and CEIBS went from strength-to-strength. To a great extent, it symbolised the maturity of this relationship, i.e. the creation of value by HEIs from transferring knowledge into employment, from the students’ perspective; illustrated in the following quotation:

“Sure, there are areas that CEIBS could improve, but I have got three good jobs lined-up for me to decide upon, seven months before I finish the MBA programme. CEIBS definitely got its core business right.”

(International respondent #15)

Despite a decline of relationship interactions between students and CEIBS during the graduation and alumni stage, respondents’ strong commitment to CEIBS was evident as explained in section 5.3.1.6 and section 5.3.2.6. The relationship life-cycle between students and CEIBS moved to a hibernation phase as students became loyal partners and advocates of the IBS.

5.3.4 The Nature of the Environment

While analysing single and multiple relationship interactions between and amongst the stakeholders of CEIBS (Kotler and Fox, 1985), the environment in which these relationships take place is also of importance (Håkansson ed., 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Different from the competition-cooperation mix suggested by Wilkinson and Young (1994) in the Relationship Life-Cycle Model, and the environment defined by Håkansson ed. (1982) in the Interaction Approach, data analysis showed that student
respondents interpreted the concept of environment principally as it would be aligned with the analytical framework of ‘PEST’ (Brownlie, 1987).

Equally, this environmental analysis provided an understanding of the overall picture surrounding relationship interactions and the IBSs. Different patterns of technology-integrated interactions were also analysed as part of the micro environment linked to each IBS, and demonstrated varied implications on relationship development between students and their IBSs.

Data analysis from a student-centric perspective examined single-relational and cross-relational interactions, and demonstrated the unique environment within which CEIBS operates and these relationship interactions exist. The CEIBS environment of relationships and networks could be viewed as being principally driven by China factors. The environment is influenced by the educational market structure in China and the extent of its internationalisation, as well as by the dynamics of Chinese employment in the global context, along with the social system nationally. In addition to these macro factors, research findings also confirmed that stakeholder interactions of CEIBS were influenced by the micro institutional environment, in particular CEIBS’s positioning in the worldwide MBA market, which was translated in its operational procedures and tactics as evaluated by interviewees. Empirical data analysis demonstrated subtle different interpretations of the environment at the macro level in general between Chinese and international student respondents. It also revealed their shared views regarding the institution’s positioning and flexible admissions tactics towards non-Chinese national applicants.

5.3.4.1 Macro Environment: Chinese Student Respondents’ Perspective

Tables 5.1 shows that Chinese students were mostly senior and middle managers from a MNC background, between 26 and 33 years of age. Such interviewees explained that after having completed their first degree in Chinese universities, their careers had progressed well largely as a result of rapid economic growth over the last two decades in
China. Their professional work experience enabled them to move freely amongst middle-management positions. However, they felt that heightened pressure from the tough competition in the China employment market, as well as the rigorous and transparent requirements for hiring and promoting senior and top managers especially for MNCs operating in China, all impacted on their promotion and long-term career development. Also, as a result of significant expansion and internationalisation of Chinese higher education since 1998, the national employment market had become very competitive (Ryan, 2011; Anonymous, 2013a). Respondents revealed that mid-level managerial positions were increasingly being taken by postgraduate degree-holders and by Chinese nationals who had returned with qualifications obtained at foreign universities.

Chinese interviewees confirmed that despite over 2,000 HEIs operating within the Chinese education system, only 27 reputable Chinese universities were granted and regulated by the Chinese MOE for MBA provision. The data suggests that it was essential to have an MBA degree, and this was viewed as the gateway to enabling further career promotion. Such a position was common across all Chinese respondents, as echoed in this interpretation:

“I have to invest in an MBA qualification to level the playing-field and remain competitive in the current Shanghai job market, where there is no shortage of smart people.”

(Chinese respondent #16)

From a social system perspective, Chinese respondents confirmed that they were principally influenced by Confucian philosophy, where education is the gateway to one’s career success and to upgrade one’s social status. They strongly believed that life-long learning was embedded in Chinese society and culture, and highly regarded as an individual’s responsibility. MBA degree qualification was considered as a worthy investment amongst these Chinese students, despite tuition fees being nearly three times their annual salary, as noted in the following statement:

“Confucius said that education offers status. Thus, it is my education and my career potential. It is expensive, but will definitely be worth it all in the end.”

(Chinese respondent #14)
These were the fundamental macro environment factors that influenced the Chinese respondents in their interactions with CEIBS and its associated stakeholders.

5.3.4.2 Macro Environment: International Student Respondents’ Perspective

In contrast, international respondents shared different interpretations regarding the dynamics of China’s environment. These students were largely attracted to the fast-growing Chinese economic and post-MBA employment opportunities in China and their home countries. They explained that China is considered to be an emerging superpower of the world economy, and as a consequence MNCs and foreign investors have been increasing their business activities in-country. This echoed the fact that today the world’s top 500 MNCs have established their business presences in the Chinese market. Such a point is reinforced in the comments below:

“I am in China, the heart of the world economy. You don’t get more opportunities anywhere else in the world.”
(International respondent #3)

“A China-based MBA is a must. I need it to help me grab hold of the opportunities both in China and back home”.
(International respondent #5)

International respondents also reckoned that with over one billion speakers worldwide, Mandarin was increasingly recognised as an important business language after English; and potentially, it could also be the language of the future, with China becoming increasingly powerful in buying and selling globally. Amongst international students, their strong passion and fascination towards Chinese culture was clearly evident. To a great extent, this reflected the policies and initiatives led by the Chinese MOE to accelerate the process of China HE internationalisation (Huang, 2005; Mok, 2005; Zhou, 2006; Anonymous, 2011g; Ryan, 2011), in particular, through attracting foreign students to study in-country; as illustrated in the following interviewee comment:

“Chinese language, Chinese culture, Chinese people. I am fascinated by China, full stop.”
(International respondent #9)
The above were the major macro environment factors influencing international respondents in their relationship interactions with CEIBS and its associated stakeholders.

5.3.4.3 CEIBS’s Positioning in the Global MBA Market

The following CEIBS mission and vision statements provided insights and exemplified the institution’s strategic positioning in the global MBA market:

“To educate responsible leaders versed in aspects of ‘China Depth, Global Breadth’.”  
(CEIBS Mission)

“To become the most respected International Business School, by linking East and West in teaching, research and business practice; and by promoting China’s social and economic development through high-impact knowledge creation and dissemination”.

(CEIBS Vision)

The data demonstrated CEIBS’s commitment to link East and West in teaching and business practice, which was evident in the high-profiles of their academic faculty, and in their established network of world-renowned MNC recruiters operating across China.

Both Chinese and international respondents emphasised that CEIBS considered the international student body as being one of the critical elements in measuring its success of becoming a well-respected IBS globally. This was also reflected in CEIBS promotional materials, regarding year-on-year growth of international enrolments. As a result, CEIBS admissions service practices varied from Chinese to international students.

For example, Chinese business cultural factors and the higher volume of indigenous applicants may have influenced CEIBS practices in taking a longer time to offer admissions acceptances to Chinese-national applicants. All interviewees voiced concerns that CEIBS potentially ‘cherry-picked’ high-calibre international candidates, and adopted a more scrutinising admissions approach with respect to prospective applicants from China. However, CEIBS had enrolled international students with less work experience and lower-level management positions, as long as they met the minimum MBA entry requirements. CEIBS had adopted a comparatively more relaxed admissions approach
with international applicants, seeking to extend its internationalisation agenda; as exemplified in these student comments obtained from interviews:

“I did not like the waiting. But somehow, the longer I waited, the more I was excited to get into CEIBS. I was so happy when I finally got accepted.”

(Chinese respondent #18)

“... It also made me wonder whether CEIBS offered every single international applicant a place on the programme.”

(International respondent #2)

Chinese interviewees criticised the way that CEIBS calculated its numbers of international students. For example, learners born in mainland China who studied a first degree in China, but who had worked in the United States and were currently holding American passports, were classified as international students. From a Chinese respondent point of view, this type of student did not provide true international elements to their study experiences. Also, Chinese and international interviewees expressed concerns as to the high percentage of Japanese and Korean students, emphasising that international diversity in terms of extending beyond Asia was critically important from the perspective of a learner’s study experience, as well as being a differentiating factor for the future success of CEIBS. The following quotations echoed these statements:

“CEIBS should get some real Americans, the blue-eyed ones. Chinese-Americans do not really give you much extra on the course, in terms of studying and career development.”

(Chinese respondent #12)

“It would be much better if we have more international students from Latin America or Africa. For example, there are too many Japanese and Koreas on the programme.”

(International respondent #1)

Respondents also suggested that CEIBS should expand its promotional activities outside China, instead of principally relying on its ‘Financial Times’ league-table rankings and historical linkages with the European Union, in order to combat greater competition in maintaining its positioning in the global MBA market. The student comment below reiterated this point:

“If CEIBS really wants to bring in more international students, it needs to cast a bigger net and actively promote itself overseas, instead of resting largely on its glorious FT rankings.”

(International respondent #4)
5.3.4.4 Technology-Integrated Communication

The CEIBS case study revealed that MBA students had wide access to complex networks, including established personal contacts (e.g. family, friends and employers), new connections to the CEIBS intranet, and in particular the broad social network of Chasedream (e.g. the platform for CEIBS alumni and China-based flagship enterprises), all as a result of pursuing CEIBS MBA programmes. Despite the sizes and bond characteristics (i.e. closeness) of these different networks, all such relationship interactions, especially in terms of communications, were facilitated and empowered by technology. Figure 5.15 illustrates the linkages between technology and different networks in the CEIBS case study, especially the impact on the access of CEIBS students to the independent broad social network, named Chasedream.com.

Figure 5.15: Technology-Integrated Relationship Interactions – in the Case of CEIBS

Interviews revealed that CEIBS recognised the important influence of the Chasedream social network. Blogs listed on Chasedrem.com revealed that members for this social network consisted of high-volumes of active CEIBS alumni, as well as management
executives from China-based premier enterprises, amongst which are established long-term recruiters of CEIBS graduates. Data analysis also reinforced Mazzarol and Hosie (1996)'s research findings that personal knowledge and first-hand experiences were considered as the most influential sources impacting on the student decision-making process. Interviewees perceived alumni as well as employers as crucial opinion-leaders. The CEIBS case study revealed that whilst students were well-aware of Chasedream, it was clear that the institution had strategically directed prospective MBA students towards this well-recognised social website. This was with the aim of maximising its powerful influence on prospective students’ decision-making, especially during the enquiry stage, the application and acceptance stage, and even stretched towards the registration and orientation stage. The following quotation supported this understanding:

“CEIBS chooses big and influential websites like Chasedreams to announce its promotional activities. CEIBS student ambassadors were asked to follow forums and blogs about the institution and answer questions that prospective students raised. It is all well thought-out and managed by CEIBS to guide students until they physically arrive.”

(Chinese respondent #2)

Case analysis demonstrated that to a great extent CEIBS strategically used technology, in the format of social network forums and blogs, to generate interest and enquiries, and convert applicants to registered students. It did this by using the powerful conversion engine of word-of-mouth (Elliott and Healy, 2001; Helgesen and Nesset, 2007; Voss, 2009) from CEIBS alumni and its associated high-profile MNCs. In contrast, technology-facilitated relationship interactions at the CEIBS intranet were very limited. It was evident that CEIBS did not place much emphasis or encourage students to interact through this in-house network prior to registration and arrival. During the studying and living stage, the CEIBS intranet served predominantly as a blackboard/repository site.

Research data showed that CEIBS students were largely using the Chasedream site throughout their studying experience with the institution. Therefore, regardless of whether the individual CEIBS student was a prospective candidate, an existing student or graduate/alumni, his or her access and interactions with Chasedream was continuous and consistent. CEIBS case analysis also demonstrated that despite the fact that individual students may have required different information during distinct stages of their study
experience with CEIBS, the established volume of information provided was widely accessible at Chasedream. The following comment confirmed this:

“... It [Chasedream] is a very popular website. I did not participate in discussions, but just [by] reading the information and following the conversations, I got loads of information. For me, it was more than sufficient.”

(Chinese respondent #4)

The trustworthy nature, as well as the volume of interactive actors within the Chasedream network, made it possible to provide almost any information and advice required. It was evident that the added-value of Chasedream contributed to student satisfaction with CEIBS (see section 5.3.2.1). As customer satisfaction leads to relationship enhancement and customer loyalty (Grönroos, 1994, 1996, 2000; Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1991) in the HE context, student satisfaction does not only positively impact on student retention (Bejiou, 2005), but also enables long-lasting relationships to be built between students and institutions (see section 5.3.1.6). Therefore, the advantage of having continuity of relationship interactions between CEIBS students and actors in the Chasedream network had both strategic as well as operational applications. Data analysis demonstrated that this broad social network enabled CEIBS to facilitate and harness relationships amongst multiple stakeholders, including MNCs, alumni, and students. As a result, it was possible for CEIBS to attract, convert and maintain individual students and their valuable associated relationships even after graduation (seen in section 5.3.1.6).

In summary, the above macro and micro environmental factors, along with the technology-integrated social network, formed the context in which relationships between students and CEIBS, as well as the other stakeholders of the institution, were interacting and will continuously evolve.
Chapter 6  Case Study of MBS

6.0  Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a holistic analysis of important relationship dynamics, as perceived by MBA students at Manchester Business School (MBS), during the life-cycle of their experiences with the institution.

6.1  Background of MBS

The “old” MBS and the London Business School (LBS) were the first HE institutions in the UK offering postgraduate management programmes in the 1930s, and also became one of the first two business schools offering an MBA course of study. The “new” MBS was formed in 2004 through the merger of University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology’s (UMIST’s) Manchester School of Management, the Institute of Innovation Research (IoIR), the Victoria University of Manchester's (VoM’s) School of Accounting and Finance, and the "old" Manchester Business School.

Today, the “new” MBS is the biggest department of The University of Manchester (UoM), which is the largest single-site university in the UK (Anonymous, 2012j), and one of the most popular universities amongst applicants on the basis of Higher Education Statistics Agencies (HESA) national figures (Anonymous, 2012e). The “new” MBS became the largest campus-based business school in the UK, and is well known for the size of its academic groupings across a range of subject areas, and also for its high percentage of international students (Anonymous, 2012j). According to ‘The Financial Times’ Global Full-Time MBA league tables 2012, the MBS programme is ranked 31st in the world, 11th in Europe and 4th in the UK (Anonymous, 2012k).

6.2  Summary of Research Respondents’ Profiles at MBS

Table 6.1 summarises the profiles of the MBS respondents who participated in the interviews for this research study.
Table 6.1: Profiles of the Respondents from the MBS 2011 MBA Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student No.</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of work experience</th>
<th>Type of Companies</th>
<th>Level of Management</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Number of IBS Applications</th>
<th>Lead-time of Admissions</th>
</tr>
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<td>29</td>
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<td>Private</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>Middle</td>
<td>India</td>
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<td>3 weeks</td>
</tr>
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<td>Thailand</td>
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<td>2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>India</td>
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<td>Portugal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary Note: Male slightly more than Female
Avg. Age: 29.01 years
Avg. Years of work: 6.74 years
Type of Companies: Mixed
Level of Management: Mid and Senior Management
Nationality: 90% non-UK (including MBS)
Avg. Lead-time of Admissions: 3.48 weeks
According to the promotional information pack gathered at the informational session organised by the MBA Office at MBS, the generic profile of these 29 respondents interviewed in 2011 was similar to the characteristics of the institution’s cohort for that year, being from 21 countries with an average age of 29 years. MBS has a high percentage of international students, with over 80% of full-time MBA students from outside of the UK in 2011 (Anonymous, 2012e, 2012j, 2012k). Internal presentations shared by the Marketing and Admissions Department at MBS showed the sharp increase in the enrolment of Indian students on the full-time MBA programme in particular from 2006, with 20.4% of the 2011 cohort coming from India. The current study reflected this, and included 5 Indian interviewees, which represented 17.2% of the respondent population. A limited number of British nationals enrolled on the MBA programme, representing a generic trend of the UK MBA recruitment market (Anonymous, 2012e). In total, there were 5 British students out of 98 enrolments on the 2011 MBA cohort; the current study included 2 of these.

Table 6.1 demonstrated clear consistency in MBS’ admissions lead-times, at an average of 2 to 3 weeks. Respondents on average had over 6.7 years of work experience, from a diverse background of enterprises, with the majority achieving middle and senior management positions prior to pursuing their MBA studies. On average, research respondents applied to 3.5 IBSs including MBS, in particular to European and North American global MBA programme providers.

6.3 Data Analysis at MBS

6.3.1 Actors Involved during the Student’s Experience at MBS

Figure 6.1 provides an overview of the patterns of actors and networks involved whilst the students’ were at MBS. Analysis of the interactive episodes was predominantly from the viewpoint of student respondents obtained during interviews. The following sections explain the thematic patterns for each of the stages of the process that have been identified.
Figure 6.1: Actors Involved during the Students’ Experience at MBS

- S: Student(s)
- AS2: Academic Staff
- IC: Internship Company
- CIBS: Competitive IBs
- OH: Offer Holder
- MWW: MBS Worldwide Office
- ES: Existing students
- AL: Alumni
- FE: Future Employer
- FF: Family and Friends
- CM: Current MBA cohorts
- UoM: University of Manchester
- SA: Student Ambassadors
- AI: Alumni Icon
- CE: Current Employer
- PC: Personal Contacts / Network
- PS: Prospective Student(s)
- AS1: Administrative Staff
- MNC: Multi-national Company
- OI: Overseas Exchange Partner Institutions
- EM: EMBA Students
- OCM: Off-campus Manchester Community
- CMS: Career Management Service
6.3.1.1 Actors Involved during the Enquiries Stage

From the students’ perspective, it was employers, MBS administrative staff, MBS academic staff, friends and families, as well as competitive IBSs who were the principal actors. Figure 6.2 shows the broad range of actors who were involved during the enquiries stage.

**Figure 6.2: Actors Involved during the Enquiries Stage at MBS**

Respondents emphasised their direct and proactive interactions with employers and companies from their home countries, with whom they would like to pursue their careers post-MBA studies. These interactions were aimed at gaining the views of employers, and to evaluate their familiarity with MBS, which were considered essential criteria by prospective students. These points are evident in comments obtained during interviews:

“People in India can relate to Manchester, compared to Cranfield or Strathclyde. Because in India, which was a British Colony, everybody knows about the city, since clothes used to come from there to India. Although the Business School is not that well placed, people can easily relate to it. So it can be sold to people, saying ‘Okay, I am learning from MBS’. Some prospective students will relate to it much more quickly and easily. Compared to other Schools, like Strathclyde and Cranfield, for which they won’t be able to relate...”

(MBS respondent #17)
“The familiarity factor is very high for MBS. You have Manchester United football team which is very famous, and also Manchester is known as a major industrial city that was learned in primary textbooks.”

(MBS respondent #5)

Respondents also contacted the Business School directly for detailed information regarding internship programmes and which companies were involved, since MBS emphasised these as unique aspects of its MBA teaching methods, see below:

“The internship projects, and also the type of companies offering these internships, give a strong message of how good MBS really is.”

(MBS respondent #25)

The data also revealed that respondents interacted with MBS administrative staff in-person at promotional events, often keeping in regular contact through technology-facilitated communications, during the enquiries stage, as well as the application and acceptance stage. For example:

“I met Fiona in New York. Yes, at the MBA World Tour. My father also met Fiona in Mexico, because he was going there for my brother, who’s also doing an MBA. The face-to-face meeting with her was very helpful. I was in regular contact with her afterwards, and also the whole way through my entire application process.”

(MBS respondent #9)

Respondents from Greece, Iran, Portugal, Singapore, Spain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) highlighted that prior to, and during, the enquiries stage they expected direct interactions with MBS academic staff, who were also associated professors teaching either PGT programmes or executive training courses in their home countries. These direct interactive experiences encouraged and inspired them to make further enquiries or applications for MBS MBA programmes, as exemplified in the students’ quotations below:

“I had direct interactions with a MBS professor through the executive training course, which gave me assurances of the academic quality, even before I enquired about the MBA.”

(MBS respondent #28)

“I know Professor X teaches on the MBA programme. He is a true picture of the academic quality of MBS. I was inspired by him to apply, as he also taught me on a PGT course in Iran.”

(MBS respondent #19)
Other respondents felt that they had very limited direct interactions with the academic staff, apart from referring to information provided in promotional materials and made available on the MBS website. However, they held the view that lecturers were important, particularly in the way that they teach and apply knowledge relating to business practices; this was despite the common perception amongst MBA students that IBSs generally provide the same amount of knowledge and all of them tend to use similar text books. This point is evidenced in the comment below:

“Let’s say we are learning Marketing, we will use Kotler, and most of the other business schools use that main text as well. So there is not much difference in the knowledge. I would say, it’s the way the academics’ teach and how they apply that knowledge which makes all the difference.”
(MBS respondent #1)

Interviewees also noted that they interacted with family and friends who had direct experience of the UK, from either having lived, worked or studied in the UK, as well as having visited the UK. This was particularly visible among Indian respondents; all of them confirmed that they have relatives and friends living in different cities of the UK. Despite the fact that the MBS MBA cohort consisted of a limited number of British nationals, amongst the respondents, 19 out of 29 had some form of connection with the UK, prior to their studies at MBS. These interactions with family and friends, and their personal experiences regarding life in the UK, influenced the enquiries and applications processes of respondents; as indicated by the following quotation.

“My uncles are living in Birmingham. It’s close enough to Manchester. They explain to me about all the things needed to know about life in the UK.”
(MBS respondent #18)

Analysis revealed that respondents actively searched for information regarding successful MBS alumni icons, as they strongly viewed these successful examples as reflecting the high-calibre of candidates on the MBA programme. MBS equally recognised the influences of the success stories of alumni, as they were made available on the MBS website and in its promotional materials. From the students’ perspective, these alumni icons reaffirmed their belief in career prosperity that MBS could potentially offer, as illustrated below:
“...Tesco and Sainsbury are household names in the UK. The Tesco’s Chief Executive was from Manchester Business School. So if this guy was straight from MBS and reached such a position, why not me? That’s the way I thought about it...”

(MBS respondent #20)

Interviewees emphasised that they also contacted other competitive IBSs, predominantly from European and Northern America countries. Most of these interactions were carried out indirectly by referring to promotional materials in the public domain, especially ‘The Financial Times’ global MBA league tables. Additional information, such as visa success rates and immigration policies, were also taken into consideration, as in the following comment:

“I used the FT league tables. You have to, everyone uses it. Otherwise, I would not know where to start. Also, the success rate of visas, working permits, etc, such information is also important.”

(MBS respondent #6)

Respondents confirmed that they had interactions with existing students on the MBA programme at MBS to gain trustworthy feedback, by referring to their direct on-course experiences, instead of solely relying on the promotional materials provided by the Business School.

In summary, during the enquiries stage, prospective students interacted with an array of HEI stakeholders, including employers, MBS academic staff, MBS administrative staff, friends and family, competitive IBSs, alumni and existing students. These interactions and feedback evaluations enabled the prospective applicant to make an informed selection of their desirable MBA study destination.

6.3.1.2 Actors Involved during the Application and Acceptance Stage

At the application and acceptance stage, the broad range of actors that prospective students interacted with remained similar to that of the enquiries stage. The characteristics of relationship interactions were rather different, in particular such interactions between students and MBS administrative staff (i.e. from the MBA Office), along with interactions between and amongst students (i.e. existing students and prospective students). Figure 6.3 illustrates the main actors involved.
Interviewees explained that their relationship interactions with MBS administrative staff were “above, beyond and better than any other competitive IBS” as indicated by MBS respondent #26. The entire application and acceptance process was viewed as smooth and impressive from MBS; see the comments below from selected interviewees:

“MBS communicated with me directly, regularly and clearly; informing me on which day I would get my acceptance decision, with information about scholarships. This was all very smooth and reassuring. The entire process was very friendly and professional. I do think that’s where MBS, I would say, won my heart.”

(MBS respondent #11)

“In terms of the application process, Manchester is above, beyond, better than any of the other business schools. And by better, I mean more personal, more efficient, being quick to respond.”

(MBS respondent #26)

Interviewees highlighted the recruitment/admissions team had assigned responsibilities, and that each team member led on service provision to students from specific countries and regions; and in doing so, drawing on their knowledge and expertise. Respondents appreciated that this dedicated service enabled relationships to be built and strengthened between individual prospective students and MBS administrative staff. For example:

“It’s a good idea to have a specific and dedicated person for the Middle East, as s/he has relevant knowledge and expertise. All the times when I had a problem, I just asked questions and obtained their response to my concerns very fast. That’s proper customer relationships.”

(MBS respondent #10)
Data analysis also revealed that during the application and acceptance stage, prospective students made an effort to visit MBS, by mainly combining it with their interview trip to the School, in order to gain the personal experience of MBS staff and existing MBA students. The respondents were impressed with such service provision, as evidenced in the comment below:

“I wanted to come and have a look at the Business School, because I feel that I was going to spend so much money on the MBA course. From the time I called to say ‘I am coming’, and then being greeted and welcomed, I had a personal tour of the campus, I met with students, I met Dr X the Programme Director, and also with Y from Careers Management, chatting at length with then. All of that was flawless, in my mind.”

(MBS respondent #13)

The analysis of the data also demonstrated that direct interactions between and amongst offer-holders, as well as between offer-holders and existing students, had increased significantly through a technology-supported exclusive intranet. Relationship interactions amongst students were driven by their own questions and needs, as echoed by this interviewee:

“I like MBS better. Through MBS.Net, I know what to prepare and to see where to live. Classmates and MBS students talk and share a lot of insights, like the reasons why they come to Manchester. I think I confirmed my decision of joining Manchester because of what they say.”

(MBS respondent #28)

6.3.1.3 Actors Involved during the Registration and Orientation Stage

Whilst prospective students become enrolled students during the registration and orientation stage, they continued to interact with friends and families, as well as alumni. The investigation of relationship episodes also revealed that the actors and themes were characteristically different from the previous stages. Figure 6.4 illustrates that, from the perspective of a registered student, predominantly their interactions with MBS staff (i.e. administrative staff and academic staff), as well as with other registered students (i.e. existing students from previous cohorts, and classmates from the same MBA cohort), had increased.
MBS.Net had enabled respondents to get to know a broad range of actors from the point when they confirmed their admissions acceptance. Interactions with MBS administrative and academic staff through face-to-face engagement was viewed as the natural progression after enrolment. MBS internal news bulletins and information sessions confirmed that such administrative and academic staff were briefed to be extra-engaging with new arrivals, making students feel welcomed and supported during the honeymoon period of the MBA programme (i.e. the pre-MBA course), in order to help students acclimatise into their new studying and living environment. This was evident in MBS promotional materials, as well as echoed in the following comments:

“Your MBA journey begins as soon as you arrive in Manchester. We give you a month of intensive pre-MBA activities, so when you start the core MBA programme you already feel part of a close-knit team, ready to face the next 18 months with confidence.”

(Think Manchester MBA, promotional brochure 2012)

“I thought one of the things that were very valuable was the ability to schedule an appointment with the MBA Programme Director. So, you instantly had a contact. I thought it was extremely valuable, as I expected to wait at least two weeks for such an opportunity.”

(MBS respondent #23)
With the recognition that the MBA was one of many degree courses offered by MBS and The University of Manchester, interview analysis also revealed that respondents had interacted with other administrative and academic staff (i.e. from the library, sports and accommodation, as well as academics from the law school), who may be broadly linked to MBS or the university’s organisational structure.

Interviewees revealed that they had met their fellow students, talking on a daily basis and gaining in-depth understanding about their classmate’s individual characteristics, as well as their strengths and weakness. These interactions potentially enabled respondents to make life-long friendships with their fellow students, as illustrated below:

“I made quite a few friends during the pre-MBA programme. We talked on a daily basis, and formed potentially life-lasting friendships with them.”

(MBS respondent #2)

“…I made good contacts and great friendships with my classmates, because they were in my groups during the pre-MBA…”

(MBS respondent #15)

The respondents also interacted with existing MBA students (i.e. the previous year’s cohort), who were entering the final six months of the MBA programme, when the new period of registration and orientation started. Interviewees explained that they proactively interacted with their course ‘seniors’ to find out more about their personal views and experiences of the MBA programme. Respondents stressed that interactions with these existing students were extremely beneficial, and revealed that useful study approaches, such as team-working and time-management techniques, were shared openly to help them minimise study mistakes and pitfalls. Interviewees confirmed that these interactions helped them to form realistic expectations about the MBA programme on which they were about to commence in-full. Analysis also demonstrated that respondents looked forward to the programme after having been encouraged by their ‘seniors’, especially with highlights of the MBA programme, as noted in this comment:

“Liam was a year ahead of me, and was extremely helpful in providing insights into study approaches. He mentioned ‘The M&C Project is one of the highlights. It’s very demanding and involves live negotiation with executive consultants. It’s a real hands-on experience. You will enjoy it’. And he was right. I did enjoy it.”

(MBS respondent #1)
Respondents also noted that during the registration and orientation stage, they interacted with the local Manchester community, including people living close to the School and having good knowledge about life in the city. This further helped MBA students smoothly and quickly settle into Manchester. These people, including general residents, have become friendly social groups for MBA students, especially at the beginning of the programme. These interactions were initiated in places, e.g. local pubs, restaurants, letting agencies and neighbouring areas of the Business School. The following quotation provides a glimpse of the complex interactions between respondents and the off-campus Manchester community:

“Meeting so many people, the locals, and settling-in, finding a house, and other things. It was a very good experience, and we socialised a lot in the British pubs. It’s great to be close to the city, and to feel so connected to the distinctive life of the UK.”

(MBS respondent #29)

6.3.1.4 Actors Involved during the Studying and Living Stage

When the interviews were conducted, all respondents were around 10 months into the programme. Due to the MBA programme structure, which is branded to promote the ethos of ‘Original Thinking Applied’, academic staff were considered as the main actor, as well as the leading actor who facilitated student interactions with their classmates, sponsorship companies and administrative staff. Figure 6.5 presents the thematic groupings of the principal actors involved during this stage.
Interviewees confirmed that one of the perceived value provisions of the MBA programme was to broaden their extent of knowledge. They stressed that their daily interactions with academic staff were an important part of their learning experience. Respondents also emphasised that the all-round quality of academics was a critical element contributing to their overall satisfaction with MBS. The data suggested that whilst respondents recognised the reputation of MBS academics, they strongly believed that the direct experience of academics was important in applying theories to the business world and in understanding how these theories actually worked. The following comment reinforced this point:

“From a practical perspective, because business is about real life, I feel as if some of the faculty are too academic. I expected a little bit more from the faculty about real-world application, and really come to the table saying ‘This is how this applies from my everyday experience’. That is so much more valuable than, for example, when someone says ‘Oh, I studied this company’.”

(MBS respondent #12)
Interviewees also explained that they preferred to be more realistic, in being practical rather than theoretical, during their MBA studies, noting that they could read textbooks at their own leisure and ask the experts any theoretical questions. While in the MBS class, they sought to obtain practical views and experiences as much as possible:

“The academic staff are academically reputable, with intensive publications in cutting-edge journals. Though, I am learning a MBA, not a doctorate”.

(MBS respondent #14)

“If you are twenty four or twenty five, it would be okay (in terms of learning the theoretical knowledge). But at my age (30), I say what’s in it for me. From a real-world perspective, I would like to have more professors who bring specific practical knowledge. I could read textbooks at my own leisure.”

(MBS respondent #13)

The data revealed that student respondents considered the MBS academics as vitally important in their pursuit of knowledge, and their main source, not necessarily the only source, of learning. Interviews and documents gathered indicated that this was largely due to the ‘Manchester Method’, i.e. ‘Original Thinking Applied’ – with real-life project-based learning approaches embedded into the MBA programme and championed by MBS academic staff. The following example, Table 6.2, illustrates the MBS MBA programme structure, consisting of six months’ worth of projects in four distinctive business management areas, such as not-for-profit, mergers and acquisitions, UK consultancy and international business.
Analysis indicated that respondents appreciated the hands-on approach and the added-value of working with a diverse range of clients, in building up a strong network of international contacts whom have a real impact on their career development, and in testing theories immediately that relate to real-world situations so as not to feel completely removed from the commercial world. This aspect of learning at MBS was valued by respondents in comparison to other rival MBA providers:

"MBS programme and teaching methods in comparison to Durham and Cranfield are better. The international business project gives the opportunities to work on a live activity with real companies. My fear was that I'd stay in the classroom and be left so far behind the real business world. Instead, the course here kept the business world accessible and alive via IB projects".

(MBS respondent #18)

Interviews demonstrated that students considered the academic staff being at the forefront of MBS service provision, and were inseparable from the whole business
school during the studying and living stage. Respondents also emphasised that any
deficiency of interactions between students and the academic staff led to a failure of
relationship development between MBS and students. Interviewees suggested academics
should be considered as the engine of MBS service provision, and should be adequately
supported by administrative staff. Respondents also stated that they should remain in the
heart of the institution’s system and service provision. The following student’s comments
confirmed this understanding.

“It’s all for one (all being the academics, one being the students), and one for all (one being the
academics and all being the students); we should be in the heart of the system and service. The
added-value of this MBA programme largely rest on what the professors could offer. If the
academics fail in delivering on your expectations, then the entire business school fails you. The
professors are the engine, should be a well-oiled engine of the institution with the support of the
administrators.”

(MBS respondent #27)

Analysis revealed that interacting and networking between students within the same
cohort were constant and continuous throughout the studying and living stage.
Respondents noted that interactions with their fellow students led to friendships, and
were critically important to their overall studying and living experience at MBS. They
stressed great appreciation of the international nature and diversity of the MBS student
population, along with its added-value in enabling their understanding of different
cultures and business practices in the international context. This underpinned the
expectations of students in choosing the MBS MBA programme, as illustrated from the
quotations below:

“I definitely felt the importance of learning from my classmates, especially those with different
work experiences and also from different nationalities and backgrounds. This contributes
significantly to the learning process. For example, whenever you have a case study associated
with a particular industry, there is usually someone who has worked at that industry and can tell
you, ‘But really this is what happens, and maybe these are the reasons why’. You can surely gain
a lot of deeper knowledge and direct understandings from someone with that experience’.

(MBS respondent #20)

“Diversity in the MBA cohort is the most desirable factor in why I chose MBS. There are a lot of
relevant experiences from my classmates of use on the course. The sharing of knowledge and
experience is very beneficial to our cohort.”

(MBS respondent #3)
“Maybe in two years’ time I will look back and think, ‘That was all I really needed. I needed to have group work with people who were motivated or as enthusiastic as me’. Because not all people in life are, you know.”

(MBS respondent #21)

Interview data demonstrated that whilst student respondents interacted with academics and fellow students from the same cohort during the studying and living stage, they also continued their interactions with other actors, including administrative staff from the IBS and/or the university, the students in the cohort one year ahead of them, alumni, sponsorship companies (i.e. relating directly to the practical aspects of the MBA programme), and the off-campus Manchester community.

6.3.1.5 Actors Involved during the Career Development Stage

Analysis of the data showed that career service provision, during the career development stage of the student experience, co-existed alongside the studying and living stage. Respondents indicated that they hardly initiated any interactions themselves, but predominately interacted with a wide range of actors, led by the Career Management Service (CMS) at MBS to enhance their employability globally. Figure 6.6 illustrates the categories of actors who were involved during the career development stage.

Figure 6.6: Actors Involved during the Career Development Stage at MBS
The data revealed that the CMS Office proactively drove relationship building with current students on behalf of MBS, through an extended and wide range of established stakeholders, as soon as one month after course enrolment. From the viewpoint of student respondents, they considered CMS as a distinct entity of MBS, whilst other stakeholders were recognised as CMS’s assets and extended networks. Interviewees really appreciated the value of these closely associated actors/stakeholders, due to their effects on overall relationship development between students and the School, as well as students’ satisfaction with MBS’s service provision.

Respondents explained that the CMS engaged with current students as soon as the MBA programme commenced. Analysis revealed that students’ expectation on CMS’ service provision varied, with the shared view that CMS was often lacking in resources as its system could have been more robust. The following comments echo these points:

“I don’t think that Career Management will hand the job to us, but I expect they will look after every one of us, to make sure that each of us who want to get an internship are offered a place. I expect them to be more proactive on that stance.”

(MBS respondent #3)

“I think at the beginning of the year, they [CMS] had all fields covered. I think as soon as Tina left, the balance shifted tremendously. As soon as you remove one individual, the system kind of crumbled.”

(MBS respondent #6)

“CMS needs more people so they can be proactive and care for each student, and tailor their services to individual students as well. Because, there are some of us in the MBA cohort who feel that only the loud ones in class get to talk to the advisors and get noticed.”

(MBS respondent #21)

The CMS managed the ‘Manchester gold’ mentoring programme, as a key career counselling service jointly delivered through established alumni volunteers. Respondents explained that this mentoring programme was designed to encourage and inspire existing MBA students, as well as facilitate relationship development between current students and MBS alumni. However, whilst CMS encouraged current MBA students to be proactive in contacting and building relationship with alumni, the regular input from alumni were considered to be limited by the respondents. Nevertheless, interviewees stressed that alumni who sponsored or who were involved in real-life projects were often
very supportive. These direct contacts were recognised as extremely valuable by respondents for their future career development, as testified below:

“Alumni involved in the real-life MBA projects are very supportive and approachable. But the ones involved in the mentoring programme are not as helpful as I had expected, maybe because they don’t have enough experience. You could feel the distance as they are not so devoted.”

(MBS respondent #12)

Respondents explained that CMS managed an overseas exchange programme involving globally-reputable IBSs. The students placed great emphasis on the value of overseas partner institutions as a gateway leading to international networks. They also considered these associated overseas IBSs as the benchmark from which to gain indications regarding MBS’s brand power in those overseas countries. However, interviews indicated that the application rate from the MBA cohort for overseas exchange programmes were very low. For example, 5 out of 29 respondents expressed their interest in taking overseas exchange opportunities as part of their course, and considered it as a backup option if they could not secure internships or other projects. Student respondents also explained that given the high levels of internationalisation associated with the MBS MBA programme (i.e. having over 80% international students on the programme, with over 35 different nationalities), they considered the experience with MBS as part of their international experience, which was potentially more internationalised than some of the IBSs on the exchange partnership list. Their desire to stay and work in the UK was another reason they preferred MBA internships to the exchange programme. The comments below illustrate this (see Appendix J for MBS MBA exchange partners).

“It has already been something international for me being here in Manchester. On this point, I am more interested in the international business project than the exchange programme.”

(MBS respondent #2)

“I think that the exchange programme is a great opportunity for all students to gain international experiences in different cultures and environments. Importantly, for me, I could just look back and compare other universities with MBS, so I know that I made the right MBA choice.”

(MBS respondent #7)

“I am particularly not that interested in an exchange programme. Being here in Manchester is my international experience. As I want to work in the UK at the end of the day, I don’t see the immediate benefit of going on an overseas exchange.”

(MBS respondent #9)
CMS also facilitated direct relationship building between current students and companies. Respondents expected more MNCs to provide seminars and workshops, which were regarded as important sources of learning business practice during the MBA studies, as well as critical assets for enhancing their potential global employability. Interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the limited number of MNCs that CMS was associated with, and emphasised that from their viewpoints internships/job offers transform the true value of a MBS MBA from a qualification to possible employment. Such points are illustrated in the quotations that follow (Appendix K lists the main MNC recruiters associated with the MBA programme at MBS).

“Many blue-chip firms say ‘No, we are only interested in INSEAD, LBS; we don’t hire MBS’. From my personal perspective, maybe it is their responsibilities to try and change this. Probably we won’t have the opportunity or benefit immediately, but our next year fellow MBA students maybe will. It’s not really good enough to just be told ‘No, they don’t hire from MBS MBAs’.”
(MBS respondent #18)

“CMS’ role is primarily building relationships with potential employers and providing more of an industry scope. So they should continue to make efforts to bring companies onto campus, and perhaps develop more internships, in general.”
(MBS respondent #29)

“We were told that CMS is only a platform. I would have been happy if the School provided an effective service, which means 2 or 3 internships or job offers. Otherwise, where you learned your MBA has no real difference.”
(MBS respondent #23)

Data indicated that CMS worked closely with MBS offices operating in Brazil, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, UAE and USA to obtain intelligence on their employment markets. Interviews confirmed this type of information was used to guide MBA students in their career planning. Respondents explained that these global offices facilitated and supported MBS students when working on international business projects; recognising that the support service was accessible and helpful. They also suggested CMS should have worked closely with these offices to improve MBS careers provision, through engagement with more MNCs in the countries. The following comments emphasise this:

“My experience with MBS worldwide office in Dubai was generally positive. It would be better if they could really bring on board MNCs and big local companies which could offer internships or jobs. At this moment, CMS don’t really have enough companies to go around.”
(MBS respondent #18)
“I know it’s a two-way street, and so MBS cannot hand over a job to you. But it will be good if they had great connections directly to companies. More work needs to be done by CMS through MBS worldwide offices. If there are limited internships or job offer in the UK, then CMS should build relationships with more industries overseas. I would be delighted to have an internship experience in Brazil or China, for instance.”

(MBS respondent #29)

It was highlighted that the Projects Office has been a new creation since 2010, aiming to coordinate with companies and organisations in facilitating the four major MBA projects, which are the key building blocks of the programme and have strong implications for enhancing employability through hands-on-experience. Respondents explained that they interacted closely with the Projects Office regarding self-sourced internships and in gaining support to established business contacts; as echoed in the following quotation:

“Colleagues at the MBA Project Office are well organised and provide good support for the business project that was self-sourced. I am not dependent on them to find me an internship or a job, so we are fine.”

(MBS respondent #1)

Interviews demonstrated that there were few interactions initiated or proactively driven by students with other actors during the career development service stage. It was suggested that the predominant reason could be in student respondents placing high expectations on MBS CMS service provision, so that they did not feel the urgency or need to proactively develop career options themselves while being on the course. Equally, due to the intensity of the MBA programme, respondents felt that they had limited time to develop contacts with industries, as noted below:

“You may say an MBA is an MBA. At Manchester it is really hard, especially the group work. Without the group work, it would be an absolute doddle, it would just be easy. The group work drives me up the wall and eats into my time to make contacts with companies. It makes me go home and kick the dog, as we say!”

(MBS respondent #21)

6.3.1.6 Actors Involved during the Graduation and Alumni Stage

Figure 6.7 illustrates the major actors who would be potentially involved during the graduation and alumni stage of the student experience with MBS.
The interviewees would recommend MBS to prospective students who were interested in pursuing MBA studies, whilst making sure they had ‘realistic expectations’. Respondents considered their overall study experiences were positive, and also pointed out a number of areas where MBS needed further improvement, so that future MBA students would not have to go through a similar struggle:

“I don’t want to mislead people. I want to make sure that my recommendation leads to reality. Prospective students have to readjust their expectations on MBS. Otherwise, they are going to be frustrated with the fact that they won’t have guaranteed internships/jobs offers after graduation.”
(MBS respondent #4)

“I will recommend MBS to others. But, I have to say to him or her as a prospective MBA candidate, that you need to have the correct expectations, not too much by way of expectations.”
(MBS respondent #12)

Respondents expressed strongly that they have different value expectations in comparison to standard PGT and UG students, especially when it comes to aspects of employability enhancement. Therefore, they felt that there should be continuity with careers guidance and support, at least in the first year after MBA graduation. Importantly, interviewees noted that the generic MBS and The University of Manchester alumni network, which host all MBS and university graduates respectively, could potentially weaken the bond between MBA students and MBS. Respondents confirmed that none of them had registered their details with the university alumni office. They also indicated
that they would feel lost, less cared for, and see little value in being a member of the university alumni network, which is the home for all graduates across Schools and disciplines; the following student comments confirming this understanding:

“Well, where is the alumni network? Where do you want your alumni network to be? With the size of this university, you don’t really know where to start. Ideally we should have an exclusive MBA network.”

(MBS respondent #25)

“It would be extremely helpful to have extended careers support, especially after graduation, as many of us are exploring job opportunities in the UK and Europe. I anticipate that once the MBA course is finished, we will be on our own.”

(MBS respondent #4)

Student respondents also suggested that MBA worldwide offices could harness alumni relationship interactions. These overseas representative offices could be the hubs for all MBS MBA alumni, as interviewees emphasised the importance of the local contacts in relation to their career development:

“The access to the local MBA alumni network would be super important. For instance, if MBS worldwide office in Dubai could do that, then it would be fantastic.”

(MBS respondent #17)

6.3.2 Interactive Activities Involved during the Student’s Experience at MBS

Figure 6.8 illustrates the patterns of interactive activities involved in the six of the stages that comprise the students’ experience at MBS. The data showed the range of activities organised by MBS, as well as those initiated by student respondents. These are described below.
Figure 6.8: Interactive Activities at MBS
6.3.2.1 Interactive Activities Involved during the Enquiries Stage

The data illustrated that interactive activities between students and MBS were far from limited. Figure 6.9 outlines the mixed range of these interactions, including activities that were organised by MBS administrative staff, initiated by students, and those promoted by MBS academics.

Respondents were aware of MBS promotional activities on-campus (i.e. open days, information sessions, ambassador programme, on-campus visits, etc.), as well as overseas recruitment events (i.e. the MBA Tour, QS World Tour, Access 1:1, etc.). These interactive activities were recognised amongst interviewees as commonly established approaches adopted by other rival business schools, especially reputable European and North American institutions, as seen in Table 6.3.
Interviews confirmed that 17 out of 29 respondents attended open days, 11 out of these 17 using the MBS ambassador programme, and 5 attending public seminars. 7 out of the 29 were previously taught by MBS academics overseas, whilst 22 from these 29 students attended MBS overseas recruitment activities.

Online assessment, in particular, was the interface frequently used and considered to be useful amongst respondents during the enquiries stage, as the following sample quotes testify:

“Prior to my application, I went onto the MBS website and did an online assessment. The online service helped to verify my qualification, work experience, and English proficiency as being suitable for applying to MBS. That was self-reassuring.”

(MBS respondent #2)

“The online assessment has been a useful indicator, which gives you a clear idea as to whether it is worthwhile going through the application process or not in full.”

(MBS respondent #11)

Students also interacted with other actors, such as existing students, through email communications, telephone conversations, and face-to-face meetings.
6.3.2.2 Interactive Activities Involved during the Application/Acceptance Stage

Interactive activities during the application and acceptance stage remained largely the same as in the enquiries stage. However, their characteristics altered somewhat; in particular, regarding the frequency and preference of using the mixed range of activities organised by MBS. Importantly, interactive activities principally took place at MBS.Net, which was facilitated through a dedicated intranet service. Figure 6.10 summarises these.

Figure 6.10: Codes of Interactive Activities during the Application/Acceptance Stage

The entry requirements, essay questions, GMAT, etc., required by MBS, were very similar to other IBSs. The data showed that students evaluated interactive activities between themselves and MBS; interactive frequency and efficiency were highly valued amongst respondents. On average, e-mail response time had a 48-hour turnaround, and the waiting time between application and interview was one week; with outstanding candidates informed about their scholarship award often within a week after they attended an interview. Respondents stressed that MBS administrative staff (i.e. the recruitment and admissions team) engaged with prospective applicants, in particular
offer-holders, on a regular, one-to-one, face-to-face basis during the application process.

The following quotation illustrates this:

“Within a week, I got an e-mail saying you are on schedule for an interview. 48 hours after the interview, I received another e-mail informing me I had obtained a MBA place. One week after, I then received an e-mail congratulating me on a scholarship award. The entire application was smooth and impressive. My face-to-face meeting with MBS staff was also very professional and friendly.”

(MBA respondent #4)

Interviewees confirmed that offer-holders were given their own username and password after confirming their acceptance of the MBA programme, so that they could start interactions directly with other offer-holders, existing students, MBS appointed staff, alumni and student ambassadors through MBS.Net. Respondents felt strongly that this intranet enabled them to develop relationships with their classmates and existing students prior to registration and orientation. The following quotations reiterated such interpretations:

“MBS.Net was outsourced and designed by a software company. It’s a pretty good set up for the School, and made the transition much easier for prospective students; at least in my own case.”

(MBS respondent #21)

“Everyone (classmates) knows everyone. Everyone is there via MBS.Net. In some ways, you are curious and want to know your classmates before meeting them in-person. That way you don’t have to struggle remembering their names and making friends with them when the MBA starts.”

(MBS respondent #15)

Respondents emphasised that the information posted on MBS.Net was very useful, and such interactions through this online source were extremely beneficial. Interviews confirmed that all respondents had used MBS.Net prior to their arrival, although a very small number of them chose to read the information, preferring to be in the background instead of proactively and fully participating in most discussions. Respondents also explained that they got to know people from the question-and-answer section, and also saw the faces and photographs of their MBA classmates via MBS.Net. By doing so, they became familiar with each other’s backgrounds and work experiences before registration and orientation. The sense of MBS community made respondents feel relaxed, and they could then more easily relate to one another before meeting directly on the programme.
MBS.Net also enabled respondents to transition from a professional workplace to a full-time study mode in a foreign country; see below:

“It [MBS.Net] gives you more of a sense of security, a sense of community, belonging and acceptance. I came all the way from Asia, and in the back of my head I am worried about what I did not know. So, when you realised that other classmates had similar feelings and apprehensions, you then felt so much better, because everyone was in a similar boat.”
(MBS respondent #14)

“... I used to read about the questions to ask... I knew most of the people via MBS.Net. So for a person like me who was in corporate life for seven years, the transition was made that much easier to academe. So mentally, I said ‘Okay, I can go there, and I can fit in’...”
(MBS respondent #10)

It was broadly recognised that MBS.Net benefits the business school. It enabled respondents to form a sense of community with a broad range of MBS stakeholders prior to commencing on the programme.

6.3.2.3 Interactive Activities Involved during the Registration/Orientation Stage

Increasing numbers of interactive activities took place during the registration and orientation stage which facilitated relationship development, in particular between students and MBS, as well as between and amongst students from the same MBA cohort. Figure 6.11 illustrates a number of activities initiated by students themselves, including e-mail, telephone and face-to-face communication, social gatherings with actors whom they had established one-to-one relationships in the past, through MBS.Net virtual interactions, or met after their arrival in Manchester. Figure 6.11 also shows a wider range of activities organised by MBS, including the pre-MBA programme and orientation week.
The pre-MBA was viewed as a valued activity, which was echoed in respondent comments:

“Our intensive four-week introductory course, not only gives you the skills and techniques to start your MBA with confidence, but also helps you hone your interpersonal and team-working skills; essential for success in your MBA and beyond.”

(MBA Welcome Pack, 2012)

“The pre-MBA was useful as well for me, as I hadn’t been in an academic environment for ten years, so it was useful to get back on to that way of learning. It is a learning curve; it’s a nice gentle way of easing you back into it all before things on the course really start.”

(MBS respondent #21)

Respondents viewed the pre-MBA programme as the honeymoon period of their studies, in having direct access to MBA administrative and academic staff, along with fellow student classmates, to settle into their new environment and develop close relationships:

“Pre-MBA was enjoyable and so well organised. Very good team-building events brought the class together. I thought that it was a good way to get to know people, the whole camaraderie in the class. It is a good preparation before just throwing you straight into the full course.”

(MBS respondent #6)
“Pre-MBA gave us the opportunity to gel with classmates. You had to mingle with your peers and get to know each other better, as you will spend 18 months with them on the programme.”

(MBS respondent #16)

The Brathay orientation week was recognised as the highlight of the pre-MBA programme, enabling respondents to set-off to a good start in their MBA studies at MBS. The following quotations illustrate this:

“Brathay was the flagship of the pre-MBA course. First of all, I became familiar with some of my classmates very well, since we lived there with each other, spending twenty hours a day together. We basically had to get to know each other.”

(MBS respondent #7)

“Brathay was a 24/7 operation. I am sure that you heard it from everybody. It was a brilliant experience. It was also very useful because we got to know each other very well. All things were positive. It set us off to a good start.’

(MBS respondent #13)

Interviewees also explained that they arranged informal meetings and socialised with people they had initially known through MBS.Net after their arrival. The face-to-face interactions and support given by people already in the MBS system were invaluable. Student respondents felt strongly that meetings and sharing experiences with classmates, who were also new to MBS and the environment, were extremely beneficial. These interactions and mutual support between and amongst students provided courage and emotional comfort, with respondents reassuring themselves as not being alone and in unfamiliar territory. The following examples illustrate this:

“In the first week of the course there are not many classes. Since I knew almost everybody from MBS.Net for a while, we socialised a lot as well. We went to pubs and restaurants, and had different kinds of food. And yes, that was very useful in terms of building friendships.”

(MBS respondent #11)

“It was good to know that your classmates felt the same way as you were. Everyone was a bit apprehensive about the new environment and unfamiliar territory that we were in.”

(MBS respondent #6)

6.3.2.4 Interactive Activities Involved during the Studying and Living Stage

The analysis of empirical data demonstrated that a number of activities took place during the studying and living stage, these driven by the academic staff, sponsorship companies,
current students and the administrative staff. Figure 6.12 illustrates the different types of interactive activities.

Figure 6.12: Codes of Interactive Activities during the Studying / Living Stage at MBS

Respondents confirmed that interactive activities between students and the academic staff predominantly took place in classroom settings, with supplementary face-to-face tutorials either with individual students or the assigned group members. Respondents suggested that the level of practical experience and teaching styles represented by academics varied, which potentially effected students’ overall satisfactions with MBS. The following students’ comments exemplified this notion:

“Their [academic staff] knowledge expertise and practical experience vary. Some of them have extensive experiences in business management for leading corporate and consultancy firms. Their prime real business life examples were really valuable to learn from and be inspired.”
(MBS respondent #18)

“It is difficult to judge the individual quality of the academics [at MBS]. Personally I think there are wide variations due to their teaching styles. Whether that comes across in lectures is a different story, as it depends on their individual teaching styles. Some professors were very reputable, though this does not guarantee they are competent communicators.”
(MBS respondent #24)
Data analysis also demonstrated that interactive activities between and amongst current students were constant and continuous, which mainly occurred in classrooms, within assigned groups, through self-sourced projects and at social activities. Respondents emphasised that the project work and group work had dominated their studying and living experiences. The following quotations confirmed the intensity of the group work, as well as the respondents’ appreciation of the real-life projects and the involvement of their fellow classmates:

“At one point of time, I was working with seven groups, which was tough. But you get inspired, as I have handled that, and now I can deal with any challenges in real business.”

(MBS respondent #7)

“I like the structure of the MBA programme, the project work and group work. I felt the programme fit was what I wanted, especially all the different real-life projects. The fact that we all come from different countries and with different work experiences, it made the whole learning experience on the course even more valuable and inspiring.”

(MBS respondent #19)

Respondents also recognised the importance of social activities, in particular their added-value in facilitating relationship building and in forming friendships amongst fellow students from the MBA programme. Interviewees illustrated that the School organised some main social events jointly with sponsorship companies, as part of the MBA programme structure. Respondents explained that these events included the welcome party, MBA ball, cultural nights, MBA sports event, MBA cricket league tournament, etc. Interviewees used the motto of ‘working hard and playing hard’, since the School expected students to immerse themselves in student life beyond the classroom, and to have fun and relax while making important business contacts and friends for life.

Interviewees also mentioned other social activities that were formulated on a spontaneous basis and took place around holidays, birthdays or in response to ad hoc suggestions to build in relaxation time and reduce the stress of the intense MBA studies.
6.3.2.5 Interactive Activities Involved during the Career Development Stage

During the career development stage interactive activities were predominantly driven by the CMS. These consisted of one-to-one meetings, advice on career paths, internship and job search strategies, support in building professional relationships, access to online career assessment tools, application reviews, and business development, all to promote the MBS MBA to corporate recruiters, as well as the co-ordination of the ‘Manchester gold’ mentoring programme.

Respondents were concerned about a lack interaction with alumni; equally, the vast majority of respondents placed more importance on international projects over the overseas exchange programme. Interviewees also strongly indicated that the monthly company presentation and information sessions were insufficient, as they had been expecting companies to provide seminars and workshops more frequently. The following comment illustrates this:

“From a passive standpoint, there are few companies that come on-campus. This should not be the nature of the MBA provision here. It certainly should not be the way the system works. MBS should pull in more employers and global players. I am finding it a little bit disappointing.”

(MBS respondent #2)

Interviewees explained that their interactive activities with Manchester worldwide offices and the in-house Project Office were principally driven by international projects that they were involved in.

There were few interactive activities initiated and driven by students during the career development stage. This was largely due to student respondents’ reliance on CMS service provision to gain internships and/or job offers.

6.3.1.6 Interactive Activities Involved during the Graduation and Alumni Stage

Student respondents anticipated that during the graduation and alumni stage, interactive activities would reduce drastically. Interviewees confirmed that they would principally
be using internet communications to maintain contact with Manchester worldwide offices, share their personal experiences with prospective students, and try to harness their friendships with MBA alumni preferably. Data analysis revealed that MBS.Net was no longer the virtual platform available for MBA graduates. Equally, it was not the type of network that student respondents, i.e. future alumni, would like to use. Documentation (e.g. the MBS website) shows that alumni interaction with MBS came through a number of internet-based channels, including Twitter, Facebook, MBS News, etc.

6.3.3 Atmosphere Surrounding Students and MBS

6.3.3.1 The Students’ Perspective of Evolving Relationship Atmosphere

Håkansson ed., (1982) placed great importance on interactive activities as one of the key constructs underpinning the Interaction Approach. An evaluation of the strength of activities that had taken place between actors allowed an understanding of the nature of relationships and its effect, i.e. the relationship atmosphere (Håkansson ed., 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Such atmosphere is the product of interactions and conversely influences the relationship interactions (Håkansson ed., 1982).

Data analysis illustrated that student respondents’ interpretations regarding relationship atmosphere were remote from the power dependence described in the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982); this was principally due to the multiple roles of students being producer (Armstrong, 1995; Guolla, 1999) and product (Levitt, 1980; Conway et al., 1994; Emery, et al., 2001; Modell, 2005) of their experience with the institution. Instead, respondents used the terms ‘cooperative’, ‘close’ and ‘family member’ to define the state of their relationship with the institution. The current study also confirmed that relationship atmosphere was shaped by interactions between students and MBS, as well as these interactions determining the atmosphere between two parties.

The analysis of interactive activities took place during the students’ experience with MBS (see section 6.3.2 and Figure 6.8), demonstrates that, from the students’ viewpoint,
these interactive activities were evolving as a result of the different interactions that took place. Subsequently, the relationship atmosphere between students and MBS was not at a standstill, but continuously developing, in response to the different interactive stages of the educational process.

Interviews showed that MBS respondents considered the enquiries stage as a self-driven information gathering, assessing and prioritising process. Apart from directly interacting with employers, friends and families, respondents also got involved with other actors either directly or indirectly during the enquiries stage, inclusive of successful alumni icons, companies offering internships, and competitive IBSs. Importantly, it was evident that the relationship between student respondents and MBS academic staff that had been previously established greatly influenced the new relationship development between prospective students and MBS. Equally, promotional activities, such as the MBA World Tour, QS World Tour and Access 1:1, offered a wide geographic coverage of international cities (see Table 6.3 in section 6.3.2), and demonstrated that MBS administrative staff made efforts to proactively meet prospective students. Data analysis demonstrated that MBS administrative staff adopted a one-to-one relational approach. The relationship atmosphere during the enquiries stage displayed a nature of acquaintance, as indicated in the following student comment:

“I came to one of the QS world tours in Athens, and subsequently attended the Access 1:1 three months after. I think that was quite good actually, that sort of impressed me, speaking to Helen Dowd on a one-to-one basis, who was very open with ideas. I personally found that worthwhile.”

(MBS respondent #28)

The relationship atmosphere between prospective students and MBS (i.e. the administrative staff from the MBA Office) during the application and acceptance stage demonstrated the nature of closeness. Interviewees emphasised that the interactions between applicants and MBS were frequent and efficient; students also expressed satisfaction with the efficient and smooth service provision. Respondents stressed that that MBA Office was very accessible and friendly, and they were known as an individual rather than a number by MBS; as testified in the comment below:
“I met Helen a few years ago, and met Fiona at the MBA World Tour in New York. From constant e-mail contact, any questions I had were answered very quickly. The application process was standard, but the response was very quick. Questions were answered directly, and it all felt very connected. You didn’t feel like you were a number, as they knew who you were.”

(MBS respondent #3)

It was evident that students started formal interactions with MBS on most fronts during the registration and orientation stage. From the respondents’ viewpoint, the relationship atmosphere between current students and MBS remained close. The pre-MBA programme was greatly appreciated by MBS respondents. The relationship between and amongst students evolved naturally from a MBS.Net-based virtual interface to face-to-face-daily interactions, thus facilitating the formation of life-long friendships. The following quotation supported this interpretation:

“The pre-MBA was well organised, extremely beneficial, and brought the class closely together. I could not have settled into the study environment so easily without those friendships.”

(MBS respondent #8)

Different to the close nature of relationship interactions that existed between students and MBS during the previous stage, the relationship atmosphere between students and MBS (i.e. with the academic staff) was dependent and cooperative during the studying and living stage. Interactions existing amongst students were intensified through group work and led to long-lasting friendships, as testified in these comments:

“Obviously the professors add value, but I don’t think they are the main source of learning. I think that the most impressive and most valuable is when you have an engaging faculty that have practical business experiences which they bring regularly to the table.”

(MBS respondent #7)

“I learned a tremendous amount through my several group work activities and projects, which at times can be extremely frustrating. Also the good thing is that I made really good friends through participating and contributing actively in group work.”

(MBS respondent #22)

During the career development stage, the relationship atmosphere between students and MBS (i.e. the administrative staff at CMS) were perceived by respondents as being rather disappointing, as the comments from interviews reveal as follows:
“At the end of the day I want to get a job after the MBA. How well major recruiters regard the MBS MBA programme is so important. Somehow CMS are not pulling in the recruiters globally. The existing connections that CMS offered were too few to go around us all.”  
(MBS respondent #6)

During the graduation and alumni stage, the relationship atmosphere between students and MBS were anticipated by respondents to remain loose, resulting from the traces of dissatisfaction of their most recent experience (i.e. as relating to available internships/job offers) with the institution; illustrated by the following comment:

“I would say fifty-fifty, I wish I could say 100%. I have been asking myself similar questions several times a day as to whether I have chosen the right place.”  
(MBS respondent #15)

6.3.3.2 Expectations of MBS Students

The current investigation illustrated that student respondents placed great expectations on MBS, which partially created the evolving relationship atmosphere and influenced the overall relationship interaction with MBS. Interviews revealed students’ expectations about the added-value of the MBS MBA programme and their experience with the institution. Figure 6.13 summarises the themes of these expectations and their perceived hierarchy of importance.

Figure 6.13: Key Codes and Themes of Students’ Expectation for the Added-Value of MBS
Service Provision

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Respondents explained that recognition of the professional MBA qualification globally, as well as their desire for enhancing their knowledge through practical learning approaches, was the number one expectation that they placed on their MBS experience. For example, interviewees emphasised the importance of ‘The Financial Times’ league table of global MBA programmes, and evaluated the uniqueness of the ‘Manchester Method’ in response to their desire for gaining better knowledge and practice integration. The following quotations supported this point:

“MBA rankings show qualities which are very important to us and employers. Companies are more likely to hire you if you graduated from globally highly-ranked MBAs. It’s the value of those three letters attached to your name. Prospective employers will look at you differently already.”

(MBS respondent #8)

“MBAs provide us with the platform and just get our ‘foot in the door’ to companies. It is about learning the new knowledge, about teaching us these subjects and thinking from a manager’s view, understanding business meanings and implications, preparing us for more senior roles in companies, through hands-on experiences of group work, projects and internships. The integration between knowledge and business practice is the key on the MBA course, so that we have the quality, skills and potential to successfully achieve a career path that we want.”

(MBS respondent #20)

Respondents also placed great expectations on accessing the UK and European job market, and strongly believed that the MBS MBA programme was the gateway for preparing and enhancing their global employability. The following student comment echoed this understanding:

“Manchester is becoming increasingly important and well known in Europe, and its job opportunities are second to London. The 18 months MBA is definitely a good gateway and platform to get into the employment market. The MBA qualification opens up possibilities and flexibilities in job choices, and then the work permit becomes less of a challenge.”

(MBS respondent #4)

Data analysis also suggested that international experiences were third in-line in terms of students’ expectations for the MBS MBA programme. Respondents explained that their learning experiences of different cultures and personalities during the 18 months MBA studies were especially beneficial, as testified by this student’s comment:
The international experience at Manchester would be more beneficial than if I stayed in the United States. Because I found in the States there wasn’t as much diversity in the class. Here you have 35 different nationalities in one MBA classroom. That diversity of culture is so important when working for multinationals; you only learn the differences and subtleness of different cultures and personalities through interactions and first-hand experiences. I couldn’t get a true international experience if I did not leave America.”

(MBS respondent #2)

Interviewees also shared their expectations placed on the MBS MBA alumni network, as they perceived that the reputation of MBS and its existing MBA alumni network could potentially enhance their career prospects. This is illuminated by the following student comment:

“Basically, industries know the name of MBS, its alumni network is already out there. Therefore, after graduation, the MBA opens doors, and makes my career path much more prosperous, to some extent, I hope.”

(MBS respondent #18)

6.3.3.3 The Relationship Life-Cycle of the Students at MBS

The analysis of actors (in section 6.3.1), as well as the analysis of activities (in section 6.3.2), provided essential insights into understanding the relationship life-cycle of students at MBS, as well as the relationship atmosphere linking actors that influences how two parities interpret situations and form their identities and stances in relation to each other (Håkansson ed., 1982).

Figure 6.14 illustrates the understanding of the four phases of the relationship life-cycle between students and MBS, in response to the six interactive stages of learners’ experiences whilst at the institution. Importantly, it also indicates the uniqueness of this relationship life-cycle, as a result of the relational tactics adopted by MBS and in being effective before the studying and living stage. It was also evident that the relationship between students and MBS went through an adaptation and re-development phase, due to the nature of the HE service as well as the MBS business environment.
The relationship atmosphere state between students and MBS showed strong evidence of acquaintances during the enquiries stage. Respondents also noted that pre-relations established in the past, through overseas teaching programmes in particular with MBS academics, largely inspired them to enquire and contact the MBS MBA programme. The interview data indicated that MBS invested in time and resources to engage with prospective students, as well as being readily available and accessible in overseas MBA recruitment markets. Therefore, this interactive stage could be principally categorised as the pre-relation stage of its relationship life-cycle, with the recognition that some students with pre-relations, and/or one-to-one engagement with MBS, may have progressed their relationships from initial acquaintance to further development.

During the application and acceptance stage, the relationship atmosphere developed rapidly and demonstrated the nature of closeness, as explained in sections 6.3.1.2 and 6.3.2.2. From the students’ perspective, their investment and commitment to these
exclusive interactive activities accelerated the relationship life-cycle fully into the development phase.

For the stage of registration and orientation, the relationship between students and MBS went from strength-to-strength. To a great extent, it symbolised the early maturity of this relationship, as the professionalism, efficiency and dedicated service provision, in particular through MBS administrative staff, was broadly appreciated amongst respondents.

During the studying and living stage, as well as the career development stage, the relationship atmosphere between students and MBS transferred from closeness to cooperation, and evolved into the adaptation and re-development phase. The following students’ comments testified this understanding:

“As soon as you walk into the classroom and sit in a seat, and as soon as the lecturers start teaching, you have no choice. It's not like I can de-select my supplier and pick another one. Therefore, I have to work around, adapt and make the course really work.”

(MBS respondent #22)

“It is too difficult to walk away from the relationship. The Business School kind of know it, and you kind of know it. You're stuck in a kind of silent suffering syndrome for a short while. As my room for manoeuvre is pretty limited, I have to keep the relationship going and developing on what were put in front of me as a reality.”

(MBS respondent #10)

The relationship interactions potentially reduced during the graduation and alumni stage. Dissatisfactions revealed by student respondents, in particular regarding the lack of core value-creation by MBS (i.e. transferring knowledge into employment), as a result principally defined the relationship life-cycle between the students and MBS, as it reached to the decline phase. The following student exemplified this:

“I wonder if I made the right decision. With the limited internships and job offers made available by CMS, I don’t really know why I am here. I have those sorts of days and feel that they [MBS] have failed me.”

(MBS respondent #21)
6.3.4 The Nature of the Environment

The Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982) emphasises the important influence of the business environment within which single and multiple relationship interactions take place. The current case study examined the single-relational and cross-relational interactions from the student respondents’ perspective, and demonstrated the unique environment within which MBS operates and also how these relationship interactions impacted on each other.

Different from the definition of environment as defined by Håkansson ed., (1982) in the Interaction Approach, and the competition-cooperation mix suggested by Wilkinson and Young (1994) in the Relationship Life-Cycle Model, the current investigation demonstrated that student respondents’ understanding about environment, within which relationship interactions took place, were largely similar to the analytical framework of ‘PEST’ (Brownlie, 1987).

The data analysis suggests that the business environment is largely influenced by the fiercely competitive MBA market, especially amongst English-speaking countries, and in particular the outlook of the economy and employment market in the UK and Europe. In addition to these macro factors, interviews confirmed that relationship development between students and MBS were unavoidably influenced by the micro institutional environment.

6.3.4.1 Macro Environment

From the macro environmental perspective, MBS operates in an extremely competitive business environment. Whilst there was a strong recognition of the increasing importance of international HE, in particular its significant contribution to the UK knowledge-based economy, the UK’s international market share had been saturated since 2004 (Anonymous, 2008b, 2011f, 2011g). Internal documents, such as the MBA recruitment
and admissions review 2011, confirmed the external challenges that MBS had to combat in order to maintain its global positioning:

“As with all postgraduate education in an increasingly competitive market, growth of business schools between 1999 and 2006 shows that the US has grown by 10% from 846 to 927; India has grown by 33% from 639 to 953. In the same time period, the number of MBA programmes available in Europe has grown by 364% from 181 to 658; in Germany alone there are 150 programmes available. As for China, there is serious growth, but no definitive figures available!”

(The MBS MBA Marketing Report 2010)

Data analysis demonstrated that the MBS MBA programme was premiumly-priced to be at the top-end of UK-based IBSs, and aimed to be along similar lines with major Schools in Europe. According to ‘The Financial Times’ global full-time MBA rankings in 2012, London Business School, Cambridge Judge Institute and Oxford Said Institute have shown consistent and significant growth over the last three years. As a result, this means that despite Manchester maintaining its rankings globally and in the UK, the gaps between MBS and these three prominent UK rival IBSs was getting bigger in global league tables. Additionally, Lancaster had also moved to number four in this global MBA ranking table, being recognised for best value.

When the interviews took place with MBS students, the gloomy economic outlook, the double-dip recessions and the Euro zone crisis were all reflected in the tough job market especially in the UK financial sector, which prior to the global economic crisis in 2007 traditionally attracted most MBA graduates. These financial factors had a tremendous impact on MBS full-time MBA recruitment and admissions, with respondents’ expectations relating to investment-return in terms of employment increasing. Given the economic climate in the UK and Europe, interviewees noted that the MBS MBA programme “didn’t come cheap”. The priority for any prospective MBA candidate was about funding the course and obtaining guaranteed internships and job offers. To address students’ demand, marketing tactics adopted by the MBS recruitment team emphasised that its scholarships were generously funded by successful alumni, as well as the average increase of 116% in graduates’ earnings potential within three years. This was evident in
the advert titled ‘Think about a continuous return-on-investment’ which was placed in the Focus Report of ‘The Times’ newspaper in the UK in May 2012.

The data also showed that, traditionally, a high percentage of MBS graduates secured positions in the UK. For example, the MBA Careers Report 2012 showed that 71% of Indian nationals, 50% of Asian nationals (excluding India), and 48% of Latin and North American nationals remained in employment in the UK upon graduation. The recent changes in UK Border Agency (UKBA) immigration policies regarding post-study working visas were hotly debated in the press and caused negative views amongst prospective students, especially amongst those from India, being the number one recruitment market for the MBS MBA programme. Influenced by these economic and political factors, MBS had to proactively bring more internships and companies directly to its MBA candidates, in order to facilitate and build their management knowledge and skills through a learning-by-doing approach, i.e. in implementing the ethos of ‘Original Thinking Applied’. Therefore, differently from other IBSs, such as CEIBS benefitting from China leading in many areas of global economic growth, in attracting global investment and in creating huge demand for management professional, MBS had to work extra hard to remain strong in the global MBA market.

6.3.4.2 Micro Environment

From the viewpoint of institutional structure, The University of Manchester (UoM) consisted of 21 academic Schools; with MBS remaining as one of these units. From the academic discipline perspective, MBS MBA provision rested within the autonomy of the MBS organisation, which was located in the Faculty of Humanities, governed by the University. To a great extent, this has had a strong impact on MBS MBA provision both in academic and administrative service delivery. For example, the UoM strategic document ‘Manchester 2020’ sought the institution to be one of the top-25 research universities in the world by 2020. This meant that MBS academics who teach on the MBA programme had to produce world-class research, which was outlined as key performance indicators (KPIs) in the University Strategic Plan 2010. Equally, academic
staff members had to enhance their industrial expertise, so that they could be appreciated by MBA candidates through demonstrating their competencies in applying theoretical knowledge in the real-life business world. ‘Manchester 2020’ also outlined one of its ambitious goals was to increase its PhD student enrolments by 30% by 2020. As MBS’s doctoral programme was consistently ranked as one of the best in the world, this potentially meant that MBS may have to invest more of its resources into PhD provision. The following comment reflects this sentiment:

“I don’t mind that the School talks about research all the time, as it helps with the rankings. The fact is that they also tell you it is not cost-effective to teach MBA students, as it is other PGT and PGR students that bring money into the School and keep us afloat. It really makes your stomach turn, feel second-class and less-valued.”

(MBA respondent #22)

Analysis also strongly indicated that amongst respondents, there were great concerns regarding the facilities and the organisational culture within MBS and the broader University, which hindered relationship development between students and MBS. The following quotations illustrate this:

“If you walk into a business school in the US, the lecture halls are brand new; they are top of the line. There is a plug at every seat so you can connect your computer into every table. The wireless has to work, if it doesn’t work, it gets fixed. You could expect none of this at MBS. The fact that any lecturer would use an overhead projector at a business school blows my mind”.

(MBS respondent #20)

“What could be happening is that the difficulty to get anything accomplished is so high, as in any organisation that is large, that’s the attitude that comes across. But it doesn’t mean like there’s enough interest in making it better. In general I would say they are very receptive, ‘Well, we will look into it’, which feels like just addressing the façade, a cover-up. If anything costs them, communication will die”.

(MBS respondent #21)

6.3.4.3 Technology-Integrated Communication

The MBS case analysis demonstrated that MBA students had an equally wide access to complex networks, including established personal networks (e.g. family, friends, employer), and other social networks (e.g. Facebook and Twitter). However, the connection of MBA students to MBS.Net, which belongs to a broader organisational internal network of The University of Manchester, was as a direct result of enrolling onto
the MBA programme. The interactive actors within MBS.Net included a wide variety of MBS stakeholders, such as academics, administrators, registered MBS students, MBS alumni and MBS prospective students having admissions acceptances. Figure 6.15 illustrates the linkages between technology and different networks in the MBS case study, especially the impact on the access of MBA students to MBS.Net.

**Figure 6.15: Influence of Technology in the Internal Network – in the MBS Case**

MBS student informants all used MBS.Net; after confirming their admissions acceptance, they were given their own username and password. Data analysis demonstrated the importance of the MBS Net. The following quotations illustrate this:

“I felt that we live and breathe with MBS.Net. It’s a very active online community amongst students. I communicated with my classmates and staff members to find out all the things that I needed to know.”

(MBS respondent #12)

“The full ownership of MBS.Net means monitoring this website, and managing the online communities and communications to its maximum effect.”

(MBS internal document – Meeting minutes of marketing and admissions, Nov 2010)

The current investigation confirmed that from a strategic perspective, MBS invested and created the communication platform, in order to foster an online community amongst
MBS’ broad range of stakeholders; including MBS offer-holders, existing students, MBS staff, MBS alumni and student ambassadors, as explained in section 6.3.2.2. The research findings demonstrated that MBS used technology, in the format of intranet-based forums and blogs, to convert offer-holders to registered students, by using the powerful conversion engine of (E)WOM (Elliott and Healy, 2001; Helgesen and Nesset, 2007; Voss, 2009) from multiple stakeholders, especially between the application and acceptance stage, and also the registration and orientation stage. The MBS case study illustrated that given the increasingly competitive international recruitment market (Johnstone et al., 2010; Maringe and Foskett, 2010; Anonymous, 2010a, 2011a, 2012a; Lawton and Katsomitros, 2012), the time and effort invested in attracting and enticing prospective students through a one-to-one relational approach (e.g. Grönroos, 1990; Gummesson, 1994a, 1994b), and in fostering online exclusive MBS relationships prior to registration and arrival, were clearly effective in contributing to student satisfaction and in them having a tangible commitment to MBS.

The current case analysis also showed that MBS.Net as an institutional intranet has its limitations, in contrast to independent broad social networks such as Chasedream (as at CEIBS), from the contextual time-space perspective, since it failed to endorse the continuity of relationship interactions between MBS and students consistently within one network. As the MBS case study confirmed, MBS.Net was not accessible to the massive number of prospective students interested in MBA students until they had actually gained entrance to MBS. However, it was understandable that MBS were strategically selective in order to build relationships with suitable customers, but on the other hand such exclusivity also meant that MBS restricted many potential applicants.

Documents gathered as part of the research investigation demonstrated that a number of social networks, including Twitter, MBS.Nets and Facebook, co-existed along with the MBS.Net intranet. MBS stakeholders were scattered amongst these social networks as registered members, and the online interactions were rather limited, in comparison to the Chasedream social network that CEIBS students were associated with.
The current investigation also showed that MBS failed to effectively facilitate and respond to students’ desire for information exchange with companies and recruiters as early as the enquiries stage had kicked in, since career enhancement was recognised as one of the key influencing factors impacting on the decision-making process of students to study for the MBA (Michael, 1990; Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999, 2002; Anonymous, 2012e; Brooks et al., 2012). Therefore, there was a breakdown of direct relationship interactions between MBS and students. With multiple social networks being used instead of one host network, i.e. MBS.Net, and with a relatively low participation rate, it could be challenging for MBS to effectively and consistently manage relationships with students. As MBS students no longer have access to MBS.Net after graduation, this illustrated the relatively weak connections between the School and its alumni, as well as the limited relationships between and amongst offered-holders, existing students and alumni; importantly, the lack of strong relationship continuity between students and the institution.

In summary, the macro and micro environmental factors as explained above formed the business context within which relationships between students and MBS, as well as other stakeholders of the School, were interacting and will keep evolving. In addition, from a strategic and operational perspective, MBS deployed a technology-based communication platform i.e. MBS.Net, to attempt to facilitate and maximise relationship interactions. The current research findings also suggested it is important to recognise that MBS.Net, being the exclusive institutional intranet, has certain limitations and suffers from a lack of continuity in terms of relationship interactions between MBS and students.
Chapter 7  Research Discussion and Cross-Case Comparison

7.0  Introduction

The current study applied the ethos of the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982) and the Relationship Life-Cycle Model (Wilkinson and Young, 1994), through an analysis of both CEIBS and MBS cases, and demonstrated the high relevance of these concepts in the context of higher education services marketing.

Individual case studies, as well as cross-case comparison, confirmed the interactive and inter-dependent nature of relationships and networks as suggested by Håkansson and Snehota (1995), and also illustrated how MBA students interacted with their IBS, and other IBS associated stakeholders. The co-existence of single-relational and cross-relational interactions and networks, as illustrated in both the CEIBS and MBS case studies, confirmed how the findings of Ford (1980), along with Håkansson and Johanson (1992), were equally applicable to this context.

CEIBS and MBS case studies examined the single and multiple relationship interactions from the students’ perspective, and confirmed how boundary setting and contextual timeframe were similarly essential (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005) in gaining an in-depth understanding of the complex nature of the HE service.

Both case analyses also evaluated students’ expectations relating to the value creation of their MBA studies. In doing so, each case demonstrated six key relationships, including:

- the relationship between current students and alumni
- the relationship between and amongst current students
- the relationship between current students and academic staff
- the relationship between current students and administrative staff
- the relationship between current students and MNCs
- the relationship between current students and overseas exchange partner HEIs
The current research findings confirmed that value co-creation – either through customer-to-organisation interactions (Payne et al., 2008) or customer-to-customer interactions (Rowley and Kupiec-Teehan, 2007; Cova and Salle, 2008) – and also that continuously developing and managing business relationships and networks (Ford, 1997, 2002; Zolikiewski and Turnbull, 2002), were central to the satisfaction of MBA students and to the long-term success of IBSs.

In summary, the current study demonstrated that the above concepts were applicable and transferrable to HE services marketing. Consequently, the adaptation of the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982) and Relationship Life-Cycle Model (Wilkinson and Young, 1994) could be used to broaden the approaches in formulating HE strategy, i.e. through successful development and management of relationships and networks. It also provided an alternative lens for examining the nature of HE services marketing, i.e. a network-like structure (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Ford et al., 2006).

The following sections illustrate the similarities of research findings across the CEIBS and MBS cases studies, including the six key relationships from the perspective of current students, the added-value of HEIs as expected by students, the concept of students as network users, and the impact of (E)WOM. Cross-case comparison also demonstrated the differences manifested in the life-cycle of relationship development between students and their IBSs, the impact of different relational approaches applied and of technology-integrated interactions. Interactive activities which dominated the students’ experience with their HEIs were also compared and presented.

7.1 Similarity One: Six Key Relationships

Research findings from both the CEIBS and MBS case studies confirmed that, similar to many companies, IBSs are interactive and relational by nature (Håkansson ed., 1982); since the business enterprise of an HEI comprises both direct and indirect relationships within a broad array of stakeholders (Kotler and Fox, 1985). This investigation revealed that from a student-centric perspective, the main relationship that is present between
current students and their HEI also co-existed with other cross- and multiple-relationships (Håkansson and Johanson, 1992) operating between and amongst the many stakeholders of the HEI. Importantly, this investigation demonstrated that current students evaluated the importance of these stakeholders from a viewpoint relating to one of co-value creation, i.e. the contribution towards overall customer satisfaction with their HEI varied massively, and they also placed great emphasis on the importance of six relationships, as illustrated in Figure 7.1.

**Figure 7.1: Six Key Relationships and Networks**

From a student perspective, the current research pointed to such relationships that were considered most significant in influencing the interactions with their HEI. These relationships and related activities were presented in the CEIBS and MBS case studies (section 5.3 and section 6.3 respectively). The significance of the relationships, and their impact towards relationship development between students and the HEIs, is discussed below.
7.1.1 Relationship between Current Students and Alumni

Both the CEIBS and the MBS case studies showed that students interacted with the HEI’s alumni from a very early stage in their relationship with the institution, and long before they had even engaged with the IBSs directly; as testified by Chinese respondent #5 from CEIBS (page 167) and also MBS respondent #20 (page 218) from the interview sample. The current research also reconfirmed that alumni are considered as an extension of an HEI (Anonymous, 2001), as they are highly valued by respondents in particular at both the enquiries and application/acceptance stages.

The two case studies demonstrated that from the perspective of current students, the value of the IBS is manifested within its alumni network, with the profile and the social status of these alumni providing an indication of the reputation of the institution, as seen in the comments of Chinese respondent #8 (page 171) from CEIBS and also MBS respondent #20 (page 218) confirming the findings of Mazzarol (1998). Students also perceived that the (E)WOM of alumni, based on their personal study experiences and their achievements post-graduation, were far more trustworthy than promotional information provided by the IBSs. This was confirmed by international respondent #11 (page 167) from CEIBS. To a great extent, the current study echoed existing literature which indicates that the profile of graduates and alumni are increasingly becoming the ‘living image’ that is an embodiment of their home institution (Stahli, 2005; Wolverton, 2006; Thomas, 2007).

Both case studies demonstrated that accessibility to an alumni network was also very important during two further stages of the student life-cycle with an HEI: the studying and living experience stage, and the careers development service stage. For instance, interviewees perceived that an alumni’s involvement and contribution, through for example mentor schemes, on-campus seminars and student clubs, were an extension of MBA learning activities and a platform for employment enhancement, as voiced by MBS respondent #12 (page 230) and CEIBS Chinese respondent #5 (page 178). From a perspective of knowledge enhancement, these respondents emphasised that they did not
only receive information from academic staff, but also through interactions with their fellow students/classmates, as well as alumni; the latter who had been applying their MBA knowledge to real business practices, and as a result had gained relevant experience and expertise. CEIBS Chinese respondent #5 (page 178) expressed the view that they greatly valued alumni as an important source of knowledge to learn from and be inspired by.

Student respondents placed a greater importance and preference towards alumni with whom they could, and/or have had, an established association. However, respondents, in particular from an individualistic cultural background, relied on the goodwill of alumni who were from the same country or similar regions, as evidenced by international respondent #11 (page 167) from CEIBS. Those, in particular from collectivist cultural backgrounds (i.e. Chinese students at CEIBS), chose to interact with alumni whom they had established friendships in the past through academic or professional life, rather than counting on the goodwill of random alumni, as echoed by the comment of Chinese respondent #5 from CEIBS (page 167).

7.1.2 Relationship between and amongst Current Students

Existing literature suggests that students can play the role of being producers in the process of education, by taking an active role in the learning process and so being held responsible for academic outcomes (Guolla, 1999). As a consequence, the ultimate responsibility for educational success and failure lies within them (Eagle and Brennan, 2007). The current research strengthened these understandings, and showed that interviewees acknowledged that HE service productivity and quality depended not only on the performance of IBS personnel, but also on the performance of students themselves, in particular during the learning process.

The case study findings further demonstrated that the perception of MBA students regarding the quality of their IBS was partially influenced by the calibre of students, and by the knowledge and experience which they shared amongst themselves. Relationships
between and amongst current students, and predominately their interactions during the studying and living experience stage, were critically important to their MBA academic success, as well as greatly influencing their overall customer experience and satisfaction regarding the service provision of the IBS; this supported by the comments of Chinese respondent #6 from CEIBS (page 175) and also MBS respondent #20 (page 227).

Both the case studies revealed that given the structure of the MBA programmes and their emphasis on group work, students then perceived that the value of the programme itself was hugely determined by the quality of their classmates; for instance, in the make-up of the work experience, knowledge base, cultural background and interpersonal skills of their peers. In addition, these factors had a major impact through group interactions and study sessions that took place outside of the classroom, including Student Clubs (i.e. in the CEIBS case) and the Student Society (i.e. in the MBS case). Furthermore, respondents from CEIBS, as well as those from MBS, expressed their concerns regarding the slight inconsistency in the quality of academic and professional backgrounds of a small number of their MBA cohort. Consequently, relationships between and amongst current students, led to a clear display of their expectations that institutions should maintain the quality of admissions; to ensure that their fellow classmates actually shared a similar educational background, and to a large extent were compatible in terms of their work experiences. This was particularly evident in the CEIBS case study, as expressed by Chinese respondent #12 (page 207).

The current investigation also demonstrated that the management of IBSs had recognised the value of current students, through their marketing activities (e.g. a student ambassador scheme and a buddy system), as a direct means to encourage relationship interactions, and to boost student recruitment and conversion, as reinforced by international respondent #10 from CEIBS (page 173) and also MBS respondent #13 (page 220).
7.1.3 Relationship between Current Students and Academic Staff

Research findings from the current study supported existing literature highlighting that the reputation and expertise of academic staff are some of the key influencing factors in student selection of an institution (Mazzarol, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999; Marginson, 2006). This was most evident in the MBS case study, in which respondents had gained a strong awareness, in some cases personal experience and acknowledgment, of MBS academic excellence, during the enquiries stage, and/or during the application and acceptance stage.

This investigation also underlined that respondents considered academic staff as the main representation of an HEI (Anonymous, 2001). The quality of the institution can be directly linked with the quality of associated academics (Swanson and Davis, 2000; St George, 2006). This was confirmed by the comments of MBS respondent #19 (page 216).

Research findings from both case studies demonstrated the importance of relationship interactions between current students and academic staff, in particular during the learning process (i.e. the study and living experience stage of the HE life-cycle). Such research outcomes also clearly revealed that, from a student perspective, the value exchange with IBSs and the overall satisfaction of their service experience, were greatly influenced by the quality of academics; relating to their expertise and practical business experiences, as well as their ability to teach, to communicate and to inspire, as evident through the comments of MBS respondent #1 (page 217) and Chinese respondent #9 from CEIBS (page 175).

Relationship interactions between current students and academic staff, as derived from both the CEIBS and MBS case studies, strongly demonstrated the critical importance of the academics, in particular throughout the learning process at the HEI. Their guidance and facilitation enabled students, being the producer (Guolla, 1999), to take the active role in the learning process and be responsible for their own academic achievement.
7.1.4 **Relationship between Current Students and Administrative Staff**

As the educational process is long and involves the relationship life-cycle, research findings echoed the notion that the scale and diversity of services across the different units within an HEI posed difficulties in maintaining consistent service quality (Nicholls *et al.*, 1995; St. George, 2006). In addition, CEIBS and MBS respondents collectively expressed the view that they considered the MBA office, careers, accommodation and other service units either individually or jointly belonged to one business entity, i.e. the IBSs. The professionalism of the administrative staff was critically important and could not be undervalued, as voiced by MBS respondent #10 (page 219) and international respondent #6 from CEIBS (page 177).

Findings from the CEIBS and MBS case studies collectively reveal that administrative staff recognised the significance of relational approaches with students, regardless of these being prospective students, current students or alumni. Irrespectively, they aimed to build relationships and gain benefits, in the form of recruitment conversion (e.g. through student ambassadors), student satisfaction of learning, or employability achievement (e.g. through a mentor scheme).

7.1.5 **Relationship between Current Students and MNCs (Business Community)**

This doctoral investigation strengthened existing literature that currently indicates HEIs should be viewed as knowledge providers (Henning-Thurau *et al.*, 2001), but also as the gateway towards employment enhancement (Mazzarol, *et al.*, 2003; Kim, 2009; Anonymous, 2010b, 2011d; Brooks *et al.*, 2012). The findings showed that both CEIBS and MBS respondents placed a strong emphasis on accelerating their employability through the MBA programme. Consequently, they were seeking an investment-return, regarding what type of jobs and what salary packages the institution and its qualification were potentially associated with, in particular, prior to the registration and orientation stage. These points were illuminated by MBS respondent #8 (page 250) and Chinese respondent #5 from CEIBS (page 198).
The case studies further revealed the critical importance of relationship interactions between students and MNCs, which to a great extent reflected the business community, this having been identified by Kotler and Fox (1985) as one of the stakeholders of HEIs. From a global employability perspective, interviewees emphasised that the profile of the MNC network established by and/or associated with the IBS, was key to the added-value of their experiences with the institution, and greatly impacted on student satisfaction of IBS service provision. Collectively, the current research strongly demonstrated that from a student-centric viewpoint, the added-value of HE not only rested on the evolving educational learning process, but also was tested through the transformational process of securing employment with tangible companies. Most importantly, respondents expressed strongly that the continuous interactions between students and MNCs during the studying and living experience stage, and beyond, should be the key building blocks and embedded into HE service provision, as strongly voiced by MBS respondent #18 (page 226) and international respondent #15 from CEIBS (page 202).

Research findings also illustrated that relationship interactions between students and MNCs in the HE context were not shielded away from the business environment. This reinforced Håkansson’s suggestions (1982) that environment was one of the key substances of the Interaction Approach, and companies need to be aware of the ever-changing business environment in which they are operating. In echoing research findings that environments impact on the interaction process between parties and the characteristics of the relationship atmosphere (Håkansson ed., 1982), the current study showed that variations of relationship interactions, as represented by the CEIBS and MBS case studies respectively, were greatly influenced by the surrounding social and economic macro-environment.

Research findings illustrated that China’s business environment worked in CEIBS’ favour in rapidly establishing, expanding and consolidating its relationships with MNCs operating in China. CEIBS internal documentation showed that 430 companies offered 1,589 managerial positions to 238 CEIBS graduates in the year 2011, through its Careers Development Centre (CDC), despite the global recession. In MBS’s case, their Careers
Management Service (CMS) could have worked harder to bring in more internship opportunities for graduates, as the UK was suffering from the global economic crisis. This was exemplified in particular by international respondent #3 from CEIBS (page 178) and also MBS respondent #2 (page 245).

7.1.6 Relationship between Current Students and Exchange Partner HEIs

The outcomes of this research investigation suggested that overseas exchange partnership HEIs were also important from a student-centric perspective, and so should be added to the broad array of stakeholders of HEIs as identified by Kotler and Fox (1985). Both cases studies confirmed that exchange partnership HEIs have emerged to a large degree as a result of the internationalisation of HEIs and the desire of students for mobility (Mazzarol and Hosie, 1996; Mazzarol, et al., 2003; Anonymous, 2004; Kim, 2009; Brooks et al., 2012).

Findings demonstrated that students from CEIBS and MBS perceived these overseas exchange partner universities as great opportunities to extend their knowledge, and also to expand internationalisation linked to potential employability enhancement. These were testified by Chinese respondent #4 from CEIBS (page 178), and by MBS respondent #7 (page 230). Nevertheless, the current investigation illustrated that CEIBS and MBS student respondents evaluated their relationship interactions with overseas partnership HEIs differently.

In the CEIBS case, a large number of Chinese students preferred to take the opportunity to spend three months with an institutionally-approved overseas exchange partner university. CEIBS MBA students perceived that such an experience with one of these overseas partners was not only going to provide them with additional value in terms of studying in an international environment; it could also give them a platform to gain an understanding of different business cultures.
In the MBS case, MBA students chose internships over opportunities at overseas exchange partner universities, since most respondents perceived that the MBS study was in fact their international experience, and that the diversity of cultures and nationalities represented by the MBA cohort was considered as a supplement of the internationalisation process. This reinforced the suggestions of student mobility and desire for studying overseas (Mazzarol et al., 2003; Brooks et al., 2012). Nevertheless, MBS students revealed that it was advantageous to have overseas exchange partner universities allied to the MBA programme, as these provided a strong indication regarding MBS’ brand extension into foreign countries corresponding to these overseas institutions, as well as giving them the possibility of exploring such overseas employment markets. It became clear when comparing the lists of overseas exchange partner universities at CEIBS and MBS that they shared a similar pattern of having a higher percentage of North American HEIs, as well as IBSs of non-English speaking countries (Anonymous, 2008a, 2011a, 2011f, 2011g; Ryan, 2011). Relationship interactions between students and overseas partnership HEIs, as explained above, also reinforced that overseas exchange institutions have become an essential part of HEI service provision in the context of internationalisation (e.g. Huang, 2003; Maringe and Foskett, 2010; Anonymous, 2012a; Lawton and Katsomitros, 2012).

### 7.1.7 Other Secondary Relationship Interactions

Other relationship interactions were also taking place and being demonstrated in both case studies. Whilst these relationship interactions were identified and explained in individual case analysis, cross-case comparison illustrated that there was a lack of continuity and significance of these relationship interactions throughout the students’ educational process, unlike the other key relationships described above. On the basis of value co-creation, other HEIs stakeholders, for example, family, sponsors and local community identified in the current study, made little direct contribution towards the core values of HEIs (as desired by students and seen next in section 7.2). These stakeholders and their associated networks were largely either personally-driven or socially-driven. From a relationship development and management viewpoint, these
relationships potentially present great challenges for HEIs to initiate and develop. Thus, the current study took the focus of explaining the key type of relationships that were evident across both CEIBS and MBS case studies.

7.2 Similarity Two: The Added-Value of HEIs Expected by Students

The current research investigation provided a clear understanding regarding the added-value of HEIs as desired by students; these were international standards of knowledge enrichment, along with global employability enhancement. It was evident that these fundamental core values of HEIs were critical to students’ satisfaction with the service provision of their institutions, as illustrated in sections 5.3.3.2 and 6.3.3.2. These findings confirmed that student satisfaction was linked to an enhanced learning experience as suggested by Elliott and Shin (2002), and reinforced the view of increasing student demand for employability and mobility (Kim, 2009; Brooks et al., 2012).

The study demonstrated that these core values were principally co-created through multiple relationship interactions, and influenced by how successfully the HEIs developed and utilised their associated relationships and networks. As outlined in sections 5.3.3.2 and 6.3.3.2, the findings provided an understanding of the influences these associated stakeholders had upon overall student satisfaction with their institutions. This research confirmed that relationships are one of the most valuable resources of an organisation, as suggested by Ford (2002) as well as Håkansson and Snehota (2006), and reinforced the notion that such relationships impact on an organisation’s competences and success (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Walter et al., 2001; Ritter et al., 2004).

7.2.1 International Standards of Knowledge Enrichment

Respondents from both CEIBS and MBS stressed the importance of international standards of knowledge enrichment, as being one of the key components of core value associated with their institutions. This largely resulted from the network predominantly interconnected to their multiple relationship interactions: i.e. those between and amongst
students themselves, as exemplified by MBS respondent #20 (page 227); relationship interactions between current students and academic staff, as supported by the comment of Chinese respondent #9 from CEIBS (page 175); and those between current students and overseas HE exchange partners, as voiced by MBS respondent #7 (page 230) and also Chinese respondent #4 from CEIBS (page 178).

The findings showed that the importance of international standards of knowledge enrichment was underpinned by the prominence given to international accreditations that are applied across global MBA programme providers. Students from both cases drew attention to the value of the worldwide approval of three main MBA accrediting bodies. Accreditations from each of these bodies provide quality assurance and security, and are widely recognised amongst management institutions as well as high-profile corporate businesses. This confirmed the influences of accreditation organisations, as being one of the original HEI stakeholders that had been proposed by Kotler and Fox (1985).

The current study demonstrated that international standards of knowledge enrichment were principally rooted in having a high-calibre diverse student population. Research findings revealed students’ concerns that IBSs should not recruit a poor quality intake of prospective candidates, since actually in the short-term or long-term such a strategy would jeopardise the reputation of the institution. Interviewees also expected their fellow students, who came to the MBA programme having different cultural backgrounds, subject expertise, practical experiences and interpersonal skills, to enhance their overall learning experiences. This was particularly strongly voiced by CEIBS respondents, see below:

“CEIBS should get some real Americans, the blue-eyed ones. Chinese-Americans do not really give you much extra on the course, in terms of studying and career development.”

(Chinese respondent #12)

Findings emphasised that knowledge enrichment largely depended on the competencies of academic staff. Respondents strongly expressed the view that academic staff should possess research expertise as well as business experiences, and an ability to communicate and inspire, e.g. MBS respondent #12 (page 224). The data also suggested that
collaborations with reputable overseas exchange partner institutions could not be underestimated.

7.2.2 Employability Enhancement

Both case studies demonstrated that students also place great emphasis on the importance of global employability enhancement. Findings demonstrated relationship interactions between current learners and MNCs, administrative staff of the HEIs, academic staff and alumni, all contribute towards enhancing the global employment prospects of students. This reinforced Wilson’s view (1995) that the synergistic combination of these relationships’ strengths formulated the value-creation, and confirmed the critical importance of co-operation among parties for an organisation’s competitiveness, effectiveness and profitability (Zolkiewski and Turnbull, 2002; Ritter et al., 2004).

Research findings suggested that enhancement of global employability is predominantly underpinned by the profile of the MNC network established by and/or associated with the IBSs. CEIBS respondents were very appreciative and impressed with the institution’s associations with a high number of the world’s top-500 companies operating in China. By contrast, MBS respondents thought that their IBS should bring more companies and recruiters on-campus to offer internships. Nevertheless, they recognised the importance of potential platforms provided by IBSs and MNCs in relation to their career prospects for the future. These research findings confirmed Blois’s (1998) views that it is critically important to understand how customers’ evaluate the benefits of being in a relationship.

These case studies also showed that aspects relating to the enhancement of global employability are also influenced by the professionalism of administrative staff and their tailored provision of careers guidance. Research findings drawn from MBS students illustrated that the Careers Management Service (CMS) offered a tool-kit to enable MBA candidates to better know their strengths and weaknesses, and to enhance how they market themselves towards desirable companies. However, research findings emphasised that tangible internships and job-offers provided concrete measures of employment
prospects from the students’ perspective, as illustrated in the comment of MBS respondent #23 (page 231).

In contrast, CEIBS offered a high ratio of MBA-relevant job vacancies per graduate from the programme, and consequently CEIBS students were more focused on selectively-positioning themselves in the employment market. Here, respondents were satisfied with the internal Careers Development Centre (CDC) service provision. This was testified by the comments of Chinese respondent #7 from CEIBS (page 178).

The current study also suggested that to achieve the desire of enhanced global employment, this was also contingent on academic staff delivering an applied and practical learning approach throughout the course. The MBS MBA programme structure demonstrated the situation-based learning methodology, involving nearly six months of practical projects with real clients. MBS respondents stated that these live projects enabled them to apply what they had learned from the MBA classrooms directly into commercial practice. It also kept them closely connected with relevant industries while they were studying; as exemplified by MBS respondent #18 (page 230).

The research findings also showed that an enhancement of global employability resulted from high-profile alumni’s involvement and contribution on the programme. Interviewees from CEIBS emphasised that the success and established profile of alumni were critically important, especially as they were planning to develop their careers in the same region or in a similar business sector after their MBA graduation. This enabled students, especially fresh graduates, to gain access to other employment networks and recruitment opportunities. This was specifically testified by Chinese student respondent #15 (page 198). Successful and entrepreneurial alumni often provided input directly to their institutional internships and in offering chances for student employment. MBS respondents explained that many of their internships and consultancy projects to-date came as a result of the contribution of MBA alumni and their collaborations with MBS worldwide offices, as stated by MBS respondent #12 (page 230).
7.3 Similarity Three: Students as Network Users

With the acknowledgement of the multiple roles of learners (e.g. Swanson and Frankel, 2002), the current research findings revealed additional characteristics of students. For instance, they had different roles at distinct stages of the HE experience. As a consequence of these different roles, they tended to have diverse value perceptions; and importantly from a student-centric point of view, they were network users who benefitted from the added-value exchange collectively across multiple networks.

The uniqueness of the multiple roles of students, as clients (Mills et al., 1983; Hill, 1995), as producers (Armstrong, 1995), as products (Emery, et al., 2001; Modell, 2005) and as customers (Kotler and Fox, 1985; Conway et al., 1994), were confirmed by this research. Findings from the current study reinforced the perception that MBA respondents considered themselves to be performing different roles at distinct stages of the student experience map (as introduced in Figure 4.4).

Interviewees from both CEIBS and MBS felt that they were the final products of their IBS during the studying and living stage. They considered themselves being moulded into marketable business professionals to potential MNCs or employers, as they had to reach a specific set of academic standards and requirements, and to be equipped with certain business skills and thinking approaches related to their studies.

Respondents also perceived themselves as customers, as they considered that paying a very large amount of tuition-fees should entitle them to a quality service. Their opinions echoed the prevalent view that a person who pays for a service is a customer, and so should be treated like one (Modell, 2005). Interviewees also confirmed that they switched from the word ‘student’ to ‘customer’ when they interacted with the various service units of the IBSs, and demanded that these services be efficient and correct, since they talked at great length about customer satisfaction.
The notion of students as producers (Guolla, 1990) was also echoed within the current study. Respondents confirmed that they took an active role in the learning process and were responsible for their academic outcomes. Whilst respondents emphasised that it is each institution’s responsibility to attract MNCs on-campus and/or to employment fairs, ultimately students recognised that they were each accountable for locating, short-listing and securing job offers upon graduation.

Interviewees also expressed the view that they were the clients (Mills et al., 1983; Hill, 1995; Anonymous, 2011b, 2011d). They stated that CEIBS and MBS had an overall understanding of their needs; nevertheless, they were also dependent on the expertise of academic staff both in theory and business practice to boost their accumulation of knowledge, especially during the studying and living stage of their interactions with the institutions. Similarly, student respondents from CEIBS made it clear that they felt that they were not only clients, but also business professionals or associates receiving training at the institution.

Both CEIBS and MBS case studies reinforced that students are the most visible and primary customers of HEIs (Kotler and Fox, 1985; Marginson, 2006), and strongly demonstrated that they expected more from their institutions, going far beyond what traditionally HEIs offer as knowledge providers. The research findings also showed that student demands for value-added service provision varied through the different stages of the educational process.

During the enquiries, the application/acceptance, as well as registration/orientation stages, respondents from CEIBS and MBS indicated that value-added services were focused on information provision. The findings revealed that they not only expected such information provision to come from alumni who possessed personal knowledge and experiences, but also emphasised that it should be the responsibility of their IBSs to enable accessibility to these networks and opinion-leaders, such as MNC recruiters. Similar evidence was also demonstrated during the studying and living stage, when respondents noted that knowledge enhancement should not only be manifest in
theoretical studies, but also in real business practices. Thus, they expected the value-added service, such as internships and live consultancy projects, to be applied and integrated into their learning provision. These findings revealed that student respondents not only stressed that academic staff be equipped with research expertise and business insights, but also expected additional learning through seminars and workshops with input from alumni and MNC recruiters. Similarly, interviewees emphasised that their IBSs should take ownership of making these provisions not only possible, but frequently as an embedded component of their 18-month MBA programme. These findings demonstrated the critical importance of access to relationships and networks, which were suggested by Ford et al., (2002, 2006), as being the main assets of organisations.

The research findings also illustrated that multiple roles of students are interlinked at different stages during their interactions with the HEIs. This reinforced the existing literature on the different roles of students, i.e. being product, producer, client and customer in HE services (e.g. Hill, 1995; Guolla, 1999; Elliott and Shin, 2002; Voss, 2009; Brooks et al, 2012). Equally important, research showed that their demands of value-added service provision varied through the programme. In response to these different roles and demands interlinked to the distinct stages of the relationship development process, it was clearly evident that six key networks (as illustrated in Figure 7.1) were necessary to co-create the perceived value of the HEIs, i.e. international standards of knowledge enrichment and global employability enhancement. The combination of these networks’ strengths and their effects are best positioned to serve students’ demands and desires, as being the users of such networks.

7.4 Similarity Four: The Impact of Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

The current study also reinforced the importance of (E)WOM in the HE service context (Elliott and Shin, 2002; Bennett, 2003; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003), and demonstrated its importance in initiating and facilitating interactions, and in the continuity of future relationships with single or multiple HE stakeholders.
Data from the CEIBS and MBS cases illustrated that (E)WOM influence was not limited to the enquiries stage, and/or the application and admission stage. In fact, the existence of (E)WOM was evident throughout the student experience with the HEIs, as well as applicable during all four phases of the relationship life-cycle. This was largely manifested in relationship interactions of prospective students with alumni, of those between and amongst current students, as well as from associations of current students and alumni, and also between and amongst alumni. This was evident in the following comment:

“One of my good friends and college mates studied MBA at CEIBS... Business Development Director Xie from Huawei, we worked in the same sector for years. He was also a CEIBS alumni and mentor... I went to these good friends of mine for information.”  
(Chinese respondent #5)

Research findings from the current study reinforced that drawing from personal experiences remained a trustworthy information source, and was used to reduce risk and uncertainty (Zeithaml et al., 1985; Parasuraman, 1986; Mazzarol, 1998).

The current research also confirmed the power of (E)WOM, and reinforced its revolutionary actions (Duan et al., 2005; Hocutt et al., 2006), in terms of being quick, and available in great volumes, worldwide and anonymously. Data analysis also strongly suggested the power of (E)WOM in facilitating virtual relationship interactions and networks, such as through MBS.Net and the Chasedream website, illustrated below:

“... It [Chasedream] is a very popular website. I did not participate in discussions, but just [by] reading the information and following the conversations, I got loads of information. For me, it was more than sufficient.”  
(Chinese respondent #4)

“It [MBS.Net] gives you more a sense of security; a sense of community, belonging and acceptance.”  
(MBS respondent #14)

The data demonstrated that (E)WOM could potentially reach different networks and individuals who were virtually interactive at one network hub, due to shared interests. For example, the Chasedream public website hosted companies, prospective applicants, current students, alumni and global MBA programme providers, whom all shared one
common interest, regardless of whether planning to study for an MBA, sharing MBA experiences, or seeking employment after MBA. From the contextual time-space perspective (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005), the bilateral benefits of multiple relationship interactions (Wilson, 1995; Blois, 1998) underpinned the power of (E)WOM, and potentially enabled the continuity of relationship interactions and management.

7.5 **Differences Manifested in the Relationship Life-Cycle**

The case studies illustrated that the interactions between students and institutions could be understood from the perspective of a relationship life-cycle (see Figure 2.5) established by Wilkinson and Young (1994). The current investigation also demonstrated the correlation between the evolving four relationship development phases of this Relationship Life-Cycle Model and the patterns of students’ interactive episodes.

The analysis of empirical data also demonstrated similarities as well as differences between CEIBS and MBS, in terms of the overall pattern of relationship development between students and their IBFs under the influence of the business environment (Håkansson *ed.*, 1982; Wilkinson and Young, 1994). In contrast, there were distinctive levels of relationship building and management that each case portrayed, as well as illustrating different maturity phases of the relationship life-cycle between students and the HEIs, in response to the students’ experience with the institution. Figure 7.2 illustrated this.
Figure 7.2: The Relationship Life-Cycle in response to the Student Experience with the HEIs
7.5.1 Difference One: Patterns and Phases in the Relationship Life-Cycle

The MBS case study demonstrated that the relationship development between student respondents and their IBSs went through five phases – pre-relation, development, maturity, adaptation and re-development, and then decline – on the basis of an evaluation of relationship atmospheres from a student-centric viewpoint. In contrast, the CEIBS case study illustrated that the same set of relationship interactions and development (i.e. between students and their institution) went through four phases – pre-relation, development, maturity and hibernation. These understandings reconfirmed as well as expanded the different phases of relationship life-cycle as suggested by Wilkinson and Young (1994).

The findings from the CEIBS case demonstrated that the first two stages (i.e. the enquiries stage, as well as the application and acceptance stage) were more suited to the pre-relation phase, due to the evidence that student respondents were hugely dependent on alumni networks to reduce uncertainty and comprehend their understanding in making an informed decision to embark on the MBA course. The interactions between students and IBS administrative staff during the application and acceptance stage were largely internet-based, indirect and comparatively less intensive. The relationship atmosphere between students and their institution during these two interactive stages was less close and fitted to the pre-relation phase. In contrast, the MBS case study showed that a pre-relationship between some students and the School existed prior to the enquiries stage, as exemplified, in particular, by MBS respondent # 28 (page 216).

The study also showed that student commitment to the membership of the HEIs was demonstrated during the registration and orientation stage, specifically when the MBA candidates had moved on from their previous professions, had enrolled on the orientation programme, and had settled their tuition-fee payments. The analysis of these episodes confirmed that interactive activities are the engines of relationship changes (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Schurr et al., 2008). In the context of the HE service, the registration
and orientation activities principally trigger student commitment, and hence lead the relationship onto the next phase.

Both case studies also demonstrated the combination of the primary characteristics of service industries, and confirmed the findings of Zeithaml et al. (1985) and Parasuraman (1986) regarding service being intangible, inseparable, heterogenic and perishable by nature. The current study extended the notion of HE being part of service industries. It demonstrated that the non-circuitous route of learners’ educational process resulted in students making a commitment to their relationship with the chosen HEIs. This was strongly demonstrated in section 6.3.3.3 of the MBS case analysis, as the relationship life-cycle accelerated into the maturity phase around the Brathay orientation week. This was testified by MBS respondent #7 (page 242).

In contrast, research findings of the CEIBS case analysis demonstrated that the fourth stage (i.e. that of study and living experience) was suited to the development phase. This was based on evidence that student respondents were principally dependent on a broad array of networks that were closely interlinked to and/or essential components of the IBSs, so as to achieve their expectations relating to knowledge enrichment. Both case studies showed that during the development phase, the interaction had intensified, and relationship atmospheres between students and their IBS had become close. This was exemplified by international respondent #9 from CEIBS (page 190).

The analysis revealed that the requirements and expectations of students were understood, and in return HEIs adopted operational tactics and solutions to address these demands and desires. Due to the MBA programme design that was adopted by both IBSs, students were able to interact with a network of MNCs associated with the IBS. These interaction episodes were the mechanism of relationship (Schurr et al., 2008), fundamentally determining student satisfaction and on-going commitment, and led the relationship onto the maturity phase of the relationship life-cycle between the student and CEIBS. The MBS case confirmed the findings of Ford (1980) that relationship development evolves through a circuitous route. The investigation demonstrated that
students adapted and adjusted their relationship with MBS back to the re-development phase, after the Brathay orientation week (i.e. the maturity phase).

Research findings indicated that the student experience with CEIBS, the fifth stage (i.e. career development) was suited to the maturity phase, since student respondents were also interconnected with a wide range of networks relating to global employability. The investigations showed that whilst CEIBS student respondents recognised the constraints associated with the intangible nature of service (Zeithaml et al., 1985; Parasuraman, 1986), their appreciation of the MBA experience was fundamentally underpinned by their evaluation of tangible employment pathways and/or secured job offers, mainly with MNCs. To a great extent, both the CEIBS and MBS case studies suggested that whether respondents were truly aligned to the membership of the HEIs and committed to long-term loyalty, this was manifested during the maturity phase, and was dependent on student satisfaction on the basis of an evaluation of their career destination post-graduation. This is exemplified by international respondent #3 from CEIBS (page 178) and also by MBS respondent #18 (page 231).

Research findings from the MBS case study confirmed that relationship development between students and their IBSs naturally progressed into the decline phase of life-cycle, in association with the graduation and alumni stage of student interactions with HEIs. This understanding was testified MBS respondent #15 (page 249).

In contrast, CEIBS case analysis demonstrated that the circuitous route of the relationship life-cycle (Wilkinson and Young, 1994) took place during the graduation and alumni stage. Relationship between students and CEIBS could be viewed as in a hibernation phase. Here, it can demonstrate continuity through another new development phase, as soon as students (i.e. being alumni) embark onto a facilitative role in their institution’s recruitment and service provision, by drawing on their personal learning experiences and engaging in positive or negative (E)WOM (Elliott and Healy, 2001; Helgesen and Nesset, 2007). This understanding was testified by international respondent #12 from CEIBS (page 196).
7.5.2 Difference Two: Impact of Different Relational Approaches

Both case studies associated with this investigation have demonstrated that relationship development between students and their IBSs evolved through four phases of a life-cycle, as explained in the above section.

The cases show that CEIBS applied a customer prioritisation method during the pre-relation phase, and adopted a relational approach afterwards. In contrast, MBS embraced a relational approach from the point of student enquiry. The implementations of these different approaches were largely as a result of the competitive factors, as well as the capacities of networks established and/or associated with these two IBSs respectively.

The findings suggested how the different approaches adopted by CEIBS and MBS, through developing and managing their stakeholder and associated networks, consequently changed the profile of the life-cycle interactions. The differences demonstrated by CEIBS and MBS case studies, in particular regarding the pre-relation phase and the development phase of the relationship life-cycle, confirmed the findings by Wilkinson and Young (1994) that relationship phases were unavoidably influenced by competition in the MBA market. Similarly, this understanding confirmed the influence of environmental factors on relationship interactions suggested by the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982).

7.5.2.1 CEIBS Approach: from Transactional to Relational

The CEIBS case suggested that the institution’s operation in the business environment was largely driven by comparatively less competition of MBA programme provision within the China market. In other words, the supply of student applicants was by and large greater than the capacity of programme enrolment in the China-based global MBA market. Thus, in response to the selective position in which CEIBS was functioning, the institution consequently adopted a more passive and transactional approach with its prospective students. This was evident with Chinese respondents from CEIBS, as they
strongly expressed the IBS was less warm and engaging compared to other MBA programme providers in the China market; as the comment below illustrates:

“In Chinese thinking, if my product is good, I don’t have to shout about it so much or so loudly. I think that CEIBS played on this, and let Chinese students chase after them instead.”

(Chinese respondent #7)

Nevertheless, they also acknowledged that their relationship took a warm and caring turn from the registration and orientation stage, and then onwards. Research findings suggested that CEIBS had adopted a customer prioritisation approach to select the right/qualified students during the pre-relation phase, in order to combat their high volume of student enquiries and applications. This was particularly evident from the CEIBS Chinese respondents’ profiles.

The transition point of positive relationship engagement, as well as the rapid relationship development acknowledged by CEIBS respondents, happened during the registration stage, and was further enhanced during the studying and development stage. In addition, as more networks became associated with CEIBS service provision during the studying and living stage and the career development stage, the relationship between students and the institution continued to develop further and mature with high levels of student satisfaction, as illustrated in the comment below. These findings demonstrated that the overall relationship development between students and CEIBS grew smoothly:

“Sure, there are areas that CEIBS could improve, but I have got three good jobs lined-up for me to decide upon, seven months before I finish the MBA programme. CEIBS definitely got its core business right.”

(International respondent #15)

7.5.2.2 MBS Approach: from Relational to Transactional

In contrast, the MBS case demonstrated that its particular operations in the business environment were largely driven by aggressive competition in the UK MBA market. In other words, the supply of prospective MBA applicants was not much greater than actual MBA enrolment capacity in the UK-based global MBA market. This was evident
through the number of IBSs that MBS respondents had applied to, and the business environment described in section 5.3.4.

In response to its recruiting position, it seems that MBS adopted a more relational and one-to-one tailored approach with prospective candidates, and also much earlier than CEIBS did. This was clear from MBS respondents who strongly noted that MBA office staff were attentive to their requirements, and assigned dedicated professional administration to meet their cultural and career backgrounds. In comparison to other MBA programme providers to which respondents had applied, interviewees felt that they were treated more as an individual rather than a number during the enquiries as well as the application and acceptance stages, e.g.:

“I think in terms of process, Manchester is above, beyond and better than any of the other IBSs. And by better, I mean more personal, more efficient, quicker to respond.”

(MBS respondent #26)

However, it seems that students were slightly dissatisfied with MBS service provision during registration and orientation, with the fact that the initial one-to-one tailored approach had then become diluted, in the context of staff-student ratios on arrival at the institution. Respondents also expressed that they felt less than a customer after their tuition payment transaction, and perceived that the approach of MBS was more transactional-driven from enrolment onwards. This understanding is supported by the following quotation:

“I feel that I am a welcomed addition to the School. I wouldn’t say I am a customer. I think the business school, in general, goes very much into the transaction mode after enrolment process.”

(MBS respondent #2)

Research findings also suggested that as a result of the global business environment and student desire for employability and mobility (Kim, 2009; Brooks et al., 2012), MBS interviewees had to come to terms with the reality of lack of job prospects, which impacted the other evolving phases of their relationship development with the IBS. It seems that MBS had adopted a more relational-driven approach to select as well as convert the right/qualified students during the pre-relation phase, in order to address a limited and declining volume of student enquiries and applications as suggested by
gathered internal documents. The current study suggested that the positive relationship engagement endorsed earlier by MBS, had led to student dissatisfaction when the one-to-one dedicated approach had been challenged operationally from the registration and orientation stage onwards. The following comment illustrates this:

“It is too difficult to walk away from the relationship. They kind of know it, you kind of know it. You’re stuck in a kind of silent suffering syndrome for a short while. As my room for manoeuvre is pretty limited, I have to keep the relationship going and developing on what were put in front of me as a reality.”

(MBS respondent #10)

The analysis also suggested that despite the fact that the relationship between students and MBS had developed and matured, the pattern of MBS student satisfaction and loyalty was more static during their experience with the institution, as illustrated below:

“I would say fifty-fifty, I wish I could say 100%. I have been asking myself similar questions several times a day whether I have chosen the right place for my MBA.”

(MBS respondent #15)

This feeling was also caused by the limited access of other networks, such as the network of MNCs which offered job opportunities.

7.6 Difference Three: Activities Varied in Six Key Interactive Stages

Cross comparisons, between Figure 5.14 and Figure 6.14, demonstrated variation regarding interactive activities that took place at different interactive stages during the student’s experience with their IBSs.

Research findings suggested that in the CEIBS case, increasing numbers of interactive activities were carried out from the registration and orientation stage, and onwards. To a great extent, this trend of activities growth mirrored relationship development between MBA students and CEIBS. As the relationship evolved into the maturity stage, corresponding to the career development stage, interactive activities reached a peak. As the relationship moved onto the hibernation stage, CEIBS graduates strongly demonstrated their partnership commitment to CEIBS, through their contribution to the
mentoring programme, alumni event, positive WOM through the Chasedream public website, etc.

In contrast, the MBS case study showed that high volumes of interactive activities took place predominantly during the application and acceptance stage, as well as the registration and orientation stage. Similarly, the pattern of activity acceleration reflected the quick maturity of relationship development between MBA students and MBS. As the relationship progressed into the maturity stage, corresponding to the registration and orientation stage, the interactive activities could no longer continue on a one-to-one basis. The relationship moved into adaptation and re-development phase, as the variety of interactive activities gradually reduced through the studying and living stage, as well as the career development stage. As MBS graduates demonstrated less intention of being a partner of the institution, through their lack of commitment to mentoring programmes, the UoM alumni network, etc., the limited interactive activities suggested that the relationship between MBA students and MBS entered a decline phase.
Chapter 8  Research Conclusions

8.0 Introduction

The research herein was set in the context of the ever-changing and challenging international HE business environment, which is driven by students’ demand for mobility and career enhancement from studying overseas (St. George, 2006; UNESCO, 2011; Anonymous, 2012a; Brooks et al., 2012). The overview of internationalisation and marketisation of the HE sector reveals the urgency, as well as the desire, for solutions regarding how HEIs strategically position themselves, and also successfully compete in the long-term (Anonymous, 2010a; Maringe and Foskett, 2010). This research responded to the systematic review of Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) that highlights a general lack of holistic approaches and theoretical models to fully address the nature of the HE service; and built in particular on scholarly work (Zeithaml et al., 1985; Naude and Ivy, 1999; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Ivy and Naude, 2004; Ivy, 2008) relating to HE marketing strategies.

Moving from the traditional marketing and buyer behaviour approach adopted predominantly in the existing literature of HE marketing (i.e. Mazzarol et al., 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006), the current research adopted the relational concept, in particular the Interaction Approach (Håkansson ed., 1982; Schurr et al., 2008) and the Relationship Life-Cycle Model (Dwyer et al., 1987; Wilkinson and Young, 1994; Ford, 2002), as a fresh and alternative way of investigating the HE service.

The overall objective for this research was to contribute towards the development of a broader theoretical perspective on higher education strategy, and to gain a deeper understanding of the complex nature of the HE service, through empirically generating a comprehensive picture of HEI relationships. This was obtained through acquiring a richer appreciation of the relationship dynamics that exist from a student perspective within an international HE context, as well as how these dynamics impact on relationship development between students and their HEI. Simultaneously, this offers an enhanced
understanding on what added-value is perceived by students regarding their educational experience, and also what strategic net (i.e. value network) is needed to achieve student satisfaction and customer loyalty. In addition, such findings reveal the life-cycle of relationship development that exists between students and their HEI from a longitudinal/contextual time-space perspective, in response to patterns of their interactive relationship-based episodes. Thus, the overall results from this doctoral research provide much needed alternative and strategic solutions for HE Marketing academics and practitioners. In particular, it contributes to the continuous development of theoretical models that embed the unique characteristics of the HE service, and that are suitable in the HE context.

8.1 Research Questions and Answers

The current investigation focused on examining relationship dynamics from a student perspective within the international HE context, and on gaining an understanding of the impact of such dynamics on the development of relationships between students and their institution. Research questions and answers unveiled by this research are described in detail in Chapter 7.

RQ1: What are the relationship dynamics from a student perspective within an international higher education context?

The current research showed the importance of different interactions that were involved at the different points in the education process. It also demonstrated that from the viewpoint of student respondents, six key relationship interactions matter during their experience with IBSs, inclusive of relationships with alumni, other current students, academic staff, administrative staff, MNCs, and overseas exchange partnership HEIs; as outlined in section 7.1. The relationship atmosphere was also seen to be conditioned by these interactions, as well as the interactions shaping the atmosphere; as illustrated in section 7.1.
**RQ2:** How do the relationship dynamics impact on the relationship development between the students and their institution?

The current investigation demonstrated that the synergy of the above six key relationship interactions and networks co-create the added-value of the HEI service, which are centred on international standards of knowledge enrichment and employability enhancement; as illustrated in section 7.2.

The sub-research questions which examined actors, the interaction process, atmosphere and environment, i.e. the substances/parameters of relationships, were also answered through both the CEIBS and MBS case studies.

**SubQ1** for Actors: What actors are involved from the perspective of students as the focal actor?

As highlighted in Figure 5.1 and section 5.3.1 of the CEIBS case study, along with Figure 6.1 and section 6.3.1 of the MBS case analysis, a wide range of actors were illustrated during the six different interactive stages of the students’ experience with their IBSs.

**SubQ2** for the Interaction Process: What episodes and activities are involved in relationship development between students and their institution, as perceived by students?

As seen in Figure 5.8 and section 5.3.2 of the CEIBS case study, along with Figure 6.8 and section 6.3.2 of the MBS case analysis, a comprehensive list of activities took place during the six stages of students’ experience with their IBSs.

**SubQ3** for Atmosphere: How do the relationship dynamics that correspond with the key interactive stages during the life-cycle of a student’s experience with their institution
impact on the different stages of relationship development between the students and their institution?

From Figure 5.14 and section 5.3.3 of the CEIBS case study, as well as Figure 6.14 and section 6.3.3 of the MBS case analysis, different patterns of relationship life-cycle that corresponded to the CEIBS and MBS case studies were established, despite both IBSs having adopted the relational approach. The current research also showed that atmosphere, as a substance of relationships, was interpreted differently in the HE service context, as student respondents focused on the frequency and effectiveness of interactions to determine the relationship atmosphere with their IBSs, as seen in section 5.3.3.1 and section 6.3.3.1.

**SubQ4** for Environment: What is the nature of the environment within which the relationship dynamics and interactions between students and their institutions exist?

In the two case analyses, section 5.3.4 of CEIBS and section 6.3.4 of MBS, student respondents’ interpretation of environment, as a characteristic of relationships, was largely in-line with the outcome of a traditional ‘PEST’ analysis (Brownlie, 1987). This provided an understanding of the overall picture surrounding relationship interactions and the IBSs. Different patterns of technology-integrated interactions were also analysed as part of the micro environment linked to each IBS, demonstrating varied implications on relationship development between students and their IBSs.

8.2 **Research Conclusion One: Relationship Dynamics in the International HE Context**

The current study showed that the HE service is no different from other businesses, which echoed the research findings that no company can operate in isolation (Håkansson *ed.*, 1982; Ford *et al.*, 2006; Håkansson and Snehota, 2006). In fact, the nature of interdependences and connectedness meant that the performance of relationships existing between students and their HEI was dependent on other relationships and their associated
networks. The examination of these key relationships (as illustrated in section 7.1) and their network effects (examined in section 7.3) in terms of their contributions towards the value-creation of HEIs, confirmed that IBSs, as business enterprises, were set in a network of ongoing relationships. The purpose of these interactions and exchanges is a combination of business and non-business orientation (Håkansson ed., 1982; Ford, 2002; Ford, et al., 2006; Håkansson and Snehota, 2006).

The two case studies confirmed that the performance of the relationship development between students and their HEI was influenced by these key relationships, and also reinforced the literature on network effects (e.g. Zolkiewski and Turnbull, 2002; Ritter et al., 2004). It was demonstrated that relationship building and management between students and IBSs, along with co-operation with these key networks, all contributed to the competitiveness, effectiveness and profitability of HEIs; and that all of these relationships/networks were evident during the different stages of student experience with the IBSs. Thus, from the strategic perspective, the current study suggested that the relationship development between HEIs and their students were largely determined through successful management by the institution of these identified key relationships and associated networks that were most desired by students.

8.3 Research Conclusion Two: Impact of Relationship Dynamics – A Strategic Net

The current study demonstrated that given the fact that the international educational market environment is increasingly becoming competitive and dynamic, IBSs are placing greater emphasis on meeting the needs and expectations of students. This also confirmed shared views in HE marketing (Cheng and Tam, 1997; Swanson and Davis, 2000; Voss 2009). This investigation illustrated a similar understanding, and demonstrated that CEIBS and MBS, despite the different approaches that they applied in their relationship interactions during the distinct stages of the students’ experiences with the IBSs respectively, had a conscious aim to put students at the centre of their systems.
From the strategic point of view, the current study demonstrated that the value dimension of relationships had attracted the stakeholders of IBSs to become coupled and clustered together. This reinforced the view of markets-as-networks, as suggested by Ford et al. (2002). Similarly, the HE service market itself became organised in a network-like structure; and the existence of IBSs were embedded in a network of on-going business and non-business relationships and interactions, as illustrated in Figure 8.1 (see page 297).

The current investigation offered empirical evidence that the value co-created by those key relationships and networks was vital to the success of the HE service, in particular from a student-centric perspective. Research findings suggested that the ability of the IBSs to manage such relationships and networks is a critical task. The performance of the IBSs (as indicated by student respondent satisfaction) was strongly correlated to the competencies of these major relationships and networks that effectively respond to students’ requirements and desires. These understandings echoed the literature on relationships being viewed as core competencies (Cunningham and Homse, 1982; Dodgson, 1993; Day, 2000; Sivadas and Dwyer, 2000; Wilkinson and Young, 2002; Ritter et al., 2004) and the strategic perspective of managing networks (Ford et al., 2002, 2006; Zolkiewski and Turnbull, 2002; Ritter and Gemünden, 2003; Ford and Ritter, 2004).

From a strategic point of view, the current research reconformed that the HE service was not only to do with knowledge provision; it was also about building relationships with students. As such, thought should be given from the learner perspective about what actually matters most to them, and to look at that from an investment-return point of view. Research findings from this study demonstrated that the nature of the HE service could be viewed as a network of relationships from a standpoint of value co-creation, as these relationships could be condensed into two critical core values of HEI service provision, i.e. international standards of knowledge enrichment and global employability enhancement. This understanding also reinforced the research findings suggested by Wilson (1995) and Blois (1998), on the critical importance of understanding how
customers evaluate the benefits of being in the relationship, as well as the additional benefits of networks and from working together.

In summary, relationship development between HEIs and their students were largely dependent on the HEI’s successful management of key relationships and networks that are desired by students. With students being the most visible and primary customers whom HEIs serve (Kotler and Fox, 1985; Marginson, 2006), the strategic net, built from a student-centric viewpoint, consisting of six key networks, would effectively transform HE services through continuous dyadic and multiple relationship interactions. Thus, echoing the strategic perspective of relationships and networks (Ford, 1997, 2002; Zolkiewski and Turnbull, 2002), the success of the HE service is dependent on the ongoing development and continuous management of those key relationships that most matter to the students’ experience with their HEIs, as illustrated in Figure 8.1.
Figure 8.1: The Strategic Net and the Six Key Relationships in HEI Services – from the Students’ Perspective
8.4 Knowledge Contributions

8.4.1 Extension of the Relationship Life-Cycle

The adoption of the Relationship Life-Cycle Model developed by Wilkinson and Young (1994) provided the theoretical framework to gain an in-depth investigation of the different phases of relationship development between MBA students and their IBSs. It enabled a holistic understanding of the relationship dynamics and their implications on students’ experiences and satisfaction with their institutions’ service provision.

By referring to Figure 7.2, this research study suggested that in the HE context, relationship life-cycle could go through the decline phase if the level of students’ satisfaction and commitment to their institution were low. As demonstrated in MBS case analysis, student respondents could be categorised as supporters of MBS by applying the loyalty ladder, as suggested by Christopher et al., (1991) and by Harridge-March and Quinton (2009), since interviewees only supported MBS passively. This was testified by the comments of MBS respondents #4 and #12 (page 233).

Equally possible, the relationship life-cycle may remain at the hibernation phase if the level of students’ satisfaction and commitment to their university were high. As illustrated through the CEIBS case study, student respondents could be categorised as advocates and partners of CEIBS, as they were willing and actively advertising CEIBS to prospective students through positive WOM, and importantly they wanted to continue the partner (family) relationship with CEIBS long-term. This was exemplified by the comments of Chinese respondents #9 (page 180) and international respondent #7 from CEIBS (page181).

As existing literature suggested that qualifications were becoming an important and inseparable part of an individual’s social status and a platform for job opportunities and career enhancement (Brooks et al., 2012), either close relationship or loose association between students and their HEIs will always remain, instead of declining and vanishing.
From the theoretical knowledge contribution perspective, the current study extended the phases of the Relationship Life-Cycle Model by embedding the nature of HE service, as empirically illustrated through case analysis.

### 8.4.2 The Adaptation of Cooperation and Competition Mix

The Relationship Life-Cycle Model (Wilkinson and Young, 1994), as illustrated in Figure 2.5, was widely applicable to business-to-business relationship interactions. A cooperation-and-completion mix was used to describe four types of interfirm relationships: low cooperation and low competition; low cooperation and high competition; high cooperation and low competition; high cooperation and high competition.

The nature of HE service determined that students were largely dependent on their HEIs. For example, the HEIs set the admissions requirements, to select the right calibre of students to initiate and develop relationship with. In contrast, students had to go through the selection process due to the nature of the HE service; despite increasing numbers of students being self-funding. The current research demonstrated that students had to cooperate and commit to their relationship with the HEIs as soon as the registration and orientation stage took place, and to be responsible for their own academic outcomes. Therefore, the relationship between students and their HEIs is interdependent by nature; there is no competition between two parties, but complete cooperation. This was exemplified by the comments of MBS respondent #22 and #10 (page 253).

From the theoretical knowledge contribution perspective, the current study adapted the cooperation and competition mix of the Relationship Life-Cycle Model (Wilkinson and Young, 1994), embedding the nature of the HE service, that was empirically testified by the CEIBS and MBS case studies. This research demonstrated that the context of the business environment, in particular market competition, has wide relevance to the life-cycle of relationship development between students and their HEIs. This, to a great extent, mirrors the outline of a traditional ‘PEST’ analysis (Brownlie, 1987).
8.5 Practical Implications and Recommendations

8.5.1 Implications for Senior Management in HEIs

The research findings of this study could provide a set of tools which will effectively facilitate the goals of Senior Management Teams (SMTs) within the HE sector in their strategic planning and policy-making. The focus on marketisation and globalisation in international HE markets urged traditional HE decisions-makers to address issues of a quasi-commercial nature (Marginson, 2006). This meant that they were expected to grasp and implement marketing tactics to ensure their HEIs’ sustainability and success in the increasingly competitive global HE environment (St George, 2006).

Predominantly HE marketing practitioners and management executives are influenced by traditional marketing concepts (Aijo, 1996), and formulate business strategies by borrowing and imitating established marketing tactics practiced by other business organisations, though lacking long-term effectiveness. The current research, through the adaptation of a relational approach to the HE context, could provide alternative solutions as well as encourage creative and innovative thinking in HEI business strategy. By doing so, it could challenge the traditional approach of market planning and resource management/allocation. The research findings identified key relationships and networks, which traditionally either have been ignored, taken for granted, or regarded as less urgent or important, by HE managers. The adapted theoretical framework and the student experience map (Figure 4.4) provide the structure for HEI strategy formulation. It is not to be expected that HEI management executives embrace all these elements, as investing in relationships and network development requires long-term commitment and resources. However, even if HEI decisions-makers start with one of these key findings, and are drawn towards the student (focal actor-network) perspective, it will bring relevant changes to policy-making and impact on the fundamentals of HEI strategic planning.
8.5.2 Implications for Institutional Service Units in HEIs

The research findings could also be used as a framework for drawing up a list of guidelines and a set of recommendations for best practice, to encourage different offices and service centres of HEIs in enhancing their relationship-building and services provision to students.

The current study extended the number of analytical tools that HEIs could adopt and facilitate in their market planning and implementation, as suggested in the Gilligan Report (Anonymous, 2001). For example, this investigation illustrated the added-value of MNC networks from the perspective of students, as employment prospects become equated to investment-return and reputation of an HEI in terms of hard currency. From a strategy perspective, it is valuable to allocate resources to jointly create internship schemes with companies for existing students and graduates. This insightful feedback is beneficial to making a direct impact on service provision at operational levels.

The nature of the HE service is defined as a mixture of core, tangible and intangible elements (Mazzarol, 1998). However, there is a paucity of investigations into the synergy between them, as well as a lack of synchronisation of strategic capacities among business function units within HEIs (Kyvik, 2009).

For example, from the HEIs’ perspective, the quality of academic staff is determined by their research expertise and publication productivity (Ramsden, 1994). Research findings showed that from the student’s perspective, a significant emphasis was placed on academic staff’s practical business consultancy knowledge and experience, and importantly their abilities and skills in facilitating students’ understanding of business activities and inspiring original thinking. Therefore, HEIs should not make assumptions that all academic staff are confident speakers, charismatic communicators and hands-on IT professionals. Instead, HEIs should consider offering presentation training courses for academic staff as standard practice. Additionally, while considerable resources are allocated to attract world-class professors who are international experts of research, those
people may not necessarily be the best instructors in classroom-based learning. As such, it is valuable to also invest resources and encourage academic interactions between and amongst themselves, so that experienced teaching fellows and professors, who have established their credentials through real-world practice and research, may share their knowledge and expertise to enhance students’ knowledge enrichment by applied and integrated methods.

It is also important for HEIs to recognise that from the viewpoint of students, during the studying and living stage, academic staff members are perceived as the HEI. The deficiency of relationship interactions between students and academics is functionally equivalent to the failure of relationship development between the HEI and students. Therefore, service units within HEIs need to adopt a synchronised service culture to best support academics and students, especially during this studying and living stage.

The formulation of the student experience map (Figure 4.4) enabled the processual understanding of the specific service provision and quality perceived by students. For example, students suggested that the content of orientation week should be delivered throughout the first semester. Students felt that they were overloaded with information during the orientation week, and did not have the capacity to digest important guidance which was found to be extremely valuable later on. For example, regarding personality tests and managing conflict within group work, information sessions and tailored tutorials could have been run and facilitated as issues appeared throughout their course. Additionally, students seemed sure that the first semester would be the right length of time for them to be fully and truly oriented into the institutional environment. This feedback from students is valuable for on-going relationship building and management between HEIs and their students. It helps the institution to spread the same sets of service provision, and run similar sessions at different times when required, instead of delivering the current intensive sets of university services. The outcomes of these two operational approaches could result in different levels of student satisfaction.
8.6 Research Limitations

This investigation has been shaped by research objectives, adopted theories, a literature base, and research questions, all outlined in earlier chapters. As a consequence, research exploration and data analysis then presented in subsequent chapters has determined and restricted the scope of this study. Four such limitations have been identified, which provide a context for viewing the research findings. Each of these limitations is detailed as follows.

It would be valuable to have dyadic views from students’ counterparts. Given the exploratory nature of this research, and the fact that adoption of the IMP theoretical framework into the HE service has been hitherto untapped, it was beneficial as well as necessary to take the student’s perspective (i.e. the focal actor-network approach) to investigate the HE market as networks. Although documentation and observations have been employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the research (Johnson, 2001), this investigation lacks the dyadic views from students’ counterparts, including academics / professors, MBA office staff, IBS managers, alumni and employers.

The Interaction Model emphasises the dyadic characteristic of relationship interactions, placing importance both on the dyadic and dynamic nature of relationships and networks (Håkansson ed., 1982). The current research could further enhance its depth and research validity, by taking dyadic views to examine individual strands of key relationships identified.

Documents were constrained by the period when they were collected, although valuable in terms of gaining an understanding of case context. However, this does not greatly enhance the understanding of a specific relationship interaction from a contextual time-space perspective. For example, how students view IBS admissions procedures may be different from IBS rationales, and could possibly be different from the researcher’s interpretation (Rafferty, 2011). Although data triangulation could overcome this
limitation to some extent, one of the most valuable approaches is to directly engage with relationship parties, and to hear this in their own words through face-to-face interviews.

Although Business Schools are the building blocks of HEI success in international HE markets (De Onzono and Carmona, 2007), MBA students are unique professionals and different from randomly selected undergraduate (UG) or PGT student informants (Blackburn, 2011). There is a possibility that MBA student’s perceptions regarding the value of relationship interactions with academics, and relationships with MNCs, may not have been viewed equally strongly by UG or PGT students. Since UG programmes last between three to four years, such students may view employability prospects as more relevant and immediate to investment-return, as they are about to complete their studies. Additionally, PGT students may view relationships with professors differently than MBA students, as they are more reliant on guidance of academics than on practical expertise.

Regarding future case selections, it would be valuable to either focus on the UK, or expand more internationally. The current research conducted case comparisons, these aimed at gaining a better understanding of relationship interactions through more than one case study or exploration, but not aimed at generalisations (Brannen, 2005a, 2005b). It also lacked breadth from an international perspective, given the fact that the US and Australia are also major players in the international education market (Chen and Zimitat, 2006; Chadee and Naidoo, 2009; Johnstone et al., 2010; Maringe and Foskett, 2010). Therefore, adding case samples from these countries would be valuable. Additionally, further cases, regardless of being from the UK or internationally, would have offered the possibilities not only of in-depth exploration, but also a generalisation of the validity and transferability of the IMP theoretical framework into the HE sector.

The face-to-face semi-structured interviews were valuable for this exploratory study, as the comprehensive data helped to gain the detailed understanding regarding the HE service from the students’ perspective. However, the current research is constrained to the limited number of IBS cases selected and the case study research approach adopted, and as such unable to contribute to theoretical generalisations (Yin, 2003).
8.7 Future Research

Four specific areas are discussed for further research into the topic of this investigation. Initially, it would be beneficial to consider implementing the suggestions given, to help overcome current research limitations outlined as above, and to enhance the depth and breadth of future research.

It would be valuable to further investigate the role of technologies in relationships and networks. Given the fact that HEIs are increasingly feeling the pressure of dealing with an IT-savvy generation (Prensky, 2010), prospective students’ IT literacy is only going to get stronger and their demands for online relationship interactions are expected to be heightened (Margaryan et al., 2011). Therefore, future research could look into different means of technology and their attributes in terms of relationship interactions from dyadic perspectives. For example, future research could investigate value differences between blogs and social network forums, as perceived amongst students for establishing and developing relationship interactions. From a practical implication viewpoint, such findings could then provide guidance for developing HEI communication strategies.

It would also be valuable to examine nationality origin and network location, to explore whether the perceived value of relationships and networks was due to the proximity in geographic locations of actors in relationships and networks. The current study suggests a correlation, since Chinese students perceived that relationship with CEIBS provided them with the gateway into the institution’s alumni network, which predominantly exists in China. This then enabled them to tap into Guanxi (a Chinese term for close and inner circle relationship, which implies strong trust and business collaboration values) (Hofstede, 1991; Ryan, 2011), which offered extended networks for future career prospects (Choo, 2007; Blackburn, 2011). Future research could use British students as respondents, to testify whether findings share a similar pattern.

It would also be valuable to link up with the current trend in HEIs of having Directorates of Student Experience (Anonymous, 2012d, 2013b). A series of management-based
projects could potentially be established, for example, introducing relationship and network approaches to pilot Schools, and to compare student satisfaction before and after, over a period of three or five years, given the fact that relationships need time to develop and grow. These management-based projects could be formulated on the basis of the key relationships and networks identified from current studies, especially regarding relationships between students and academic staff, as well as relationships between students and MNCs. Research findings from these future research or management-based projects would be beneficial to senior executives, and could potentially contribute further to changing the landscape of the HE service.
# Appendices

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Appendix A: Relationship Marketing in HE

1.0 An Analysis of the Definitions of Relationship Marketing

It is important to start by determining the origins of Relationship Marketing. The specific term was alluded to by Thomas (1976), and appeared distinctly for the first time in academic literature when used explicitly by Berry (1983) as part of a critique of services marketing. Around that time, Jackson (1985) used the same expression ‘Relationship Marketing’ in the context of industrial marketing. Additionally, Levitt indicated that a business objective is underpinned by providing enhanced customer satisfaction that depends on “how well the relationship is managed by the seller” (Levitt, 1983, p. 111).

The intensification both of demanding business climates and of more selective customer power led to the establishment of the Relationship Marketing concept (Lindgreen et al., 2004), with a proliferation of associated publications throughout the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s (Marandi and Robson, 2008). Notably, in 2004 the American Marketing Association (AMA) changed the definition of marketing from: ‘Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of goods, ideas and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organisational goals’ – to: ‘Marketing is an organisational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers, and for managing customer relationships, in ways that benefit the organisation and its stakeholders’. It is interesting to compare these two sets of definitions, and notice the evident emphasis on the relational nature of marketing as espoused by the AMA (Gundlach, 2007). This was further strengthened in terms of relational aspects through the AMA’s revised 2007 definition (which exists now): ‘Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, marketers and society at large’ (Gundlach and Wilkie, 2009).

Over the last three decades, Relationship Marketing has evolved significantly, to the point when it was defined as the new revolutionary marketing paradigm, in contrast to
traditional marketing (Aijo, 1996; Grönroos, 1996, 2000; Payne, 2000; Palmer, 2002). Hence, it is useful to trace the origins of Relationship Marketing and understand the development of its key definitions. Harker (1999) carried out a review, and as a result, identified 26 different definitions. A few of the more popular ones amongst many identified are presented chronologically below in Table A1. They share similarities as well as differences relating to what constitutes Relationship Marketing.

Table A1: Examples of Various Definitions of Relationship Marketing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Author and Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>'Relationship Marketing is attracting, maintaining and – in multi-service organisations – enhancing customer relationships.'</td>
<td>Berry, 1983, p.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Marketing is to establish, maintain and enhance relationships with customers, and other partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met. This is done by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises.'</td>
<td>Grönroos, 1990, p.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'The Relationship Marketing concept is emerging as a new focal point, integrating customer service and quality with a market orientation.'</td>
<td>Christopher et al., 1991, p.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Relationship Marketing is the process whereby a firm builds long-term alliances with both prospective and current customers, so that both the seller and buyer work toward a common set of specified goals.'</td>
<td>Evans and Laskin, 1994, p.440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'…all marketing activities are directed towards establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges… adequately conceptualising Relationship Marketing requires a definition that accommodates all forms of relational exchanges.'</td>
<td>Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Relationship Marketing is the ongoing process of identifying and creating new value with individual customers, and then sharing the benefits for this over a lifetime of association.'</td>
<td>Gordon, 1998, p.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'[Relationship Marketing is] the ongoing process of engaging in co-operative and collaborative activities, and programmes with immediate and end-user customers, to create or enhance mutual economic value at reduced cost.'</td>
<td>Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000, p.9</td>
</tr>
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</table>

In addition to the above examples of Relationship Marketing definitions, a number of other terms have been used either as a substitute or to describe similar concepts. These
terminologies include direct marketing, one-to-one marketing, loyalty-based marketing, customer relationship marketing (CRM), customer information management (CIM), integrated marketing, dialogue marketing and interactive marketing (Brodie et al., 1997; Coviello et al., 1997; Möller and Halinen, 2000; Palmer et al., 2005; Eiriz and Wilson, 2006). Despite the existence of various Relationship Marketing definitions, perhaps the most often cited understanding of its objectives is given as: “To identify, establish, maintain and enhance, and, when necessary, terminate relationships with customers, and other stakeholders, at a profit, so that the objectives of all parties involved are met; this is done by mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises.” (Grönroos, 1996, p.11)

To conclude, although there have been numerous definitions and descriptions of Relationship Marketing, researchers have criticised the lack of consensus in explaining the nature of the relationship construct (Gummesson, 1994a; Zolkiewski, 2004; Marandi and Robson, 2008). Additionally, as Relationship Marketing covers a wide range of activities, this gives the impression that it means different things to different researchers (Palmer and Bejou, 1994; Morris et al., 1998).

2.0 Characteristics and Implications of Relationship Marketing

2.1 Characteristics of the Relationship Marketing Concept

Relationship Marketing originated as a management approach in industrial and service markets (Gummesson, 1994a, 1994b; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Christy et al. 1996). The development of the Relationship Marketing concept was influenced by interaction theories (Gummesson, 1987), and then extended to consumer services and goods markets principally as a result of technology developments and improvements in database and direct marketing (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000; O’Malley and Mitussis, 2002).

According to Gummesson’s viewpoint (1994a), relationships were ‘fuzzy’ entities, with ‘fuzzy’ borders and many overlapping properties. Relationship Marketing remained a ‘broad church’ (Egan, 2003, 2004; Harker and Egan, 2006), and was probably best
understood as an umbrella concept, which emphasised the need to view exchanges from a long-term oriented perspective, rather than in the short-term (Palmer, 2002).

Relationship Marketing was also regarded as a philosophy of doing business in an intangible environment, with a distinctive strategic orientation to focus on retaining current customers, rather than on acquiring new customers (Loveland, 2001; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003). Research has shown that it is far less expensive to retain a customer than to acquire a new one (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990). When marketing expenses are allocated more towards retaining customers under a Relationship Marketing strategy, it is likely to make marketing more efficient (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Kotler and Armstrong, 1996; Kotler, 2003). It is also suggested that an improvement in the retention rate positively influences the financial performance of a business unit (Reichheld, 1996; Ryals, 2002). In addition, research findings demonstrated that loyal customers will frequently help to attract new customers through positive word-of-mouth (WOM) (Sheth, 2002). Therefore, as the number of these relationships expands, the impact on the growth of customer referrals and economic benefits could potentially be huge.

Within such broad and fuzzy boundaries, Barnes (1994) investigated the conceptions of Relationship Marketing that had been initiated by different researchers, and identified four ‘research groups’, each with a distinct conceptual framework and focus. They are: 1) Creating exit barriers for customers; 2) Customer retention and recurring purchases; 3) Building customer intelligence through database marketing, to enhance ongoing communication with customers; 4) Partnering, where both buyers and sellers are willing partners in an ongoing arrangement, and where benefits and sacrifices are incurred on both sides. Alternatively, Palmer et al. (2005) categorised Relationship Marketing into four main perspectives, or Schools. Along with traditional Transactional Marketing, the other three alternatives are the Anglo-Australian Approach (e.g. Buttle, 1996; 2004; Payne et al., 2005a, 2005b), the Nordic School (e.g. Gummesson, 1987, 1994a; Grönroos, 1994), and the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Group (e.g. Ford and McDowell, 1999; Håkansson et al., 2004). Most recently, Brito (2011) provided a comparative analysis of the main streams of research on Relationship Marketing,
delineating the scope and defined focus of each marketing School, within their fuzzy boundaries, as a body of knowledge.

On the basis of these categorisations and analysis, the following summary presented in Table A2 outlines some of the key characteristics of Relationship Marketing in comparison to Transactional Marketing.

**Table A2: Key Characteristics of Relationship Marketing**

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**– Relationship Marketing versus Transactional Marketing**

(adapted from Grönroos, 1991; Coviello *et al.*, 1997; Harker, 1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Components</th>
<th>Relationship Marketing</th>
<th>Transactional Marketing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basis</strong></td>
<td>Service / Quality / Loyalty / Interactivity</td>
<td>Exchange of the marketing ‘4 Ps’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus / Orientation</strong></td>
<td>Customer retention</td>
<td>Single sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeframe</strong></td>
<td>Long-term</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Emphasis on the Customer** | Customer loyalty driven through:  
- High customer service  
- High customer commitment  
- High customer contact | Limited emphasis on customer:  
- Little importance placed on customer service  
- Restricted approaches to customer commitment  
- Moderate customer contact |
| **View of Market** | Multiple: customers and networks | Singular: an individual customer |
| **Measurement** | Quality, value, customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, profitability | Revenue, market share |

In summary, with acknowledgement of its fuzzy boundaries, the two fundamental pillars of the Relationship Marketing concept were the emphasis placed on customer retention and on having a long-term orientation. This original ethos enabled Relationship Marketing, as a body of knowledge, to rapidly rise and continuously expand during the last three decades, with enduring prominence.
2.2 Implications of Relationship Marketing in HE

Morris *et al.* (1998, p.360) argued that it is not evident that “academic thinking leads, lags, or parallels real-world practice in the area of relationships”. This claim can also be applicable in the higher education sector. Despite the evolution of Relationship Marketing as a new concept in marketing since the 1980s, it has only recently been recognised as a new research phenomenon in HE Marketing (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). As a consequence, the usefulness and relevance of Relationship Marketing (RM) to the higher education service have only been explored and adapted by HE marketing researchers and practitioners largely over the last decade.

2.2.1 Research Articles Exploring the RM Concept in HE Marketing

Academics in HE Marketing have extolled the merits of Relationship Marketing (RM), and aimed to adopt its relevance to the HE service.

For example, Gibbs (2001) suggested that HEIs should develop educational relationships rather than transactional deals. Johnson (2001) shared similar views, and placed great emphasis on the significance of a two-way relationship between the HEI and its customers. The application of Kotler and Armstrong’s (1996) ‘Five-Level Model’ of relationships (i.e. basic level, reactive level, accountable level, proactive level, and partnership level) applied to the HE sector was undertaken by Klassen (2002), in an investigation of web-based strategies for relationship building through assessing information offered by university and college websites. An exploration of identity theory by Arnett *et al.* (2003) emphasised the nature of exchange relationships in HE; whilst Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) suggested that RM is more appropriate for an educational context, in contrast to the transactional approach. In addition, Priluck (2003) suggested that RM principles could lead to different and potentially more fruitful models in HE marketing. McAlexander *et al.* (2005) explored aspects of customer relationship management (CRM), by examining how the nature of relationships among alumni and their shared experiences affect their long-term loyalty to their home institution. Similarly,
the CRM concept has been applied to develop an enrolment officer training model for colleges (van der Schee, 2010a), as well as to increase student retention or brand loyalty (Sauer and O’Donnell, 2006; van der Schee, 2010b). In summary, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) recognised the usefulness and compatibility of RM, and considered it well-suited with the nature of HE.

In the service arena especially, RM is regarded as a philosophy of doing business with a distinctive strategic orientation focused on keeping and improving current customers (Lovelock, 2001; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003). Since an improvement of the retention rate positively influences revenues (Reichheld, 1993, 1996), satisfied and loyal customers will frequently help to attract new customers through positive WOM endorsements (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990; Reichheld, 1996; Sheth, 2002). These arguments are exceedingly pertinent to the business management of HEIs. For example, the increasing global competition among HEIs has made retaining enrolled students equally as important as attracting and enrolling them (Elliott and Healy, 2001). Bejou (2005) suggested that learner satisfaction has a positive impact on student retention, thus enabling long-lasting relationships to be formed through post-graduation activities of alumni. Also, many satisfied learners can help market an institution and attract new students, through sharing their positive learning experiences and engaging in positive WOM communication (Al-Alak, 2006; Helgesen and Nesset, 2007; Voss, 2009).

Despite the numerous definitions and different divisions of RM research, in general the volume of literature on buyer-seller relationships is ever-expanding (Grönroos, 2006, 2011), with a burgeoning of RM research in both business marketing and services marketing (Ballantyne et al., 2003). Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of RM as an alternative approach aligned with transactional marketing for the HE sector, and the initiation of RM research in the HE field, has by and large been under-developed (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006).

The summary below in Table A3 presents a list of research articles exploring aspects of RM concepts in HE between 2001 and 2013.
Table A3: List of Research Articles Exploring the RM Concept in HE Marketing
– published between 2001 and 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author and Date</th>
<th>Area of Study</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Research Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bay and Daniel (2001)</td>
<td>Investigated some of the reasons that institutions of HE should not regard the student as the customer.</td>
<td>Conceptual investigation</td>
<td>It presented that differences between profit-seeking organisations and universities prevented the entire usefulness of the customer-focus. The student-as-a-customer paradigm potentially causes institutions to concentrate on short-term and narrow student satisfaction issues over long-term needs of an entire range of HE stakeholders. It proposed to view students as collaborative partners, and examined its potential benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbs (2001)</td>
<td>Examined HE as the commodity in the economic market, and the inadequacy of this notion.</td>
<td>Conceptual investigation</td>
<td>It suggested that in the domain of higher education, HEIs should seek to develop educational relationships rather than transactional deals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gyure and Arnold (2001)</td>
<td>Explored the concept of RM in developing strategies for admissions recruiting and enrolment management.</td>
<td>Conceptual investigation</td>
<td>It provided a conceptual training outline for admissions recruiters and enrolment officers, as well as a set of attitude tools. It suggested how various training methods potentially benefit from a consistent underlying theoretical construct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klassen (2002)</td>
<td>Applied Kotler’s (1992) “five-level model”, and investigated the web-based strategies for relationship building.</td>
<td>Quantitative survey of USA universities’ web sites</td>
<td>It suggested that few websites of top-ranked and lower-ranked HEIs have achieved the partnership level of relationship marketing. It also confirmed that top-ranked institutions are better suited to build relationships with students, in comparison to the lower-ranked ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnett, German and Hunt (2003)</td>
<td>Explored RM being a viable strategy in such contexts as those involving a high level of social exchange, B2C and non-profit marketing.</td>
<td>Quantitative survey of alumni from one USA university</td>
<td>It suggested that the success of relationship marketing may require different relationship characteristics in the non-traditional RM context. The development of “the identity salience model of RM success” was tested and supported in the context of non-profit HE marketing, which involve individuals and social exchange primarily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisardi and Ekwulugo (2003)</td>
<td>Explored international students’ perceptions about UK education and UK performance in the world market for international education.</td>
<td>Qualitative and quantitative survey from developed and developing countries</td>
<td>It suggested that relationship marketing is more appropriate for an educational context, in contrast to the transactional approach. As a consequence, HEIs should pay great attention to their stakeholders, by building relationships that would generate positive impressions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s) (Year)</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Research Method</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trim (2003)</td>
<td>Explored partnership arrangements in the HE context, from a strategic marketing perspective, to enable education provision to meet a broad range of stakeholders.</td>
<td>Conceptual investigation with references of entrepreneurship centers in Canada, the UK and the USA</td>
<td>It suggested that it is essential that within the partnership arrangements framework, a structure, such as a centre of entrepreneurship, should be in place. This can facilitate the development of partnership arrangements, and can be viewed also as a catalyst for developing new and marketable products and services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oplataka and Hemsley-Brown (2004)</td>
<td>Examined the common themes and characteristics that emerge from research relating to marketing in schools.</td>
<td>Systematic literature review</td>
<td>It concluded that marketing perception, marketing planning, marketing strategies, and promotion were all key themes. It suggested that forms of RM have already been observed in schools; more in-depth studies of RM are needed to understand the approach in the higher education context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McAlester, Koenig and Schouten (2005)</td>
<td>Explored CRM by examining how the nature of relationships amongst students affects their long-term loyalty to a university, and their intentions as alumni to support the university in future.</td>
<td>Quantitative survey of alumni from one USA university</td>
<td>It demonstrated that positive inter-customer relationships (i.e., customer-to-customer) contribute to loyalty. The combination of alumni perception of the bonds that they formed with their peers and the transformational experience, are important and long-lasting contributors to relationships and future brand-loyalty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plewa, Quester and Baaken (2005)</td>
<td>Explored the RM concept between entities operating in different sectors, namely university and industry in Australia.</td>
<td>Qualitative study, through in-depth face-to-face interviews</td>
<td>It led to the development of a conceptual framework of university-industry relationships, and confirmed that three central intertwined variables influence such a relationship: interaction mechanisms, linkage mechanisms, and organizational environment difference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Alak (2006)</td>
<td>Examined the marketing actions (antecedents) and performance (consequences) of relationship quality in a HE setting.</td>
<td>Quantitative survey of UC students at one private university in Jordan</td>
<td>It demonstrated that relationship marketing activities conducted by HEIs do create an added-value for students. This contributes not only to student satisfaction and trust, but also to relationship continuity, and positive word-of-mouth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemsley-Brown and Oplataka (2006)</td>
<td>Reviewed the current research literature on supply-side HE marketing, and established the scope of HE marketing.</td>
<td>Systematic literature review</td>
<td>It demonstrated that existing literature of HE marketing is incoherent, and much research is yet to be done to explore RM models in the HE context. In addition, much research is still to be carried out, both from a problem identification and strategic perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sauer and O’Donnell (2006)</td>
<td>Examined the potential of reducing student attrition or increasing student retention.</td>
<td>Quantitative survey of freshmen at a private university in the USA</td>
<td>It suggested that schools should consider launching a new major as a means of retaining students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svensson and Wood (2007)</td>
<td>Examined the relationship between universities and their students.</td>
<td>Conceptual investigation</td>
<td>It provided a conceptual discussion that the citizen-authority relationship metaphor describing relationships between universities and students is more accurate and appropriate than the traditional customer-supplier relationship classification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helgesen (2008)</td>
<td>Investigated key success factors for student value and student loyalty, with a focus on the relationship marketing approach.</td>
<td>Quantitative survey of UG students at a university college in Norway</td>
<td>It demonstrated a RM approach means that great importance is attached to the creation of student value, and suggested that marketers need to know what creates student value, and also managers need to know which processes deliver value to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneke and Human (2010)</td>
<td>Explored whether using a relationship marketing approach is conducive to the task of identifying, selecting and recruiting highly desirable students.</td>
<td>Qualitative and quantitative survey in South Africa</td>
<td>It confirmed that serious individuals are interested in establishing a pre-application relationship with a selective number of institutions. Key influencing factors in ascertaining their interest included reputation, geographic location and campus safety of the institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison-Walker (2010)</td>
<td>Explained the customer profitability / customer prioritization in the HE context.</td>
<td>Conceptual investigation</td>
<td>It suggested that it is more important for HEIs to identify ‘right’ customers / students (i.e. profile of alumni gift-givers), than to acquiring and retaining them in order to achieve long-term success and profitability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van der Schee (2010a)</td>
<td>Explored factors of programming that led to student satisfaction, brand loyalty or student retention.</td>
<td>Quantitative survey at a private university in the USA</td>
<td>It confirmed that administrators can increase student satisfaction, brand loyalty, and student retention, by improving interaction frequency and relationship building between an instructor and a freshman class community in first-semester programming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van der Schee (2010b)</td>
<td>Explored relationship marketing and enrolment management theory in developing an enrolment officer training model.</td>
<td>Implementation and evaluation</td>
<td>It suggested that building relationship with new students, providing students with good service, and increasing productivity, led to improved student retention.</td>
</tr>
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2.2.2 Relevant Documents Exploring the RM Concept in HE Practice

In addition to the evolving number of academic articles exploring the RM concept in HE marketing, education policy-makers and influencers have also noted RM as a new way to build meaningful connections to students and stakeholders effectively (e.g. Anonymous, 2001, 2008a, 2010b, 2010e, 2011c). Table A4 that follows provides a snapshot and summary of a range of market research documents, indicating the intensity of investigations conducted at government level, and which were widely viewed and implemented across the UK HE sector from 2001 onwards. This strongly signalled a trend in HE marketing, with a shift from student acquisition to student retention and relationship building, being fundamentally influenced by the desire of HEIs to search for strategic solutions to achieve competitive advantage and long-term success in the increasingly competitive international HE market. Importantly, it also confirmed the growing demand and wide scope of RM research across the HE marketing and management field.

Table A4: Timeline of Relevant Market Research Documents Published at UK Government Level – from 2001 to 2011 inclusive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Documents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>2004</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Titles of the Documentation Published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>The Gilligan Report: A study of international marketing practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003a</td>
<td>The Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003b</td>
<td>Education UK: Positioning for success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003c</td>
<td>Education UK – the Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI 1): Executive summary; the views of international students and UK educational institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Vision 2020: Forecasting international student mobility, a UK perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Guide to the Bologna Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>PMI 2 (The Prime Minister Initiative 2): The launch of a strategy to make the UK the leader in international education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007a</td>
<td>The Economic Costs and Benefits of International Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007b</td>
<td>From Bergen to Lisbon: The contribution of the EC to the Bologna Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008a</td>
<td>International Research Collaborations: Opportunities for the UK HE sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008b</td>
<td>The UK’s Competitive Advantage: The market for international students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008c</td>
<td>Practice of Internationalisation: Managing international activities in UK universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008d</td>
<td>The Role of Marketing in HE: What Vice-Chancellors really think about marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009b</td>
<td>Widening Participation in Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009c</td>
<td>HE and Collaboration in a Global Context: Building a global civil society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010a</td>
<td>International Education as Institutional Priority: What every university should know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010b</td>
<td>The Browne Review: Securing a sustainable future for UK higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010c</td>
<td>Making it Happen: The Prime Minister’s Initiative for international education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010d</td>
<td>A UK Guide to Enhancing the International Student Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010e</td>
<td>Teaching Quality Information in UK Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011a</td>
<td>International Higher Education: Missing an opportunity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011b</td>
<td>Student Engagement in Curriculum Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011c</td>
<td>Provision of Information about HE: Outcomes of consultation and the next steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011d</td>
<td>The UK HE White Paper: Students at the heart of the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011e</td>
<td>Tracking International Graduate Outcomes 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011f</td>
<td>International Pricing Study: A snapshot of UK and key competitor country international student fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011g</td>
<td>A Guide to UK Higher Education and Partnerships for Overseas Universities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
From a customer-driven perspective, the RM concept places a strong emphasis on customer-centricity and long-term orientation, which fundamentally sets it apart from a transactional marketing approach (Ballantyne et al., 2003). In the HE sector, these are increasingly becoming equally important and relevant. In the UK, both the White Paper published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) (Anonymous, 2011d), and the National Student Survey (NSS) (Anonymous, 2010e), are two of the most recent agendas which emphasise more than ever a focus on student-centricity and student satisfaction (Anonymous, 2011b, 2012d). For example, the White Paper (Anonymous, 2011d) focuses on putting students in the ‘driving seat’, and requires the HE sector to become more accountable to learners/researchers. The document urges institutions to deliver a more effective student experience, by improving teaching, assessment, feedback and aspects of preparation for the world-of-work. Therefore, correspondingly, institutions will find it challenging to trade on their past reputations alone. Instead, they will be expected to provide student-oriented services, and as early as the stage of course enquiries get underway. Additionally, as NSS scores are the measures by which past, current and future learners judge universities, this reinforces the notion that student experience and student satisfaction does not finish after enrolment, or even beyond graduation (Eagle and Brennan, 2007; Anonymous, 2010e, 2011c, 2011d; Thomas, 2011). Therefore, these recent radical changes urge HEIs not to dwell on offering purely academic experiences (i.e. from a university-oriented perspective as a knowledge provider). Instead, they aim to make students the focus of HEI service provision (i.e. from a student-centricity perspective), for lifelong learning and social responsibilities (i.e. from a long-term orientation).

In summary, the list of research articles exploring the RM concept in HE marketing and the range of associated market research documents published over the last decade, collectively demonstrated that greater attention has been paid to RM in the HE research arena in recent years. However, despite attention having been paid to RM in HE, there are still a limited number of academic publications on the specific topic. Thus, RM research in the field of HE is relatively under-developed, in contrast to the much wider body of knowledge focused on RM overall.
3.0 Reasons for Not Choosing Relationship Marketing as the Theoretical Basis for This Thesis

RM is predominantly defined by its emphasis on repeat purchase from the same individual customer during direct commercial exchange activities, and also by a lifetime of association with the individual customer from the first point of contact (Grönroos, 1991, 1994; Gummesson, 1994a, 1994b; Gordon, 1998; Harker, 1999). From conceptual debates led by a number of academics (Berry, 1983; Christopher et al., 1991; Halinen, 1994; Barnes and Howlett, 1998; Pressey and Matthews, 2000), there have been suggestions that RM faces challenges in its applicability and implementation due to its frame of reference being that of a lifetime.

From this perspective, the RM concept could potentially be incompatible in HE, due to the fact that repeat purchase from the same individual student is limited (Naude and Ivy, 1999). Conversely, it is critically important to recognise that students form ‘membership’ relationships with institutions (Lovelock, 1983). Therefore, the individual customer has a strong influencing power on prospective customers (Modell, 2005), who can also indirectly impact on future purchases, as a result of their possible (E)WOM endorsement. Thus, the potential influences of an individual student or student group should therefore not be under-estimated.

Whilst recognising the complexity of measuring the value created by an individual student from a lifetime perspective, it is crucial to acknowledge that students contribute to overall profitability and bring a range of benefits, through ongoing interactive co-operation with their home institutions (Marginson, 2006; Thomas, 2011). This may not solely emphasise monetary value or commercial exchanges, for example as philanthropic donations, but include factors such as acting as employability mentors and making internship and vacancy offers. Hence, it can be suggested it is inadequate to view relationships between students and HEIs simply in terms of repeat purchase / commercial exchange activities.
RM is both relevant and evident in the HE service industry. However, RM faces challenges in its applicability and implementation, due to its emphasis on repeat purchase, by direct commercial exchange activities from the same individual customer through a lifetime business association (Berry, 1983; Christopher et al., 1991; Halinen, 1994; Barnes and Howlett, 1998; Pressey and Matthews, 2000). Due to the characteristics of the HE sector, including the multiple roles of students and the impact of their WOM, it is inadequate to view relationships between students and HEIs through an orientation of repeat purchase and commercial exchange activities. Equally, it is incomplete to reveal the nature of the HE service without awareness of RM from a perspective of student-centricity embedded in the context of the HEIs’ other stakeholders. Furthermore, it is extremely challenging to measure value creation of an individual student from his or her lifetime perspective.

In summary, the above points are the reasons taken in not choosing Relationship Marketing as the theoretical basis for this doctoral thesis. Nevertheless, the merits of customer-centricity and long-term orientation reinforce that further research in HE could benefit from both a student-oriented and longitudinal approach.

Articles only specific to Appendix A (with others listed in the References section)


Appendix B: Example of Introduction Letter to the MBA Class

Dear MBA Class of 2010,

I am Helen, a mature PhD student from Manchester Business School (MBS), at The University of Manchester, in the UK.

My research focuses on relationships and networks in international higher education, which will explore relationship dynamics and relationship interactions from the students’ perspective.

Having completed my undergraduate degree in China and MBA qualification in the UK, I am aware of the variations in quality that can exist between different institutions. I am investigating three international business schools (IBS): including MBS, Warwick BS and CEIBS, as my case studies. The current research aims to explore what are the multiple relationships that MBA students choose to interact with; and also how these relationships have interacted from the students’ perspective during their life cycle / experiences with their specific international school. In other words, recalling interactions with your IBS as prospective students, reviewing interactions with your IBS as registered students, and foreseeing interactions with your IBS as alumni. I would also be interested in examining the expectations and perceptions about the added-value international schools offer that differentiate themselves in the increasing competitive international MBA market.

I would very much appreciate your kind support and participation. Currently, I need to conduct interviews with approximately 25 students from your MBA class before the end of this semester. I understand that you all are extremely busy with your studies and projects. I will make an appointment with you, in advance, to suit your schedule (early in the morning, late at night, or around lunch-time). I will be available to meet up with you. The interview will be conducted with you individually, and take about 30 to 45 minutes.

What can I offer you in return? In addition to helping MBS better understand its students’ expectations, I am anxious to demonstrate my appreciation for your valuable time in some way. I am Chinese by origin, and have over 14 years work experience in both China (5 years) and overseas (10 years in Hong Kong, Singapore and the UK). I have specialised in international business, and also have good knowledge and networks in these countries and regions. If you ever need any information or assistance in the above associated areas, I will do my best to help you.

Here is my e-mail address helen.li@postgrad.mbs.ac.uk I am looking forward to hearing from you. Many thanks in advance for kindly participating in this research.

Best wishes,

Helen Li
Appendix C1: Initial Interview Questions

Semi-Structured Interview Question Guide – for the WBS Pilot Study

Draft Version, February 2007

1. Could you provide some background information about yourself, including how many years of work experience, level of management position prior to MBA study, age, qualifications, if possible?

2. How did you get on with the MBA initial enquiries? Which relationships and networks did you interact with? What was the usefulness of these relationships?

3. How did you get on with the MBA application and admissions process? Which relationships and networks did you interact with? What was the usefulness of these relationships?

4. Did you attend the Pre-MBA and Orientation activities? From your viewpoint, what was the added-value of these programmes? With whom did you interact most at this stage?

5. What do you enjoy the most about the MBA programme learning process? What are you expecting most from the MBA programme?

6. What has the International Business School (IBS) done to help your career management? What is needed to enable you to gain career prospects post-MBA?

7. Do you feel you are a product, producer, client, or customer of the IBS; and why?

8. Would you recommend this IBS to others? Also, how would you like to get involved when you are a member of the alumni?

9. What are the important relationships that you interact with the most during the MBA programme?
### Appendix C2: Correlation between the Initial Interview Questions and the Theoretical Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) <strong>Actors:</strong> What actors are involved?</td>
<td>1. Could you provide some background information about yourself, including how many years of experience, level of management position prior to MBA study, age, qualifications, if possible?</td>
<td>Opening question to relax the research respondent and ease him/her into the interview conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) <strong>Interaction Process:</strong> Which episodes and activities are involved?</td>
<td>2. How did you get on with MBA initial enquiries? Which relationships and networks did you interact with? What was the usefulness of these relationships?</td>
<td>Initial questions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 were predominantly interwoven around the key constructs of: 1) Actors; 2) Interaction Process; and 3) Atmosphere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) <strong>Atmosphere:</strong> How do the relationship dynamics correspond?</td>
<td>3. How did you get on with the MBA application and admissions process? Which relationships and networks did you interact with? What was the usefulness of these relationships?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Did you attend the Pre-MBA and Orientation activities? From your viewpoint, what was the added-value of these programmes? With whom did you interact most at this stage?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. What do you enjoy the most about the MBA programme learning process? What are you expecting most from the MBA programme?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. What have the IBS done to help your career management? What is needed to enable you to gain career prospects post-MBA?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Do you feel you are a product, producer, client, or customer of the IBS, and why?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Would you recommend this IBS to others? Also, how would you like to get involved when you are a member of the alumni?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. What are the important relationships that you interact with the most during the MBA programme?</td>
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Appendix D: Refined Version of the Semi-Structured Interview Guide
– compiled in July 2010, and used during formal data collection at both CEIBS and MBS

1. Please could you share your personal profile prior to enrolling on to the MBA programme; e.g. how many years of experience, level of management position, age?

At the Enquiries Stage:
2. Could you recall the reasons why you were interested in the MBS / CEIBS programme?
3. How did you enquire about the MBA programme with the International Business School (IBS)?
4. Are there any specific interaction episodes that you could recall?
5. Had you enquired about the MBA programme with alumni? Why is that important?
6. How did you gain information or interact with alumni?

At the Application and Acceptance Stage:
7. What did the IBS do to facilitate your application process?
8. Do you think that you needed little support from the IBS during this process?
9. How did information exchange take place with alumni and others; please could you explain in more detail?

At the Registration and Arrival Stage:
10. From your viewpoint, what is the added-value of the Pre-MBA Programme(s)?
11. Whom did you interact with the most? Why do you think it is important?
12. What was your experience about the Orientation Programme?

At the Studying and Living Experience Stage:
13. What do you enjoy the most about the learning process on the MBA programme?
14. What has contributed the most to your learning experience?
15. What could have helped to enhance your learning experience?

At the Career Development Stage:
16. What have the IBS done to help your career management?
17. What has contributed the most to your career prospects?
18. What could have helped?

At the Graduation and Alumni Stage:
19. Looking into the future, would you feel you are a product, producer, client, or customer of the IBS; and why?
20. Would you recommend this IBS? How would you like to get involved as an alumni?

From the Focal-Actor Perspective
21. What are the important relationships in the HE context that you interact with most?
22. What are the values that these relationships offer?
Appendix E: Initial Template – for Research Analysis

Value of Relationships from the Student Perspective

Relationship Interactions during Six Stages of the Student’s Experience Map

1) Enquires Stage (Code010) sub theme 1.1, and sub theme 2.1
2) Application and Acceptance Stage (Code 011) sub theme 1.2, and sub theme 2.2
3) Registration and Orientation Stage (Code 012) sub theme 1.3, and sub theme 2.3
4) Studying and Living Experience Stage (Code 013) sub theme 1.4, and sub theme 2.4
5) Career Development Service Stage (Code014) sub theme 1.5, and sub theme 2.5
6) Graduation / Alumni Stage (Code 015) sub theme 1.6, and sub theme 2.6

Relationship with WBS

Theme 1

MBA Office
Sub theme: 1.1.1.1 to 1.1.1.6

Professors
Sub theme: 1.1.2.1 to 1.1.2.6

Students
Sub theme: 1.1.3.1 to 1.1.3.6

Interactive Process
Code 002

Atmosphere
Code 003

Environment
Code 004

Relationship with Other Stakeholders

Theme 2

Alumni
Sub theme: 2.1.1.1 to 2.1.1.6

Family & Friends
Sub theme: 2.1.2.1 to 2.1.2.6
Appendix F: Final Template – for Research Analysis
Appendix G: Examples of CEIBS MBA Exchange Partner Schools
– data summarised from CEIBS Promotional Leaflet 2010-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Exchange Partner Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Melbourne Business School, University of Melbourne, Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Queen's School of Business, Queen's University, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sauder School of Business, University of British Columbia, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schulich School of Business, York University, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Copenhagen Business School, Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>HEC Paris, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Indian School of Business, India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>SDA Bocconi School of Management, Bocconi University, Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>WASEDA University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Warsaw School of Economics, Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Nanyang Business School, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>ESADE, Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IESE Business School, University of Navarra, Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>University of St Gallen, Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherland</td>
<td>Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, the Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>London Business School, The University of London, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anderson School of Management, University of California at Los Angeles, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darden School of Business, University of Virginia, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cox School of Business, Southern Methodist University, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fuqua School of Business, Duke University, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kelley School of Business, Indiana University, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kelley School of Management, North western University, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leonard N. Stern School of Business, New York University, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, USA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix H: CEIBS Associated MNC Recruiters Categorised by Industrial Sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of MNC Companies Categorised by Industrial Sectors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consulting Services including:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT Kearney, Accenture, Arthur D Little, Bain &amp; Company, Booz Allen Hamilton, Booz &amp; Company, Capgemini, Daymon Worldwide, Deloitte Consulting, Ernst &amp; Young, IBM Consulting, IDEO, iGeo, IMS Health China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial Services including:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEA Investors, AXA, Citigroup, Hana Bank, Harvest Fund Management, ICBC Leasing, JP Morgan, OCBC, Redpoint Ventures, UBS, UBS SDIC Fund Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IT/Telecommunications including:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazon, Apple, Cisco, Danaher, Dell, Gaopeng, Google, HP, Huawei, IBM, Infosys, Intel, Microsoft, Philips, Samsung Electronics, Siemens, Tata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Healthcare/Biotech /Pharmaceutical including:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbott, AstraZeneca, Bayer, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Eli Lilly, Johnson &amp; Johnson, Medtronic, MSD, Novartis, Pfizer, Roche, Wyeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industrial Products &amp; Services including:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3M, Air Products, BASF, Brambles, Chrysler, Corning, Dow Chemical, DuPont, Ford Motors, Honeywell, John Deere, Johnson Controls, Lear, Michelin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media/Entertainment and Others including:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bertelsmann, Dow Jones, Harvard Business Review, News Corporation, Ogilvy &amp; Mather, Shanghai Media Group, Viacom, Carrefour, IKEA, Metro, Tesco, Walmart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: CEIBS MBA Rankings in Internationally Influential Media between 1999 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Rankings</th>
<th>Name of Medias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>CEIBS’ MBA programme was ranked No. 17 of the best 50 business schools in Asia-Pacific.</td>
<td>A survey carried out by Asia Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>CEIBS’ MBA programme was ranked No. 14 in Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>A survey carried out by Asia Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>CEIBS’ MBA programme was ranked No. 14 of the best 50 business schools in Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>A survey carried out by Asia Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>CEIBS broke into the world top 100 MBA programmes, ranked No. 92 among the world’s full-time MBA programmes, placing it No. 3 in Asia.</td>
<td>The Financial Times Top 100 MBAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>CEIBS’ MBA programme was ranked No. 90 worldwide</td>
<td>The Financial Times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>CEIBS’ MBA programme was ranked No. 52 worldwide and No. 1 in Asia</td>
<td>The Financial Times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>CEIBS was ranked as the 22nd best MBA programme/</td>
<td>The Financial Times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>CEIBS was ranked 21st in the world and had been No. 1 in Asia</td>
<td>The Financial Times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>CEIBS MBA programme was ranked 11th on the &quot;Top-100 Full-Time Global MBA Programs&quot; and entered the &quot;First-tier&quot; among the world’s business schools for the first time.</td>
<td>The Financial Times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>CEIBS was ranked No. 1 in Asia, No. 11 worldwide</td>
<td>The Financial Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>CEIBS was ranked No. 8 worldwide</td>
<td>The Financial Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>CEIBS was ranked No. 22 worldwide</td>
<td>The Financial Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>CEIBS was ranked No. 17 worldwide</td>
<td>The Financial Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>CEIBS was ranked No. 24 worldwide</td>
<td>The Financial Times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J: Examples of MBS MBA Overseas Exchange Partnership Schools

- data summarised from MBS Promotional Leaflet 2011-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Australian Graduate School of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CEIBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chulalongkorn University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cornell University, S.C. Johnson Graduate School of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>EBS Universitat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>EMORY University, Goizueta Business School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ESADE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Fisher College of Business, International Programs-CIBER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Fudan University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>IESA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Indian Institute of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Indiana University, Kelley School of Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Instituto de Empresa Business School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>McCombs School of Business, The University of Texas at Austin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>McGill University, Desautels Faculty of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Melbourne Business School, The University of Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Rotterdam School of Management, ERASMUS University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>SDA Bocconi School of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Southern Methodist University, COX School of Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, HKUST Business School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Tsinghua University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>University of British Columbia, Sauder School of Business, Robert H. Lee Graduate School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Shanghai Advanced Institute of Finance (SAIF), Shanghai Jiao Tong University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>University of California, Davis Graduate School of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>University of Chicago, Chicago Booth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>University of Maryland, Robert H Smith School of Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>University of Minnesota, Carlson School of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>University of North Carolina, Kenan-Flagler Business School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>University of South Carolina, Darla Moore School of Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>University of Southern California, Marshall School of Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>University of Washington, Foster School of Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Vanderbilt Owen Graduate School of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Washington University of St Louis, Olin Business School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Wits Business School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>York University, Schulich School of Business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K: Examples of MBS Associated MNC Recruiters
References


King, N., Carroll, C., Newtown, P. and Dornan, T. (2002) “‘You can’t cure it so you have to endure it’: the experience of adaptation to diabetic renal disease”, *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(3), 329-346.


