School of Management and Marketing

The Focal Role of Emotional Well Being in Student-University Interactions: A Relationship Marketing Approach

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DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature: _____

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ABSTRACT

The tertiary education sector in Australia is critically important to the economy and prosperity (Australian Government, 2017) but universities are constantly faced with a range of ongoing challenges (Universities Australia, 2020). These include the ability of Australia's 42 universities to attract (Gardiner & OLT, 2020) and retain students (Li & Carroll, 2020), improve their overall mental health (Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019) whilst providing these students with a quality learning experience (Cleak & Zuchowski, 2020). Moreover, since the students' emotional wellbeing is critical in the student learning journey (Guilmette, Mulvihill, Villemaire-Krajden & Barker, 2019; Morton, Hinze, & Craig, 2020) this is an important aspect of building relationships with the student. Whilst relationship marketing (RM) is widely known to help service firms build and maintain relationships with customers (e.g. Berry, 1995; 2002; Bowden, Gabbott, & Naumann, 2015; Kingshott, Sharma, & Nair, 2020) there is still a distinct paucity in the education literature examining how RM can help tertiary education providers are able to nurture the overall student relationship.

This doctoral thesis examines whether universities are able to draw on the RM approach to successfully build relationships with their current students, the impact this has on their word of mouth and voice communication with others at the same time helping to ensure that the overall learning experience promotes positive emotional wellbeing. The specific research objectives of this doctoral thesis include: (1) addressing this gap in the education literature (2) Identify which relational constructs impact university-student relationships. (3) Help university decision makers understand factors that impact the overall student learning experience, and (4) provide an understanding of how to leverage student relationships to benefit both students and the university.

By drawing upon the theories of social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) and social exchange (SE: Thibaut & Kelly, 1959), and linking this to the EVL framework (Hirshman, 1970) this research tests a proposed conceptual model that comprises interaction quality, emotional well-being, commitment, word-of-mouth, voice and exit. By testing the proposed conceptual model that comprises 14 hypotheses the following research questions are addressed: (1) Can student relationships be viewed through the lenses of SC and SE theories? (2) Can RM be used as an effective tool to help nurture

the student relationship? (3) Which SC and SE based variables are important determinants of robust student relationships? (4) Do students from varying backgrounds respond differently to the RM efforts of Australian tertiary institutes?

This study adopts a deductive quantitative methodology (Antwi & Hamza, 2015) using a cross-sectional study (Zikmund, 2003). Data was collected using a national convenience sample of local and international students enrolled in Australian universities across disciplines and levels of study. Panel data was used to test the proposed model. Well-established scales in the literature were adapted to the university context using Likert type anchors (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree). The research instrument was pre-tested prior to the major fieldwork using a sample of panel respondents (n=50) that were identical to the targeted population to help pilot test the research instrument. A self-administered online questionnaire, using the Qualtrics based platform, solicited the data from respondents. The panel company sent the survey link to potential respondents in their database, resulting in 472 usable responses to test both the measurement and the hypothesized conceptual model using AMOS. Fit statistics using the two-step technique (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) indicate support for both the measurement and structural models.

The study contributes to the literature by addressing the identified gaps and through that provides a number of scholarly and managerial implications. The scholarly implications include empirical recognition that RM can explain student relationships, interaction quality is a key relational driver but potentially varies depending on its source, and further that both social capital and social exchange theory are suitable perspective to explain university-student relationships. The study also highlights to managers the importance of RM, the varying and unexpected role of emotional wellbeing and voice in the relationship, and the mosaic of links between RM variables. In addition to the range of limitations and future research directions, this doctoral dissertation concludes by reflecting on the potential role that COVID-19 may play tempering the research findings.

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CONCEPTUAL MODEL CONSTRUCTS

IQ	Interaction Quality
EWB	Emotional Wellbeing
COMM	Commitment
WOM	*Word of Mouth*
VOI	Voice
EX	Exit

ABBREVIATIONS

λ	Standardised factor loading
α	Cronbach's alpha
β	Model path weighting
p	Probability
χ^2	Chi-square
ABS	Australian bureau of statistics
AGFI	Adjusted goodness of fit index
AMOS	Analysis of a moment structures
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
AVE	Average variance extracted
B2B	Business to business
B2C	Business to customer
BBC	British broadcasting corporation
CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
CFI	Comparative fit index
CMV	Common method bias
COMM	Commitment
Corr	Correlation
CR	Composite reliability
CUM	Cumulative percentage
df	Degrees of freedom
DFAT	Department of foreign affairs and trade
DIY	Do-it-yourself
EFA	Exploratory factor analysis
EVL	Exit, voice, loyalty
EVLN	Exit, voice, loyalty, neglect
EWB	Emotional wellbeing
EX	Exit
GFI	Goodness-of-fit index
GDP	Gross domestic product
HEI	Higher education industry
IFI	Incremental fit Index
IQ	Interaction quality
IQCM	Interaction quality classmates
IQTS	Interaction quality teaching staff
IQNTS	Interaction quality non-teaching staff
KMO	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin
Kurt	Kurtosis
M	Mean (in tables)
Max	Maximum
MaxR(H)	Maximum reliability
MBA	Masters of business administration

Min	Minimum
MLE	Maximum-likelihood estimation
MSV	Maximum shared variance
N, n	Sample size
NES	Negotiated exit strategy
NFI	Normed fit index
NNFI	Non-normed fit index
PCA	Principal components analysis
PGFI	Parsimonious goodness of fit index
PNFI	Parsimonious normed fit index
PR	Permanent resident
PSMHW	Promoting Student Mental Health and Wellbeing
RM	Relationship marketing
RMSEA	Root mean square error of approximation
SC	Social capital
SCT	social capital theory
SD	Standard deviation
SEM	Structural equation modelling
SE	Social exchange
SES	Silent exit strategy
SET	Social exchange theory
Sig	Significance
Skew	Skewness
SMC	Squared multiple correlations
SNCP	Scaled non-centrality parameter
SPSS	Statistical package for the social sciences
TEQSA	Tertiary education quality standards agency
TCE	Transactional cost analysis
TLI	Tucker-Lewis index
TR	Transformative research
QILT	Quality indicators for learning and teaching
VAR	Percentage of variance
VOI	Voice
WHO	World health organization
WOM	Word-of-mouth
X, x	Mean (in text body)

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1   BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1.1   Background to the study

The tertiary education sector is of critical importance to the Australian economy and therefore the nation's prosperity (Australian Government, 2017; Deloitte, 2015; 2016) because it provides employers with skilled persons to undertake a wide range of professional roles within industry. At the time of writing this doctoral dissertation there were an estimated 1.37 million students studying in Australia's 42 universities (Study Australia, 2020), indicating the importance of the sector as a source of developing skilled persons both within Australia and overseas. In that regard, university education is a large contributor to the Australian nation in real GDP terms with an estimated AUD $140 billion contribution to the Australian economy in 2014 (Universities Australia, 2019). The success of Australia's universities regards educating students therefore has broader consequences for Australia both in terms of providing a source of skilled professional people and economic activity within the economy. Further to this, education is ranked as Australia's largest exporter of services (DFAT, 2017), reflected through the 369,436 international students studying in Australian universities (DESE, 2019). This data indicates that Australia is also a strong participant in the lucrative global education industry so how they engage and build relationships with domestic students has implications for their overseas activities. This is important for decision makers in Australian universities to recognize considering that as at 2020, the size of university education sector globally was in the order US$179.35 billion and that market size is expected to reach US$198.725 billion by 2026 (Market Watch, 2020). This means that if Australian universities want to continue to participate in both the domestic and this growing global marketplace they need to not only continue to attract but more importantly understand how to nurture relationships with both local and international students alike if they are to remain competitive on the global stage.

In order to ensure that universities provide a quality education to students in the local and international markets they operate in, the Australian Federal government has thus mandated that universities adhere to a range of quality standards for each level of award (AQF, 2020). Further to this, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency

(TEQSA) surveys students studying in Australian universities on an annual basis to gain an insight into their experiences in the learning journey. Based on the survey an annualized report that compares universities across a range of factors such as skill development, learner engagement, quality teaching, student support, learning resources and overall quality of the entire educational experience (TEQSA, 2020) gives an insight into the experiences of students studying in Australian universities. This external oversight report effectively provides a 'league table' of Australian universities according to the underlying dimensions in the survey so that students and other stakeholders (i.e. policy makers, parents, employers, employer bodies, etc.) can make informed choices about each institution. Typically, a number of universities around the country draw upon the report to highlight their areas of strength to market directly to prospective students.

For example, the University of Notre Dame, Australia (based in Fremantle, Western Australia) have most recently highlighted their number one status in Australia regarding student satisfaction and experience, and, skills development. This action reflects that providing a quality education experience to students in Australian universities is intrinsic to building relationships with current and future students but also reflects the trend of marketing to students that universities around the globe have adopted (Gardiner & Olt, 2020). Therefore, those Australian universities that promote the underlying dimensions in the student experience survey (TEQSA, 2020) provide the clearest indication that university decision makers need to be equally mindful of the need to build and nurture relationships with students before and during the learning journey. Promoting an ongoing relationship with the customer is one of the hallmarks of relational marketing (RM) (Grönroos 1994; Gaur, Kingshott & Sharma, 2019; Gummerson 1998) so clearly this RM approach to dealing with their students has potential merit.

1.1.2 Statement of the problem

Whilst the education literature is becoming abundant with examples of marketing directed towards students aimed at attracting them to their institutes (Gardiner & Olt, 2020; Levinson & Hawes, 2007; Naude & Ivy, 1999) very little literature is devoted how the relationship marketing (RM) paradigm can be used to help explain how to build and nurture the student relationship (Gap 1). Although this particular gap is quite

broad in nature this dissertation in the first instance represents a scholarly response to the overarching paucity in the literature devoted to examining the university-student relationship through the lens of RM. This important domain of the marketing discipline has been empirically shown to help explain a multitude of service provider-customer relationships across a broad number of settings (e.g. Alhathal, Sharma & Kingshott, 2019; Gaur, Kingshott & Sharma, 2019) therefore it is posited (and tested) in this dissertation that RM also has a critical role to play in the education sector. It is only by eliminating the paucity in the literature in general terms (gap 1) that the foundation on which to address specific gaps (gaps 2-4) related to how RM can help to model the university-student relationship. Moreover, by addressing the general and specific RM gaps in the education literature by grounding the dissertation in a suitable conceptual underpinning, this helps to illuminate and address a further gap (5) in the literature pertaining to the need to build on existing groundings when RM is involved.

Whilst the education sector globally is constantly faced with a wide range of ongoing challenges (BBC, 2020; Norton & Cherastidham, 2018; Universities Australia, 2020) this means that deploying RM should be a critical consideration in helping university decision makers model the relationship with their student base to the benefit of both parties. Accordingly, it is posited in this dissertation that two of the most important challenges facing the university sector can be addressed by the effective application of RM in dealing with their students. This is due to the recognition that successful RM practices are largely characterized as long terms relationships between the firm (university) and the customer (students) and furthermore that these are customarily positive in nature (Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987). Specifically, this means adopting RM practices would potentially mean that the ability of the education provider to overcome the endemic problem of poor retention rates (e.g. Baik, Naylor, Arkoudis, & Dabrowski, 2019; Li & Carroll, 2020) (gap 2), at the same time help to improvement the mental health of university students (Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019; Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013; Koutra, Roy, & Kokaliari, 2020; Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005; Wingert et al., 2020) (gap 3) would be enhanced. Thus the role RM can play in helping the university overcome such dual challenges through a better understanding of how the various interactions students have in the learning journey (gap 4) needs to be considered from the perspective grounding any study in suitable theory (gap 5).

This doctoral dissertation therefore argues that the successful application of RM practices offers the potential for universities to address the two specific problems, namely student retention whilst helping to ensure student wellbeing during the learning journey. However, universities have traditional focused on understanding how retention is linked to soliciting feedback from students in order to help shape a better curricula (McCuddy, Pinar, & Gingerich, 2008) and through that deliver the curricula better through good teaching practices (Cook-Sather, 2006; Shah & Nair, 2011). Since no consideration of RM practices has been adopted in the process of building student relationships this dissertation is the first to examine this approach to student retention in detail. Scholars have also linked retention rates and underlying factors to help understand how to deal with the problem of poor emotional wellbeing (EWB) of their students. In addition to responding to the broader role of RM in the university-student relationships (namely, gap 1), by addressing this paucity in the literature this research will also enables a better and more nuanced understanding of more specific aspects of the RM. However, there is no studies in the extant literature specifically showing how the institutes can deploy RM practices to help improve their student retention rates (Gap 2) this dissertation examines the role that RM plays as the mechanism to reduce students leaving their course prematurely. Moreover, the role that RM plays in helping to improve the EWB of its students (Gap 3), and the effect this plays on the overall relationship with the student is examined in more detail. These gaps are characteristic of the paucity of RM in the education literature despite the observation by Tight (2020) of the major shift in thinking within the higher education sector during the 1960 to 2018 period to one that recognizes the need for universities to focus on adapting their learning and engagement practices to cater to student needs. These approaches focus on pedagogical aspects of the student outcomes rather than adopting a more holistic relational perspective, as would be characteristic of RM practices. Ironically, the practices of learning to best cater to the needs of the customer through adaption is long been recognized as one of the cornerstones of RM practices of the firm (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987) but despite this, examining the university-student relationship through the lens of RM has been largely overlooked. Moreover, since universities must also ensure that their students have quality learning experiences during the learning journey (Cleak & Zuchowski, 2020) then the need to consider how to deploy RM needs to come into focus. This is because quality relationships are key to success of this

approach in dealing with the customer (Black, Childers, & Vincent, 2014; Kim & Qu, 2020) so are proposed in this research to similarly apply to university-student settings.

Typically, RM scholars highlight that building and nurturing relationships with the customer is the true benefit of this approach to marketing (e.g. Cambra-Fierro, Melero-Polo, et al., 2018; Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Grönroos, 2004; Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020). Service marketing scholars point out further that in that relational activity firms need to ensure they build quality relationships with the customer (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Casidy & Nyadzayo, 2019), which means these are going to be a function of quality interactions with the customer. The education literature points out the importance of students having interactions with fellow students, teaching and non-teaching staff (Jensen & Jetten, 2015) but there are no studies that link how the quality of interactions between these members of the 'learning network' help to nurture the overall relationship that universities have with the student (Gap 4). Since the various permutations of interactions between customers and an organizations' staff are one of the cornerstones of services marketing this also means that interactions are intrinsic to educational service providers and their RM outcomes.

Indeed much of the education literature focuses on the role that social capital (SC) plays in helping the student attain desired outcomes (Dika, 2012; Stanton-Zalazar, 2011) so many studies are grounded in the theory of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). However, service interactions within various service settings that involve individuals are largely regarded as social encounters (Alhathal, Sharma, & Kingshott, 2019; Malhotra, Ulgado, Agarwal, Shainesh, & Wu, 2005). This then means that when viewing the various interactions that students have within the 'learning network' through the lens of RM this implies that these relationships can be grounded in the theory of social exchange (SE: Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). To date as there are no empirical studies devoted to examining the student-learning journey from the dual perspectives of SC and SE theory (gap 5), this doctoral dissertation adopts that mantle.

These are important theories that can help to examine the role of RM practices as they potentially complement one another within the context of a higher educational learning environment. Such a learning environment requires students to engage and interact

with one another through the learning journey to attain individual learning outcomes. Grounding the relationships in SE is suitable because the associate moral obligations between students that yields interdependence through socialization (Kingshott, 2006) are going to be part of a learning journey that can typically span 3-7 years. Moreover, being able to leverage such relationships to help student gain critical social capital between fellow students and staff/faculty (Brown & Davis, 2001; Jensen & Jetten, 2015) will also help to preserve the necessary relationships that need forming and preserving during that prolonged learning journey.

Examining RM from the perspective of SE based relationships help service firms build and maintain their customer relationships customers (e.g. Berry, 1995; 2002; Bowden, Gabbott, & Naumann, 2015; Kingshott, Sharma, & Nair, 2020) and its subsequent need to engage with others (Grönroos, 2017b; Jap, Manolis, & Weitz, 1999; Kingshott, 2006) will help improve customer inclusiveness. Inclusiveness is intrinsically linked to a student's wellbeing (Bowman, 2013; Meadows, 2011; Wyn et al., 2000) so the universities RM practices that involves interactions with others shows potential to help explain how to improve student EWB. Given the distinct paucity in the education literature examining how RM can help tertiary education providers nurture the overall student relationship this research will provide an insight into the role it can play.

RM pertains to the efficacy that firms are able to attract and most importantly maintain their customer base (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), which is broadly conceptualized as a marketing approach that involves *relationships*, *interactions* and *networks* (Grönroos, 1996). Effective RM practices therefore result when service providers can have quality relationships with the customer (e.g. Athanasopoulou, 2009; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner & Gremler, 2002) so this underlying supposition about RM will also apply to those relationships that universities have with their students. Central to RM success is providing a service-scape that ensures customers are pivotal to the process of value creation (Grönroos, 2015) in terms of a series of episodes of ongoing interaction (Grönroos, 2017a). Since the major 'touchpoints' students have during the educational experience pertain to engaging with their peers, teaching and non-teaching staff through the learning journey, this means that the efficacy and success of the universities' RM approach is intrinsically linked to such interactions. In particular, if universities are able to ensure quality interactions exist in the relationship that students

have with their peers, teaching and non-teaching staff then it is proposed in this dissertation to also drive other core relational variables. In this research context, these variables include the level of emotional wellbeing (EWB) of students, as well as their commitment (COMM), word of mouth (WOM) and voice (VOI) expressed. The ability of the university to propagate such relationship variables in a positive manner is furthermore proposed in this dissertation to culminate in reducing the student's propensity to exit (EX) the relationship with the university, and thus represents a summative measure of their overall RM success.

Doing so will help to highlight how RM can be used to help address the core challenge of improving student retention rates (Li & Carroll, 2020) as well as helping to improve the poor EWB levels of university students (Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019; Bye, Muller, & Oprescu 2020). Drawing on the theories of SC and SE, this doctoral dissertation synthesizes the relevant RM and education literatures in order to develop an empirically testable conceptual model that examines how such practices influence student intentions to exit their studies. This literature includes the exit and loyalty elements of the EVL framework (Hirschman, 1970) to yield a model that will help to measure the effects of interaction quality (IQ), emotional wellbeing (EWB), commitment (COMM), word-of-mouth (WOM) and voice (VOI) on the exit intentions (EX) of their students.

1.2   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As indicated above, much of the education literature to date that helps explain the student-learning journey adopts the perspective of being grounded in the theory of social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). This body of literature shows that those university students that can draw upon the inherent SC therein will result in improved mental well-being (Backhaus, Varela, Khoo, & Siefken, et al., 2020; Koutra, Roy & Kokaliari, 2020), attendance rates (Sandefur, Meier & Campbell, 2006), as well as better academic and professional identities (Jensen & Jetten, 2015), among others. Given SC also helps to elevate student university retention rates (Palmer & Gasman, 2008) this also means that its presence in the relationship students have with others, and its effects on staying at university, is a function of the accompanying interaction during the learning journey. To that end, the education literature indicates that the presence of SC in relationships that students have peers (Rossmann & Trolian, 2020),

teaching (Trolian & Parker, 2020) and non-teaching (Lee, Chang, & Bryan, 2020) staff results in positive outcomes for the student. Whilst these interactions yield positive outcomes there is no extant literature showing how the quality of such interactions (IQ) help to drive the overall relationship students have with the university.

However, since the relational consequences of service quality are established in the services literature (e.g. Brady & Cronin, 2001; de Ruyter, Wetzels, & Bloemer, 1998; Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008) the role that quality interactions students have with others during the learning journey offers great potential to help explain how to nurture the student-university relationship. Interactions with the customer are central to RM (Hult, Menga, Ferrell & Ferrell, 2011; Malhotra & Agarwal, 2002) as well as being intrinsic to social exchange theory (SE: Homans, 1958; SE: Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). This also means that this conceptual perspective can help further explain student relationships with the university that involve interactions between students, teaching and non-teaching staff.

It is therefore proposed in this doctoral dissertation that since such interactions during the learning journey helps students to better integrate into the academic and social aspects of university life by drawing on SC (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979) these relationships also need to be grounded in SE theory. With that specifically in mind, this research will address the following four research questions.

RQ1: Can student relationships be viewed through the lenses of SC and SE theories?
RQ2: Can RM be used as an effective tool to help nurture the student relationship?
RQ3: Which SC and SE based variables are important determinants of robust student relationships?
RQ4: Do students from varying backgrounds respond differently to the underlying elements of the RM efforts of Australian tertiary institutes?

1.3   UNDERPINNINGS, APPROACH AND STUDY MOTIVATION

1.3.1   Conceptual model

This doctoral dissertation aims to help university decision makers understand the dual problems facing the sector, namely improving the mental health (Wingert et al., 2020) and increasing the retention rates (Li & Carroll, 2020) of their students. By drawing upon the theories of social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) and social exchange (SE: Homans, 1968; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959), and linking this to the seminal EVL[1] framework (Hirschman, 1970), this research will focus on empirically testing a conceptual model from the perspective of RM. It will do this by building on pertinent education and marketing literatures that draw on these two theoretical perspectives and present a conceptual model comprising 14 testable hypotheses. The aim of the model is to help understand the role that interaction quality (IQ) that students have with their student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff will have on their EWB and intention to EX the relationship they have with the university. This will then provide a much clearer picture of the effectiveness of deploying RM practices directed at students to help build and nurture the university-student relationship.

Maintaining the EWB of students is central to a university student's learning journey (Guilmette, Mulvihill, Villemaire-Krajden & Barker, 2019; Morton, Hinze & Craig, 2020) but failure to do so could also have negative implications for both the student and the university. Literature elsewhere indicates individuals with poor wellbeing results in negative outcomes for the organization that is premised on the need to interact with others (Hosie, Kingshott & Sharma, 2019; Kong, Sharma & Kingshott, 2016). The inference that can be drawn is that given students engage with others through collaborative learning activities (Clausen, Andersson & Schaltz, 2020; La Rocca, 2014; Weinberger & Shonfeld, 2020) then those with poor EWB will have an impact on the overall relationship that the university attempts to build with them. For example, since students with reduced EWB are more inclined to disengage from interaction with others in the learning journey (Steger & Kashdan, 2009) then this action potentially has broader consequences for the university. Moreover, since the

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1 Note some works in the literature extends the seminal work of Hirschman (1970) to include Neglect into the framework (i.e. known as EVLN), to cater to how employees let 'things fall apart', which is not part of this dissertation as the focus is on students. Thus, this research/dissertation does not include this neglect construct in the proposed model. Moreover, loyalty is represented in the conceptual model by the equivalent / proxy RM construct, namely commitment.

propensity of students to express WOM is directly related to their level of satisfaction with the quality of service offering (Casidy, 2014), then disengaging from the university due to reduced EWB also has potential repercussion for student loyalty and commitment directed towards the university. Therefore, by examining the university-student through the conceptual lens of RM, this doctoral dissertation this research will specifically examine how IQ drives the overall relationship in terms of affecting the levels of EWB, COMM, WOM, VOI, and relation EX intentions.

1.3.2   Study methodology

In order to address the four research questions and test the 14 hypotheses this study adopts a deductive quantitative methodology (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). The cross-sectional nature of the study (Zikmund, 2003) comprised a national convenience sample (N=427) of local and international students enrolled in Australian universities across disciplines (i.e. arts and design, business, computer sciences, engineering, law, medicine and science) and levels of study (i.e. Bachelors, Postgraduate, Masters, Doctorate). Data from an Australian panel firm specializing in panel data collection helped to capture the information related to the hypothesized model and salient demographic information of each of the respondents. All constructs in the proposed model were measured by adapting well-established scales in the literature to cater to the specific educational research context. Anchors for each of the scales were Likert type (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree). Prior to the major fieldwork, a sample of panel respondents (n=50) that were identical to the targeted population was used to pilot test the research instrument. A self-administered online questionnaire, using the Qualtrics based platform, solicited the data from respondents. The panel company sent the survey link to potential respondents in their database, resulting in 472 usable responses that helped to test both the measurement and hypothesized conceptual model using AMOS26©.

1.3.3   Study findings

Fit statistics using the two-step technique (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) indicate support for both the measurement and structural models. In relation to testing the model (See appendix 2), the findings reveal that IQ experienced by students during their educational experiences positively impacted on their EWB (H1), COMM to their studies (H2), extent of WOM they directed towards others (H3), voice directed towards

the university (H10) and, their propensity to EX the relationship (H13). The data also indicate support for the hypotheses that a students' EWB will positively affect their level of COMM towards the university (H4), WOM (H5) and the extent of VOI that students displayed (H7). The hypothesis that elevated WOM increased VOI (H8) and elevated EWB reduced the student's EX intentions (H12) was not supported by the data. Whilst COMM to the university was shown to elevate WOM (H6) as well as reduce the student's propensity to EX (H14), it was not found to support the hypothesis that it increased student VOI (H9). Similarly, WOM was not found to result in elevated student VOI directed towards the university (H8). VOI was however found to increase propensity of students to EX the relationship (H11) with the university. In addition to testing the model, a series of other statistical tools (i.e. Descriptives, ANOVA) helped provide an overall insight into the sample as well as compare whether there were any further patterns of behavior across salient groups (i.e. international verses local students, degree types, gender, ethnic background, etc.). Data indicates some variance across these categories in relation to model variables, but by enlarge all students, irrespective of their background and study patterns have a similar relational perspective towards the university during their learning journey.

1.3.4   Study implications

This doctoral dissertation yielded a number of scholarly and managerial implications. From a scholarly vantage, the research revealed that (1) the RM paradigm is a suitable perspective in which to model relationships that universities have with their students. (2) Interaction quality is a key driver of both the broader relationships students have with the university as well as affecting their individual emotional wellbeing. (3) The perceptions of interaction quality experienced by the students differs depending on whether the interaction relates to teaching (front-line staff), non-teaching (back-office staff) and fellow students (customers). (4) Highlights that both SC and SE theory can help understand the relationship students have with their university.

From a managerial perspective, the research provides a number of key insights that can help educational decision makers build stronger relationships with their student at the same time optimize outcomes for the university. (1) The findings provide a clear indication that RM is a core component of the student learning experience. (2) The data also shows that EWB and student VOI are core to the learning journey but also

play some unexpected roles in helping to shape the overall relationship. (3) SC still plays a large role in the relationship but this research indicates that the effects of this intrinsic relational element can be further enhanced when the conditions in the learning journey foster elevated levels of IQ. (4) Finally, the data shows that whilst the RM approach can be used to help define and explain the student relationship these comprise a complex mosaic of links between the variables in the proposed conceptual model.

1.3.5 Study limitations and future directions

The limitations in this research that help to guide future studies include the following. (1) Since the study was limited in focus to Australian universities, this restricts generalizability of the results. Education operates in a global marketplace thus the student learning journey in universities in other countries also need to be considered to get a more complete picture. (2) The focus was on a single part of the educational sector. As the Australian education sector comprises primary, secondary, tertiary providers, as well as many other types of providers, further research in these contexts will give an even more complete picture of how RM relates to education. (3) The focus was on one type of organization in the service sector, namely education providers. Studies across other areas of the service sector would help generalize the findings of the model to the broader service sector. (4) The cross-sectional nature of the research restricted the analysis to one point in time. As the learning experience is ongoing then longitudinal studies will help establish how the link between the variables in the model vary with the ebbs and flows of the students' learning journey. (5) The research focused on testing a conceptual model comprising six variables but given the conceptual grounding it may be possible that other variables, such as trust and negative VOI may also play a role. Future studies should take these and other potential variables into account when attempting to explain students potentially exiting the relationship they have with the university. (6) Limiting the study to only one participant in the educational value chain, namely students meant that the views of other participants in the educational 'learning network' were not factored into the model. This is an important consideration for future studies given student learning is a co-creation process that involves other parties in the educational experience. (7) The prime focus of the study pertained to examining the role that interaction quality had on other important RM variables. Since the analytical approach adopted did not focus specifically on the mediating effects of variables this potentially limits the

understanding of how each variable plays a role in leading to students exiting the student-university relationship, so future studies that center on mediating effects is warranted.

1.4   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In order to shed some light on overcoming the highlighted challenge facing university decision makers and answer the four research questions this doctoral dissertation develops an empirically testable conceptual model that addresses the following research objectives.

RO1:   Addressing the gap in the literature by investigating the role that RM plays in the university-student relationship.

RO2:   Empirically examining which relational constructs impact this relationship.

RO3:   Provide an empirical model to help university decision makers have a better understanding of what factors impact the overall student learning experience.

RO4:   Provide decision makers with a much better understanding of how RM can help deal with the dual challenge of improving student retention and wellbeing.

1.5   SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This basic objective of this doctoral dissertation was to help establish if the relationship marketing (RM) perspective to building relationships with customers can also apply in the context of university-student relationships, within Australia. A national sample of university students (N=427) at varying levels of study helped to test a proposed conceptual model that examined the effects of student engagement with others (peers, teaching and non-teaching staff) during their learning journey on the overall relationship. The doctoral dissertation examined how interaction quality (IQ) affected student wellbeing (EWB) and their level of commitment (COMM) towards the university. Other variables under examination included student word-of-mouth (WOM) and voice (VOI) behaviors as well as their exit (EX) intentions. By drawing in the RM and educational literatures this study was grounding in the theories of social exchange (SE) and social capital (SC) to reveal how the variables could help explain how retention rates can be potentially improved. As indicated above, the study makes a number of findings that has both managerial and scholarly implications in the manner that university decision makers can build and nurture university-student relationships.

Finally, it should be noted that at the time of conceiving this doctoral dissertation, through to data collection and 'write-up' these activities were mostly pre-COVID-19. So rather, that imputing discussion in the limitations and future research directions section an overview of this pandemic was documented in an epilogue section.

1.7   ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This doctoral comprises five chapters. Chapter 1 (this chapter) outlines the importance of examining the student relationship with the university from the perspective of the various interactions students have during their learning journey. It also outlines the core challenge facing managerial decision makers, the research objective and questions posed, along with the conceptual underpinnings taken in this research. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the relevant relationship marketing (RM) and educational literatures. It also articulates the conceptual and theoretical perspectives that this study draws upon to ground each of the 14 hypotheses that emerged from the literature. Chapter 3 briefly describes the various research designs and outlines the chosen approach for this doctoral dissertation. It also describes the sample, measures used and procedure adopted to collect the data. Chapter 4 presents the findings in the study. This includes a range of relevant descriptive data and the results of the hypotheses tests and overall model. It also provides some discussion regarding the data techniques used along with detailed commentary regarding each of the hypothesis. Chapter 5 provides a detailed overview of the research implications and conclusions. In this chapter the limitations and future research directions, along with managerial and scholarly impactions are discussed in detail. In closing an epilogue section highlights the timeframe of the study and helps to contextualise this in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic facing the global economy.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to address the four research questions posed in this doctoral dissertation, a conceptual model comprising 14 hypotheses (see figure 2.1) will be developed using literature from a number of pertinent sources in the relationship marketing, services marketing and education domains. The proposed model will examine student-university relationships from the perspective of the relationship marketing (RM) practices of the university and was subsequently grounded in the theories of social exchange (SE: Homans 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) and social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Viewing these relationships through these two theoretical lenses is deemed highly suitable as they reflected a service context that is highly interactive in nature that ongoing involve dealings and social interactions between students, a variety of university staff and fellow students during the overall learning journey. These two theoretical perspectives are linked through the conceptual model to the EVL typology (Hirshman, 1970; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988) to build an empirically testable model that comprises interaction quality, emotional well-being, commitment, word-of-mouth, voice and exit.

Figure 2.1: Proposed Conceptual Model
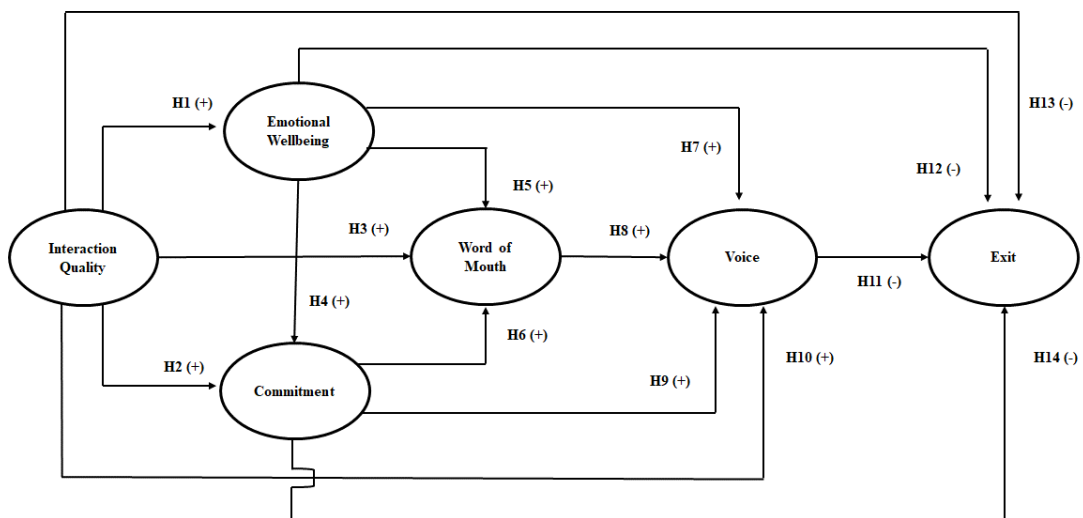
This doctoral dissertation proposes that the nature of interaction quality perceived by students during their learning journey serves as a key driver on a number of the aforementioned constructs and it is this interaction and its consequences that can help to University decision makers establish the success of their overall RM activities. Next, an overview of RM provides the contextual backdrop to the proposed model, followed by a discussion of the conceptual groundings of the model and then the development of each hypothesis.

2.2 RELATIONSHIP MARKETING AND STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Since Berry (1983) first introduced the term relationship marketing (RM) into the service marketing vernacular, the RM literature has continued to shape scholarly thinking about how firms are able to best nurture the customer relationship. Numerous scholarly works since the RM inception into the extant literature have resulted in the ongoing growth of both conceptual (e.g. Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987; Ellram, 1991; Ford, 1980; Mingione, Kashif & Petrescu, 2020; Steinhoff, Arli, Weaven & Kozlenkova, 2019; Wilson, 1990) and empirical (e.g. Kingshott, Sharma, Sima & Wong, 2020; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Van Tonder & Petzer, 2018) studies. Accordingly, these and other studies have also shown the diversity of RM to not only extend into all forms of relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Payne & Frow, 2017) but this domain of the marketing discipline is equally applicable across business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) contexts. Recent works have since revealed the versatility of RM in helping explain how firms can build and nurture customer relationships that comprise new and emergent mobile and online technologies that involve interactions between the firm and its customers through cyberspace (e.g. Hartley & Green, 2017; Laukkanen, 2016; Ramaseshan, Kingshott & Stein, 2015; Wongkitrungrueng, Dehouche, & Assarut, 2020).

To date this body of work has helped explain how managers have dealt with the ongoing challenge of nurturing relationships with their customers and other stakeholders in the value creation process across a wide range of settings. To this end, the emergent body of RM literature has also symbolised a significant shift in scholarly thinking at the time - largely because existing marketing models in the discipline were unable to help fully explain the changing role of marketing in the firm (e.g. Grönroos 1994; Gummerson 1998). Typically, the earlier work of Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995)

argued that since the axioms of the marketing discipline shifted focus from the competition/conflict and independence/choice perspective into mutual-cooperation and mutual-interdependence between parties respectively (see figure 2.1) then this required a significant re-think about how the firm responded to competition whilst serving its own customers.

Figure 2.2: The Changing Domains of the Marketing Discipline
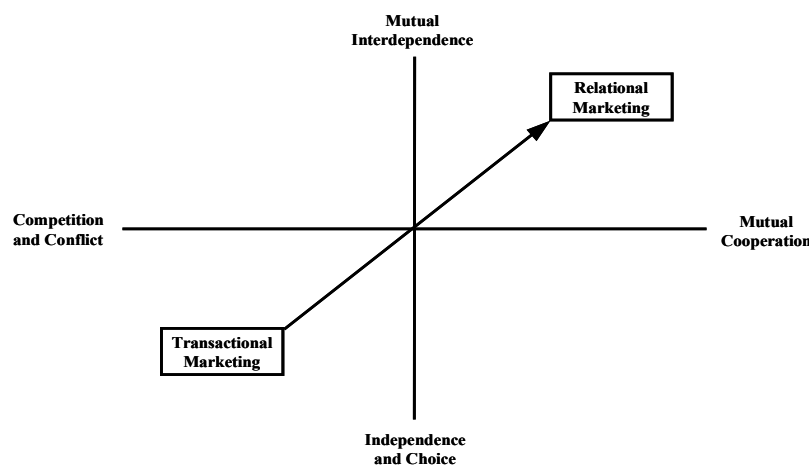
(Source: Sheth & Parvatiyar 1995, p.400)

Whilst there is always going to be much debate about whether such RM practices will morph into a specific discipline in its own right (e.g. Sheth, 2017; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2002) there is little doubt that RM will continue to play a significant role in creating value for the service firm its customers. However, Sheth and Parvatiyar's line of thinking of how the marketing discipline axioms have changed still has relevance in today's services marketing activities and in particular the firm's attempts to attract new customers. Indeed, we can directly observe how Sheth and Parvayitar's (1995) observation plays out in the context of the Australian higher education sector. To this end, *Universities Australia* is the peak body that represents a cohesive voice for Australian universities (see https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/) in their joint quest to recruit international students that aspire to come and study in Australia. By providing information about the universities in each of the states and territories, this activity underpins their *mutual cooperation* at the same time recognising their *mutual interdependence* in the international marketplace by providing a united front. Once

students have decided upon their place of study each higher educational institute (HEI) then takes responsibility to provide to their students educational needs so this is where their RM practices regards nurturing the student relationship need to come into play. The ability of each Australian university in effectively deploying their RM is critical because the adoption of RM practices can yield benefits to both the service firm (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner & Gremler, 2002) and its customers (Gremler, Van Vaerenbergh, Brüggen & Gwinner, 2020).

Currently, the annual QILT data (see https://www.qilt.edu.au/) provides a comparison of all of Australia's HEI in terms of learning and teaching related dimensions, namely: (1) skills development, (2) learner engagement, (3) teaching quality, (4) student support, (5) learning resources, and (6) a generic measure of the student's perception of the quality of the entire educational experience. Whilst these pertain to learning pedagogies, they provide little insight into how Australia's universities can build robust relationships with their students and the role that RM plays in that activity. Although *Universities Australia* are able to successfully recruit students in the international marketplace, and the demand for domestic places in Australian universities still remains strong (Marshman & Larkins, 2020), the real challenge facing any service firm is how to best build and maintain the ongoing customer relationship (Gaur, Kingshott & Sharma, 2019). This RM challenge does have an added layer of complexity within the higher education sector because the university-student relationship (from a student learning perspective) is going to be largely finite in nature, so that may have a bearing on the RM efforts afforded by each HIE.

This complexity in building and nurturing the student relationship is because students will typically study at a particular institution from anywhere between three to seven years and then leave that institute when they graduate, and subsequently enter the workforce. This means that if tertiary institutions want to continue to optimise any returns form the RM resources they have expended in building the student relationships during the learning journey then they need to look for alternative ways to leverage this sunken resource. For practical purposes (excepting those university graduates that enter the education workforce) this means that the student relationship needs to extend past the time students spend during their learning journey. One approach has been to adopt RM practices to develop and nurture the student Alumni

(McAlexander & Koenig, 2001) where graduates can act as ambassadors for the university and/or make other forms of philanthropic contributions. These include, Alumni student mentoring programs (Vieregger & Bryant, 2020), financial donations from Alumni (Harrison, Mitchell, & Peterson, 1995), and Alumni contributions to university boards (Garcia-Murillo, 2018), among others. Although university Alumni activities are relatively well established and developed in the United States and United Kingdom (Pedro, Mendes & Pereira, 2020) this still represents an ongoing challenge for Australian higher education providers (Lowry Institute, 2009).

Thus, the capacity of Australian universities to draw on RM practices to nurture the student-university relationship during the learning journey with the view to extending this relationship once the student graduates is tantamount. This activity is reflected in Berry's (1983), depiction of RM, namely "attracting, maintaining, and enhancing customer relationships" (p.54). Accordingly, any RM efforts these educational providers devote to the student customer base also needs to serve the dual purpose of (1) attracting students (2) maintaining that relationship, at the same time as (3) enticing students to become advocates of the university (Dollinger, Arkoudid & Marangell, 2019). The RM literature has converged into two theoretical perspectives to help explain how RM can be deployed to build and nurture the customer relationship (Kingshott, 2006). Specifically the perspectives of social exchange theory (SET) based relationships (e.g. Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and those grounded in Transactional Cost Analysis (TCA) (e.g. Park, Kim, & Ryu, 2020; Weitz & Jap, 1995). Whilst each approach has some variation between key relational dimensions between parties (see table 2.2) the literature has consistently demonstrated that service relationships that involve interaction between persons (such as student relationships with the university) are most suitably explained from the perspective of SE (e.g. Alhathal, Sharma, & Kingshott, 2019; Sierra & McQuitty, 2005).

Table 2.1: Differences between SET and TCA perspectives of RM

Relational dimensions	SE theory	TCA
Managerial philosophy / focus	• Build relationship • Focus on inputs	• Minimize transaction costs • Safeguard assets
Conceptual origins / grounding	• Sociology	• Economics
Underlying assumptions	• Moral obligations between actors • Inherent reciprocity • Interdependence through socialization	• Bounded rationality • Individuals act opportunistically • Need for uncertainty reduction • Risk neutrality
Governance mechanisms	• Trust • Relational norms • Bilateral inputs required	• Contractual / Legal • Hierarchal
Managerial benefits / burdens	• Greater flexibility • Interaction and adaptive • Higher efficiency	• More partner control • Greater internalized uncertainty • Relational specifications in advance

(Source: Kingshott, 2006, p. 726)

As indicated in the information in table 2.1 grounding relationships from the TCA perspective is largely an economic relationship whereby parties can to benefit economically from the terms of exchange. These tend to be legal agreements between the parties in which the terms of exchange are relatively clearly defined in advance of interaction because of the distinct fear of each party acting opportunistically (Hawkins, Wittmann & Beyerlein, 2008). Indeed, since relationships from the TCA vantage 'downplays the social foundations of transactions' (Liu, Deligonul, Cavusgil & Chiou, 2018, p.171) the conceptual grounding may not be suitable to help explain university-student relationships founded on social interactions during the learning journey. Typically, such relational situations are not characteristic of the higher education learning environment where students engage with peers, staff and faculty members in an ongoing process of learning activities that cannot be clearly defined and/or specified in advance. Moreover, as these various forms of engagement will also comprise a wide range of informal learning (and communal) contexts that involve social interactions between the parties, which are highly characteristic of a service context (Malhotra, et al., 2005), then the university-student relationship should be grounded in SE theory.

From the perspective of SE theory (Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) the application of RM strategies are shown over time to provide robust and stable relationships between parties in both B2B (e.g. Anderson & Narus, 1990; Kingshott, et al. 2020; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and B2C settings (e.g. Ashley, Noble, Donthu & Lemon, 2011; Safari & Albaum, 2019). Whilst such SE based relationships develop over time through a number of phases, namely awareness, exploration, expansion and commitment they are characteristically interactive in nature (Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987). The university-student relationship during the learning journey comprises elevated levels of interaction between students and a wide range of facility (i.e. teaching staff) and non-teaching staff as well as peers (e.g. Arbaugh, 2000; Grantham, Robinson & Chapman, 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Kim & Sax, 2017; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Smith, 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). Whilst grounding an examination of these university-student relationships from the perspective of SET is therefore a suitable conceptual underpinning, another central feature of the student relationship is the capacity of students to build social and professional networks through such interactions (Kim & Sax, 2017).

These authors argue that in a higher education context, the presence and building of social capital provides students with relationships and network opportunities that help to enhance student outcomes. Accordingly, a number of scholars within the education domain have also drawn upon social capital theory (SCT: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) to help explain how student interaction in on their networks to either help to enhance learning and/or derive a range of other beneficial outcomes in their learning journey (e.g. Dika, 2012; Stanton-Zalazar, 2011). Therefore, by grounding this doctoral dissertation from the perspectives of SET and SCT, it is proposed that a much clearer picture of how the interactive nature of the student-university relationship is likely to impact the universities RM efforts directed towards them. An overview of these two conceptual perspectives now follows, prior to discussion on the formulation of each hypothesis in the proposed conceptual model.

2.3 SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY AND THE STUDENT-UNIVERSITY RELATIONSHIP

According to Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), social capital theory (SCT) is largely concerned about how relationships between persons can potentially act as a resource that drives behaviour between them. Accordingly, Bourdieu (1986) depicts social capital as being "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group" (p.248). Typically, the central feature of SCT is that the various networks of relationships that exist between individuals also represent a valuable resource that could help the parties attain individual and/or collective outcomes (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). When viewed this way, social capital (SC) therefore serves as a potential resource that helps individuals achieve outcomes that result directly from and through their social relations and associated interactions (Raffo & Reeves, 2000). Moreover, since such capital can be multi-dimensional in nature and is directly linked to a person's networks, ties, and relationships with others (Hawkins & Maurer, 2012) it has the potential to play either a bridging and/or bonding role between persons (Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Putman, 2000).

The literature is very clear on the distinction between these two forms of social capital (e.g. Agnitsch, Flora & Ryan, 2006; Gittell & Vidail, 1998; Saegert, Thompson & Warren, 2001) as well as the potential role they play in relationships. On the one hand, bonding capital is 'inward looking' and helps the group to strengthen relationships between them (Putman, 2000). On the other, bridging capital contrasts this and is 'outward looking' and thus helps to connect people to connect to others, and in doing so acts as a vital mechanism to help individuals get access to more resources (Putman, 2000). Moreover, this form of capital helps facilitate the ability of individuals to engage with others to help widen their existing network(s), and as it helps to reduce 'costs' through access to resources (Woolcock, 1998), it makes the presence of SC a valuable relational resource. Such dimensionality also implies that when individuals in 'social settings' draw upon SC as a resource for their own benefit they are likely to be more committed to relationships in that setting that are underpinned by, and/or foster SC. On that basis, it is proposed in this doctoral thesis that the link between the 'source' of the SC (i.e. numerous interactions between student peers and university

staff) and the level of commitment will also play out in university settings given students need to rely on others for both learning and administrative outcomes throughout their learning journey.

Typically, the theory of SC suggests that it is through such involvement and affiliation with other individuals and/or group members whilst studying at university are students able to yield potential positive benefits (Brown & Davis, 2001; Tierney & Venegas, 2006). To this end, this doctoral dissertation argues that the presence of social capital (SC) also helps to underpin the proposed conceptual model (figure 2.1) as it potentially acts as an important driver of attitudes and behaviour within a higher educational learning environment. This has support in the literature. For example, the presence of SC helps to account for the desire of students to get involved in both social and academic life and through that improves their persistence to study and academic growth (Rendón, 2002). SC also enhances students overall academic achievements (Martin, 2009) at the same time elevate their levels of engagement with others in the university learning context (Park & Bowman, 2015). Other outcomes associated with SC in university settings include, among others, improvements to the overall mental well-being of students (Backhaus, Varela, Khoo, & Siefken, et al., 2020; Koutra, Roy & Kokaliari, 2020), university attendance levels (Sandefur, Meier & Campbell, 2006), elevated retention rates (Palmer & Gasman, 2008), and the development of student academic and professional identities (Jensen & Jetten, 2015).

Indeed, Brown and Davis (2001) note in an African American university context "a primary role of the Black college is that of social capital purveyor" (p.41). This suggests that the presence of SC is not only a core feature of the university experience but a desired attribute of the education provider that can be potentially leveraged by decision makers to help improve both university and student outcomes. Conceptually, SC is the mechanism whereby university students are able to develop and leverage their social networks, become involved in student affairs, engage with teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as other students – and these interactions serve as critical resources to help them navigate their overall learning journeys (Soria & Stebleton, 2013). Whilst the literature does make this distinction between bridging and bonding forms of social capital (Putnam, 2000) both forms help to underpin how university students interact with one another – which have potential 'relational' outcomes.

For example, students that engage in on-campus religious practices can draw on SC help to bring students from the same and different racial backgrounds together (Park & Bowman, 2015). On the other hand, Smith (2007) reveals how SC helps to drive the relationship and interaction between university students and faculty members and the role that such capital plays in "regulating the quantity, quality of knowledge, skill sets, and resources that are transmitted between mentors and mentees" (p.38). Given SC is a function of the nature of engagement that students have with various parties at university (Jensen & Jetten, 2015), it is proposed in this doctoral dissertation that it is the quality of interactions in the student-university relationship that help to drive the relationship they have with the university. Specifically, when students are able to enhance and/or draw on SC to attain their individual outcome then better quality interactions will help the university build more robust the relationships with their students.

2.4 SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY (SET) AND THE STUDENT-UNIVERSITY RELATIONSHIP

According to Homans (1958) and Thibaut and Kelly (1959) relationships can be viewed from the perspective of social exchange theory (SET) when they are based on parties wanting and continuing to interact with one another due to the rewards of such interaction outweighing the costs of engagement. From the perspective of SET, this means that rewards are economic and/or social in nature – whereby positive outcomes with respect to either or both these two relational aspects will result in elevated commitment to the relationship (Lambe, Wittmann & Spekman, 2001). Indeed, a core feature of relationship marketing (RM) from the perspective of SET is that the level of interaction with the customer helps to nurture the relationship (e.g. Cambra-Fierro, Melero-Polo, Sese, & van Doorn, 2018; Dwyer, Schuur & Oh, 1987; Grönroos, 2004; Häkansson, 1982; Laksamana, Wong, Kingshott & Muchtar, 2013). Indeed, the extent of interaction between the firm and the customer is also a key feature of the service relationship (e.g. Alhathal, Sharma & Kingshott, 2019; Czepiel, 1990; Gwinner, Gremler & Bitner, 1998) and this behaviour helps to drive both customer (Kinard & Capella, 2006; Pressey & Mathews, 2000) and service firm (Ekinci & Dawes, 2009; Murray & Evans, 2013) outcomes.

This doctoral dissertation proposes that since a key feature of the student-university relationship is that they need to involve elevated levels of interaction between students and a number of other parties affiliated with the university throughout their respective learning journeys, the deployment of RM directed towards students also need examining through the SET lens. Whilst these interactions include among others, those between the students and faculty/administrators, and their student peers, at varying points of time in the learning experience - the literature does also highlight the importance of being able to simultaneously interact with multiple stakeholders (Hult, Menga, Ferrell & Ferrell, 2011; Malhotra & Agarwal, 2002). Therefore how the university configures this 'interaction feature' in terms of interaction quality (IQ) has the potentially to impact upon the HEI provider's RM success.

As the RM literature viewed through the lens of SET indicates that the level of interaction quality (IQ) parties is tantamount to RM success (Vesel & Zabkar, 2010) this also means the attainment of student outcomes and through that successful student-university relationships is potentially a function of the quality of such interactions. To date, the literature indicates that the nature and quality of interactions impact how university students integrate into the academic and social aspects of university life (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). Increased IQ also helps to enhance student learning and class discussions (Arbaugh, 2000), improves their overall study efforts (Kuh & Hu, 2001) and the extent they exhibit positivity towards the university (Grantham, Robinson & Chapman, 2015), as well as helps to elevate student engagement levels with faculty (Hoffman, 2014), among others. Based on the literature it is evident the theories of SC and SE are particularly useful in helping explain interactions between students and faculty and the impact this has on student outcomes (Kim & Sax, 2017).

However, since the literature is scant in terms of explaining how the quality of interactions students have with their peers, faculty and non-faculty members and the impact this has on the overall university-student relationship, then as previously mentioned this doctoral dissertation addresses this gap in the RM, services and education literatures. One point of difference with the university-student relationship that sets it apart from other service relationships is that the duration of engagement with the university is going to be to a large extent finite in nature. The challenge for universities is how to maintain loyalty and reduce exit for a limited amount of time in

the knowledge that the student will eventually end the relationship. This is because degree programs potentially range between three (Bachelor) and seven (Doctoral) years duration of full-time study, and after that the relationship is most likely going to be severed. This means that there is potentially and 'intense period' of loyalty displayed by the student directed towards the education provider that may vary over time for one reason or another that needs to be better understood by university decision makers. As indicated earlier, the nature engagement that students have during the learning journey comprises multiple episodes (with peers, teaching and non-teaching staff) during of their degree program, either through to completion or exiting the relationship prematurely (i.e. not competing studies).

In order to encapsulate the extent of loyalty directed towards the university, which may vary overtime (for one reason or another) the EVL Framework (Hirschman, 1970) can be drawn upon to help capture the essential ingredients in that relationship. The (Exit, Voice, Loyalty) EVL framework was originally conceived by Hirschman (1970) to help explain and/or capture both the social and economic dimensions that exist within any particular relationship. It was argued (Hirschman, 1970) that even 'economic relationships' must comprise socio-cultural dynamics and that these also need to be accounted for in the various forms of relationship. Such social (e.g. various interactions) and economic (e.g. fees, employment, etc.) dimensions are also inherent within the context of the university-student relationship so the ELV framework also provides a suitable basis to further understand such relationships. The premise underpinning the framework is that those individuals that were particularly loyal to the organisation (i.e. employees, customers, etc.) would not simply leave when things went wrong but were more inclined to express voice (VOI) towards the organisation in order to make things better and/or help improve the overall relational conditions.

Accordingly, this ELV framework has been integrated into SE and SC theory to help empirical examine of the link between interaction quality IQ), student emotional well-being (EWB) and commitment (COMM) to the university, the level of word of mouth (WOM) and voice (VOI), as well as their propensity to exit (EX) the relationships has been undertaken in this doctoral dissertation. By drawing upon pertinent literatures, a detailed discussion outlining the link between these constructs in the form of a proposed conceptual model comprising 14 hypotheses now follows.

2.5   HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.5.1   Interaction Quality, Emotional Wellbeing, Commitment and Word of Mouth

2.5.1.1 Impact of Interaction Quality on Emotional Wellbeing (H1)

In line with theories of social exchange (SET: Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) and social capital (SCT: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) one of the most important features identified in the literature related to studying at university is the need to engage with a wide range of stakeholders during that learning journey (Anderson, 2003; Dika, 2012, Soria & Stebleton, 2013). The central feature of both theories relate to how those individuals that engage with one another can leverage these interactions by drawing upon the inherent social capital and reciprocity (in SC and SE theories respectively) to help yield positive outcomes (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Jensen & Jetten, 2015). Typically, the education literature reveals these dealings and outcomes will flow from interactions that university students have when engaging with their student peers (Rovai, 2002; Wisneski, Ozogul, & Bichelmeyer, 2017), faculty staff (Frankel & Swanson, 2002; Hoffman, 2014), and non-faculty staff (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020, Martin Smith, Takewell, & Miller, 2020). This research proposes that the interaction quality (IQ) intrinsic to the interactions between these persons during the learning journey helps to build the overall relationship that the university can potentially have with students.

Within the education literature, such engagements are known to be important facets of the student-university relationship from the student's perspective as they help positively contribute to their acquisition of knowledge and cognitive growth of the student (Clynes, Sheridan, & Frazer, 2020) as well as help enhance their academic and professional identities (Jensen & Jetten, 2015). Thus viewing the university-student relationship from the vantage of whom students interact with in the learning journey and the nature of the specific impact that these interactions have on student learning has long been the approach adopted by scholars in the education literature. This is also the approach embraced in this doctoral thesis but this has been extended to incorporate key aspects relationship marketing (RM) from the perspective of social exchange (SE) theory in order to help further explain how higher education providers can potentially build and nurture the overall student relationship.

The body of work in the education literature has helped scholars define the learning journey and associated benefits students by viewing them through the lens of their interactions with others (Anderson, 2003; Fitzpatrick et al., 2020; Grantham, Robinson, & Chapman, 2015) and similarly helps to serve as the suitable foundation on which to base this doctoral thesis. However, by drawing on the domain of the education literature related to SC and interactions, and the relationship marketing (RM) and services literatures pertaining to the SE perspective, the central proposition being made in this doctoral research is that the quality of interactions (IQ) contribute directly to a variety of relational outcomes. Keeping in line with the services literature it is posited further in this doctoral thesis that interaction quality (IQ) is akin to the functional quality associated by experiencing a service and accordingly IQ is depicted herein as the "customers' perceptions of the interactions that take place during service delivery" (Brady & Cronin, 2001, p.35). More specific to this research setting, IQ relates to how students view the quality of the engagements they have with others during their learning journey.

Since the various forms of interactions are shown to be the lynchpin inherent within the student learning journey (Dika, 2012; Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Wisneski, Ozogul, & Bichelmeyer, 2017), it is therefore proposed herein that the IQ of such engagements represents the driving force that helps to define and shape the student-university relationship. More specifically, it is proposed herein that it is the level of positive IQ that students are exposed to that specifically relate to the engagements that have with their student peers, teaching (i.e. faculty) and non-teaching (i.e. non-faculty) staff that helps to drive aspects of the overall relationship that they have with the university.

Furthermore, since these ties are widely known to provide students with a wide range of social, emotional and academic support (Rovai, 2002) it proposed further in this research that elevated IQ associated with such ties also serve to help shape how students feel about themselves. In relation to this specific assertion made herein the literature does show that being part an academic community is central to being able to draw upon the inherent SC to help yield positive individual outcomes (Barton, 2013; Bye, Muller, & Oprescu, 2020; Dika, 2012). Typically, such engagements that result from the SC in the relationship(s) are known to have direct implications on the overall wellbeing of university students (Baik, Larcombe, & Brokker, 2019; Kilgo, et al.,

2019). For instance, Backhaus et al., (2020) find strong evidence that low SC (which is a direct function of engagement) leads directly to depressive symptoms in university students; and find further that the presence of SC helps to improve the student's overall wellbeing. Whilst, Bye, Muller and Oprescu (2020) argue that the link between SC and university student wellbeing is highly complex - previous studies in the education literature overwhelmingly reveal that EWB does play an important and critical role in the student learning journey (Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019; Graham, Powell & Truscott, 2016; Morton et al., 2020).

Since that role is largely a function of the manner students actively engage with others (Geertshuis, 2018) it is proposed in this doctoral thesis that this is going to be a function of the level of IQ students have in their engagements with others. Elsewhere, Wyn, et al., (2000) find that the interaction students have with their teachers through the learning materials and curricula has a significant impact on student wellbeing. Specifically, it is posited herein that the intensity and quality of the IQ the students have when interacting with peers, teaching and non-teaching staff. Thus, based on the earlier work of Warr (1990) regards individual wellbeing, student EWB has been depicted in this doctoral research to represent those feelings in relation to the relationship students have with their university of study. Based on the above discussion, it is therefore posited that there is a link between the level of IQ students perceive from their engagements with others and their own personal EWB. Specifically, it is posited in this doctoral dissertation that IQ helps to drive student EWB, hypothesized as follows:

H1: Interaction quality is positively related to emotional wellbeing.

2.5.1.2 Impact of Interaction Quality on Commitment (H2)
As can be inferred through the above hypothesis, the link between these two constructs in the student-learning journey is also going to be a function of the context of that experience, namely how students engage with peers, teaching and non-teaching staff. In terms of this context, Jensen and Jetten (2015) indicate such interactions help students build their academic identity in terms of "the extent that students feel they belong to the academic community" (p.2). This suggests further that IQ not only serves the role of helping to improve students' EWB but also impact of the extent that they

view themselves as 'belonging' to their 'learning networks'. In this research, since it is posited that such learning networks comprise peers, teaching and non-teaching staff thus the feeling of belonging to the academic community relates to how students affiliate and interact with members of that 'network' through the learning journey. Steger and Kashdan (2009) indicate such belonging is positively linked to the extent of positive interactions with others, suggesting further that elevated IQ also has the potential to also serve as a bonding function in the university-student relationship.

This assertion has support elsewhere in the RM literature grounded in social exchange theory (SET). For instance, the central feature of all forms of SET based relationships is the need to have quality interactions with others and through that the role these individual actors can play in helping to define and build commitment between parties (Kim & Qu, 2020). To illustrate how this plays out in the context of SET based relationships, Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987) draw upon the work of Scanzoni (1979) to reveal that these forms of relationship do not simply materialise but rather develop over time; arguing further that the SE relationship is a direct function of the interactions between the parties that stem directly through growing interdependence between parties as the relationship begins to flourish. Furthermore, as relationships need a 'relationship context' to prosper, SC theory dictates that the presence of SC in the relationship is a function of having some form of social structure; and within that structure key individual's will need to play a role (Coleman, 1988).

In the university setting, this translates into the learning environment being the context whereby students rely on their peers, teaching and non-teaching staff (actors) to play a role in attaining outcomes during the learning journey, and furthermore in doing so, such interactions will elevate the interdependence between these actors. Therefore, based on the SE literature (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987) it is thus proposed herein that such growing interdependence will directly lead to elevated commitment (COMM) of the student towards the university. Building on the earlier work of Hennig-Thurau, Langer and Hansen (2001) commitment is depicted in this doctoral dissertation as a generalized sense of positive emotion for and for, and attachment that students have towards the university of study.

It is thus proposed herein that the IQ of the engagements students have during their respective learning journeys help to drive this form of 'emotive commitment' towards the university because of the emotional and academic support such ties offer students (Rovai, 2002). It is further posited in this research that this IQ-COM link will result directly from the quality of interactions that students have with their peers, teaching and non-teaching staff. This assertion has support in the various literatures. From the perspective of SE relationships it is through the interaction processes that parties take joint responsibility for performance of the relationship and through that are able to share the burdens and benefits of the exchange (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987). These authors argue further that this interaction results in elevated commitment between the parties. Interdependence is a key feature during the student-learning journey; and, manifests as emotional and academic support resulting through the various ties that students have with others (Rovai, 2002), implying a link between elevated levels of IQ and commitment towards the university.

Furthermore, earlier studies in the educational context reveal that integration into academic life leads to greater commitment to the institute (Reason, 2003) so it is posited in this doctoral thesis that such integration also plays a role in influencing commitment but this is going to be a function of the quality of interactions with others. This quality link on outcomes also has support in the services literature. For instance, Laksamana, Wong, Kingshott and Muchtar (2013) show that elevated IQ in customer interactions with the branch manager and service personnel increase commitment levels towards the bank. Similarly, in a healthcare context, elevated IQ that patients perceive with both hospital staff and other customers when receiving health related services helps drive patient satisfaction and loyalty towards the hospital (Choi & Kim, 2013). Based on the above discussion, it is thus posited in this doctoral thesis that there is a positive link between the IQ students experience in their engagements with others and their commitment towards the higher educational institute, hypothesized as follows:

H2: Interaction quality is positively related to commitment.

2.5.1.3 Impact of Interaction Quality on Word of Mouth (H3)

Whilst interaction quality (IQ) is a critical aspect of the learning journey in terms of its proposed effects on EWB (H1) and COM (H2) it also has much wider relational building implications for education providers. This is because students are most likely going to share those positive and/or negative experiences beyond the immediate learning context (i.e. interactions with peers, faculty and non-faculty staff.) with others. It is thus posited in this doctoral dissertation that such 'sharing' will take the form of word-of-mouth (WOM) which comprises the "informal, person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organization, or a service" (Harrison-Walker, 2001, p.70). Since this form of WOM behaviour expressed by students will extend beyond the immediate student learning context it therefore has potential broader implications for the higher education provider as it may also influence the perceptions that others have about them. Thus the general assertion made herein that there is a positive link between IQ and WOM is founded on empirical support in the extant literature for both the service firms in general as well as the literature that pertains specifically to education providers. For instance, in the banking sector customers that are satisfied with the quality of the service they receive will express positive WOM towards others (e.g. Arasil, Mehtap-Smadi & Katircioglu, 2005; Choudhury, 2014). This link between service quality and WOM is seen elsewhere in the services literature, including among others, air travel (Ahmadi, 2018), health care (Chaniotakis & Lymperopoulos, 2009), spectator sports (Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008), and B2B settings (Molinari, Abratt, & Dion, 2008).

The inference drawn in this doctoral dissertation directly from the various literatures (discussed above) is that when students experience elevated levels of IQ students directly due to the interactions they have with the student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff this will also translate into them exhibiting positive WOM behaviours. This specific interaction quality-WOM link also has support in the services literature. In that regard, functional quality, which encompasses customer assessments about the interactions they have whilst experiencing the service, has been found to positively impact on WOM across a wide range of service industries (Ng, David & Dagger, 2011). Moreover, since these authors found elevated relationship quality in the form of positive feelings towards the service provider (p.135) also impacted on WOM, this

also implies that the IQ students have in their learning journey has implications for their WOM behaviours. This link is also shown to be present in educational settings. For instance, Bruce and Edington (2008) revealed that the quality of service delivered by their school of study impacted the willingness of MBA students to recommend that educational provider to others, rather that the specific educational outcomes they received. Therefore, drawing on the various literature and based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is thus proposed:

H3: Interaction quality is positively related to word of mouth.

2.5.2 Emotional Wellbeing, Commitment and Word of Mouth

2.5.2.1 Impact of Emotional Wellbeing on Commitment (H4)

Understanding how students feel about themselves is an important aspect of decision making for the university as the need to adopt practices that help contribute to and ensure the emotional wellbeing (EWB) of students has been one of the core university responsibilities (Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019). The World Health Organization (WHO) note the relatively high incidence of mental health problems in the various student populations around the globe (Wingert et al., 2020), which is also a longstanding pattern that is also distinctive to university students (Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019; Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013; Koutra, Roy, & Kokaliari, 2020; Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005). Whilst poor wellbeing has consequences on a university student's capacity to study effectively and/or complete their programs (Hagenauer, Gläser-Zikuda, & Moschner, 2018; Thomas & Borrayo, 2016) the manner that universities address poor EWB could have positive consequences for the student-university relationship. From the negative perspective, Koutra, Roy and Kokaliari (2020) do find that university students suffering from stress and depression were more likely to cause self-injury and that social capital (SC) students could potentially draw on had little dampening impact on this link. However, these authors do go on to surmise that the link between any SC and positive outcomes was negated by the high likelihood that students with poor mental health are likely to interact with students with similar problems.

The literature does however suggests that the approach universities adopt in dealing with mental health issues facing their students may also be key to help the university

build relationships with their students. For example, the PSMHW Student Wellbeing Framework (Baik, et al., 2016) indicates that student wellbeing is a function of having engaging curricula, supportive environments, access to services, community awareness, and, the provision of MH knowledge and skills. These are important facets in the overall student learning journey because students will high levels of stress are more likely to miss class (Thomas & Borraya, 2016) and this lack of engagement in the learning journey will further 'distance' students from the key participants in that process. The PSMHW framework suggests that those students that are able to engage with their student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff in meaningful ways through the curricula in a supportive environment that also offers access to services will be able to build and draw upon the inherent SC in those interactions.

Whilst the psychological wellbeing of university students is known to be potentially influenced both positively and negatively by a variety of factors during the student learning journey (Kilgo, Linley, & Bennett, 2019) it is proposed in this doctoral dissertation that quality interactions and the associated positive EWB (as hypothesised in H1) will also lead to committed students. This assertion has support in the literature. For example, interactions with others are shown to have a positive impact on the student's overall sense of belonging (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008) and this resulted in elevated contact with faculty and the campus community (Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005). Conversely, negative emotions that arise during the learning journey reduced the commitment of university students to continue in their studies (Hagenauer, Gläser, & Moschner, 2018). More broadly speaking, the link between employee wellbeing and commitment towards the organization has been well established in the extant literature (Jain, Giga, & Cooper, 2009) whereby staff that have reduced/increased levels of EWB are shown to have lower/higher commitment (COMM) towards their organizations. An earlier meta-analysis, Thoresen et al., (2003) reveal clear and ongoing body of evidence of the link between positive/negative affect and high/low organizational commitment.

More recently, this link is also shown to prevail in a wide range of service settings such as nurses working in the healthcare sector (Brunetto et al., 2013), telecommunication service employees (Kundi, Aboramadan, Elhamalawi, & Shahid, 2020) and school teachers in the education sector (Hong, 2012). Moreover, in an

internal service context, employee EWB was also found to negatively moderate the link between employee COMM and their overall performance (Sharma, Kong, & Kingshott, 2016) suggesting further that EWB and COMM are intrinsically linked. Clearly, EWB is a core aspect of helping to drive commitment towards the organization and therefore this link is similarly anticipated to be inherent within the context of the student-university relationship. Thus in line with the literature and the above discussion in mind, the link between student EWB and their COMM to the university is hypothesised as follows:

H4: Emotional wellbeing is positively related to commitment.

2.5.2.2 Impact of Emotional Wellbeing on Word of Mouth (H5)

As indicated through H4, those students that feel good about themselves in the learning journey will become more committed to the relationship with the individuals that they interact with and the university. This also has loyalty consequences. To that end, loyalty is typically regarded in the services literature as the customers internalised commitment to continue their patronage of a service provider loyal customers and will often result in in the customer promoting positive word of mouth (WOM) to others about the service organization (Oliver, 2010). This means students will most likely tell others about their experiences due to the inherent loyalty towards their student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff. It is this posited in this doctoral dissertation that loyalty towards these individuals will also translate into loyalty towards the university and this will similarly translate into positive WOM about the university.

Thus, it is proposed in this doctoral dissertation that there is a positive link between student EWB and WOM about the university. This assertion does have support in the literature. For example, elevated EWB is also known to promote customer loyalty directed towards the service organization (Baloglu, Busser, & Cain, 2019), and further that loyalty leads directly to positive word of mouth (Choi & Choi, 2014). Therefore, given the existing literature and based on the above discussion it is proposed in this doctoral dissertation that when students have elevated levels of EWB this will also reflect in them expressing loyalty towards the university in the form of WOM, hypothesised as follows:

H5: Emotional wellbeing is positively related to word of mouth.

2.5.2.3 Impact of Commitment on Word of Mouth (H6)

The inference we can draw from H4 is that those universities that are able to provide a suitable learning environment that simultaneously helps promote overall student emotional wellbeing (EWB) can also potentially contribute to building robust relationships with their students through elevated commitment (COMM). When viewing relationships through the lens of social exchange (SE) COMM is long been recognised as the essential ingredient for the formation and nurturing of successful relationships because it represents the psychological attachment, identification and affiliation with others (Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995). Similarly, it is anticipated that in the student research setting examined in this doctoral dissertation these elements that underpin COMM are also likely to be intrinsic to the students' learning journey, resulting from the interactions they have with their student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff, as reflected through H2. However, the presence of COMM and EWB resulting from elevated IQ (H4) also has broader implications for both the student and the overall relationship they have with the university. From a student viewpoint, being part of the 'in-crowd' and/or inclusive, as reflected through the various interactions during the learning journey is known to increase the EWB of students (Bowman, 2013). However, given an underlying premise in the SE relationship is that those individuals whom are closest to others are most relevant to building an individual's wellbeing (Meadows, 2011) this also means that any elevated EWB will likely have further relational building consequences, from the perspective of the student.

Specifically, studies elsewhere have shown individuals expressing an elevated level of COMM towards a relationship will also express positive WOM (e.g. Kim, Han & Lee, 2001), which potentially has broader implications within the context of university-student relationship. Since the literature depicts COMM as the extent of one parties implicit and/or explicit pledge to stay in the relationship (Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987) this means that by displaying WOM that students are also taking on a RM function on behalf of the university. This the driver of WOM in the educational setting is a critical determinant in helping an institute increase its presence in the marketplace. Typically, in the services domain the level of emotional attachment and brand relationship quality is found to positively influence word of mouth within a music festival context

(Hudson, Roth, Madden & Hudson, 2015) suggesting further that COMM will also play a positive role on WOM in an education setting. Indeed, WOM recommendations received from current students in a MBA program have a positive influence on new students in their selection of a particular educational institute (Bruce & Edington, 2008). Since higher education students that have positive expectations about completing their studies as well as exhibit positive WOM are inclined to be more loyal (Duzević, Mikulić & Baković, 2018) then the inference can be drawn that COMM and WOM are intrinsically linked. Thus, based on the above discussion, it is proposed that there is a positive relationship between COMM and WOM, hypothesised as follows:

H6: Commitment is positively related to word of mouth.

2.5.3   Voice, Emotional Wellbeing, Commitment, Word of Mouth and Interaction Quality

2.5.3.1 Impact of Emotional Wellbeing on Voice (H7)

WOM is largely an externalized form of communication that manifestly expresses the degree of loyalty a customer has towards a brand, product, organization or service (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Since this form of communication is likely to be either positive or negative, and contingent upon whether customers perceive that they were treated fairly or unfairly, respectively (Choi & Choi, 2014) this means positive WOM in general has clear relational building consequences. In addition to WOM, the literature also indicates that individuals will also express loyalty to an organization in the form of 'internal' forms of communication. The earlier work depicted such communications under the guise of an Exit, Loyalty, Voice [ELV] framework (Hirschman, 1970) whereby employees that were loyal to their organizations would express voice (VOI) to help remedy a wrong doing (Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers & Mainous, 1988).

Indeed the literature does indicate that VOI can be expressed as either being comprised of negative or positive forms (e.g. Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020) with the latter being constructive in nature (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007) within a particular relationship context. This research dissertation focuses on VOI as being positive in nature within the university setting. Thus in line with the work of Ping (1993), VOI has been conceptualised in this research

as the student actively working with the relationship partner (university) to and remedy problems they experience during their learning journey. Although VOI can also be destructive in nature (Gorden, 1988; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014) this research therefore focuses on gauging the impact of 'positive' VOI on the relationship that students have with their university, as reflected through a number of hypotheses (H7-H11) in the proposed model. By adopting this approach to VOI this means that the role of VOI in student learning contexts potentially has on the relational building consequences will be tested through the proposed model. In that regard, when VOI is part of the learning journey it is intrinsically linked to engaging with others, in the form of the various interactions students have with student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff.

Generally, the willingness to engage with others, and through that having a sense of belonging, is also known in the literature to be a function of the individual's wellbeing (Steger & Kashdan, 2008) so will also be an intrinsic part of the student learning journey. It is however posited in this dissertation that there would be some feeling of 'internal conflict' on the part of the individual wanting to express VOI to another party as the VOI action represents the need to tell another party some 'home truths' about a particular situation that needs remedying. Whilst individuals loyal to a relationship may prefer to "suffer in silence" rather than express VOI (Hirschman, 1970, p. 38) it is argued in this dissertation that such silence can also potentially be as a direct consequence of an individual's mental wellbeing. This is because those individuals with poor wellbeing are known to be stigmatised and as a direct after-effect will also suffer from low self-esteem (Eyllon et al., 2020). As this in turn acts as a barrier to individuals seeking help about their illness (Golberstein, Eisenberg & Gollust, 2009), such a barrier reflects a desire or willingness to disengage with others. Simply put, it is posited that individuals with low mental wellbeing will reduce their level of communication with others. Within university settings, Bowden, Tickle and Naumann (2021) find a positive relationship between social engagement and student self-esteem, suggesting further that those students suffering from poor mental wellbeing are likely to disengage. Moreover, as individuals with are inclined to protect their self-esteem by disengaging from others (Leitner, Hehman, Deegan & Jones, 2014) then through extrapolation those with reduced mental wellbeing will also have a poor desire to express VOI within the relationship.

Similarly, since student interactions with others in their learning journey is also a function of student wellbeing (Wyn et al., 2000) it is posited in this research dissertation that EWB will then also impact upon their desire to take construct VOI action to help build the relationship. In contrast, students with elevated wellbeing are more likely to engage with others during the learning journey (Wingert at al., 2020) so the inference can be drawn is that engaged students are committed to the relationship and will take more than likely take action in the form of positively focused VOI to ensure the relationship is preserved. Thus, with this and the above discussion in mind, it is posited in this doctoral dissertation that student EWB is directly and positively linked to their VOI behaviours, which can be hypothesised as follows:

H7: Emotional wellbeing is positively related to voice.

2.5.3.2 Impact of Word of Mouth on Voice (H8)

Voice (VOI) expressed by students within a higher educational learning environment often has the specific aim of contributing to enhancing their university experience (Greennikov & Shah, 2013) suggesting that students are mindful of the capacity of VOI to help enrich their learning journey. Typically, VOI in the form of student evaluations of learning and teaching are thus increasing important to help higher education providers ensure the delivery of high quality education that is student centred (Steyn, Davies, & Sambo, 2019). Many students are still sceptical about providing feedback as they see this as a 'compliance exercise' on part of the university (Gaillard, Mitchell, & Kavota, 2011). However, those students that do express VOI invariably believe that such feedback empowers them to play an important role in making meaning contributions to both the learning and teaching process, as well as helping to improve their own learning experiences (Cook-Sather, 2006).

To that end, whilst VOI can be used by students to help to shape the curricula as well as how it is going to be delivered (Blair & Noel, 2014) it also has much broader relational consequences. To illustrate the point, when VOI is expressed in urban learning contexts this activity also directly results in strong partnerships between students, families, schools and communities (Oberg De La Garza & Moreno Kuri, 2014). The literature in services also indicates that positive VOI has relational building

properties (Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020) and is often be used by one party to help improve the overall relationship (Ruslbult, Johnshon, & Morrow, 1986). In effect this also means that VOI then has both relational building and relational bonding properties, which in a student learning context is characteristic of social capital (SC: Jensen & Jetten, 2015). This is also explained from the perspective of SC given its presence in student learning environments is also known to promote relationships that the student has with staff (Palmer & Gasman, 2008) and inherent in the relations that students have with others (Dika & Singh, 2002). The inference that can be drawn from the literature is that since VOI is linked directly to loyalty (Hirschman, 1970), and loyal customers are known to express word of mouth (WOM) towards (Oliver, 2010) then WOM and VOI are also positively linked. Based on the literature and the above discussion indicating the link between WOM and VOI, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: Word of mouth is positively related to voice.

2.5.3.3 Impact of Commitment on Voice (H9)

As indicated earlier, the presence of WOM signifies that there is student loyalty towards the university and subsequently hypothesised to be a function of their level of COMM towards that relationship (H6). COMM is known to be an essential aspect of long-term relational success (Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995) and therefore little surprise that it is intrinsically linked to elevated levels of student social and academic integration into the university (Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008). This is also consistent with theory of social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) as the presence of SC indicates persons are able to draw upon their networks, ties, and relationships with others (Hawkins & Maurer, 2012), which we observe through the aforementioned forms of integration. Moreover, since university students rely on SC to interact with others to attain a range of personal outcomes (Brown & Davis, 2001; Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Tierney & Venegas, 2006) then the presence of SC signifies that not only is there going to be elevated COMM towards the university relationship but students will also take the necessary steps to help maintain these relationships. Conceptually, this makes sense because from the perspective of social exchange COMM is highly desirable relationship attribute (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and known to help to provide relational longevity (Kingshott, 2006; Yang, Song, Chen, & Xia,

2017). Relational longevity is clearly key to ensuring that students graduate from their studies as they typically will study from three to seven years, depending on their level of award (i.e. Bachelor, Master, Doctorate).

In order to help preserve that longevity relationship marketing (RM) scholars have long argued that from the perspective of SE relationships communication plays a central role in building and maintaining such relationships (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Kingshott, 2006). Thus the inference can be drawn that COMM and VOI are also intertwined in close relationships because of the relational building properties inherent in VOI (Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020). Since VOI is both proactive and constructive in nature (Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2017) this means that those students that are committed to the relationship with the university will also potentially express VOI towards the university. This assertion between COMM and VOI does have some support in the services marketing literature.

For instance, Beatty, Reynolds, Noble, & Harrison (2012) found that affective commitment of service customers had a positive impact on constructive VOI that these customers directed towards the provider. From a broader RM perspective, this finding shows that committed parties will take steps to help build and nurture the relationship with those service providers, confirming one of the core features of the RM approach (Van Tonder & Petzer 2018). Specifically, that committed parties will take action to help maintain the relationship. Thus based on the literature and the above discussion, it is proposed in the doctoral dissertation that those students who are committed to their studies will take similar 'maintenance actions' in the form of expressing VOI towards the university, hypothesised as follows:

H9: Commitment is positively related to voice.

2.5.3.4 Impact of Interaction Quality on Voice (H10)

It would seem evident from the various literatures that VOI potentially plays a critical role in helping to ensure relationship longevity due to its constructive and positive characteristics (Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020). The underlying premise is that those persons expressing VOI see this particular action as

making a positive contribution to the relationship and will do so in order to help preserve and/or strengthen that relationship (Astvik, Welander, & Hellgren, 2021). Since VOI can be attributable to the intrinsic loyalty within and towards the relationship (Hirschman, 1970) this suggests further that this particular form of communication behaviour is linked directly to the level of commitment (COMM) in the relationship. Following this line of reasoning, the inference that is being drawn in this doctoral dissertation is that individuals must be basing their relational COMM as a direct consequence of them being able to extract value from that relationship. This assertion being made herein is also highly characteristic of the extent of SC inherent within the overall relationship.

Typically, the theory of social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) articulates such value in terms of the bonding and/or bridging elements (Putman, 2000) therefore meaning that the more engaged (and thus committed) an individual is within (to) the relationship the more likely these persons are able to draw on that relationship extract value. In university settings, SC is shown to help students build their both their academic and professional identities (Jensen & Jetten, 2015) so this and other forms of value that can be derived are going to be directly linked to the quality of relationships that students have with their student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff during the learning journey. The underlying premise made in this doctoral dissertation is that such value is a function of quality of interactions that students have with these three groups of stakeholders.

It stands to reason then that since quality relationships are seen in the service literature as valuable by the customer that leads to elevated loyalty (de Ruyter, Wetzels, & Bloemer, 1998) then those student relationships with elevated interaction quality (IQ) will also result in them becoming even more committed students. Whilst this link has been reflected through H2, it is also proposed that elevated IQ will also simultaneously result in the students' desire to express VOI directed towards the university because of its relational building properties. Despite VOI sometimes being regarded as being a discretionary type of action taken by an individual to help improve aspects of the relationship (Morrison, 2014) it is postulated herein that persons experiencing better quality engagements will proactively express their VOI because of the potential negative personal consequences that may result if the relationship they have come to

value flounders. As such this means that VOI in the student learning journey with student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff effectively also helps to serves as a relational preservation action because of the need to continually enhance their university experience (Greennikov & Shah, 2013). Typically, the literature regards VOI as the mechanism whereby individuals rely upon to remedy a problem (Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers & Mainous, 1988) but in the context of the student learning journey it is argued herein that those students that experience elevated IQ will also take the opportunity to express VOI towards the university, which is hypothesised as follows:

H10: Interaction Quality is positively related to voice.

2.5.4   Exit, Voice, Emotional Wellbeing, Interaction Quality and Commitment

2.5.4.1 Impact of Voice on Exit (H11)

Since one of the core challenges facing university decision makers is how to implement effective strategies that help to improve student retention rates (Li & Carroll, 2020) this domain of the student-university relationship has been widely researched in the higher education literature (Tinto, 2006). Student retention is a direct reflection of students exiting the relationship with the university so in line with the work of Ping (1993), who draws on Hirschman's (1970) EVL framework, this doctoral dissertation defines exit (EX) in terms of leaving the organization or relationship. More specifically to this research setting, this depiction reflects the propensity of students to EX their studies and/or relationship with the university. Although a variety of factors are historically used to help predict student EX intentions (Reason, 2003) more recent works in this area do indicate that it is the nature of the engagement that students with the university that impacts retention and through that EX rates (Tight, 2020).

Childs (1998) for instance notes many universities have developed programs specifically targeting first year students so that they can focus on emphasising faculty-student engagements, and in particular these student's perceptions about the university. Such an approach is in line with the theory of social capital (SC) as such actions enable students to build SC with one another in their various networks (including that will peers, teaching and non-teaching staff) in an effort to tap into the support and guidance (Farmer-Hinton, 2008) available to students. This approach to

modelling the relationship with first year students is also largely reflective of the findings of an extensive literature review (Tight, 2020) that pertained to student retention and engagement. In this review, Tight (2020) revealed that during the period from 1960 to 2018 a major shift in thinking has occurred within universities on how best to increase student retention rates. Specifically, universities are now focusing on how to become more effective at adapting to the needs of students at various stages of their learning journey. The clear inference being that universities have also needed to become more effective at soliciting student feedback and then translating this information into tangible actions if they are to improve retention and/or reduce student EX intentions.

Consequently, soliciting student feedback has gained much traction globally over the last few decades (Grebennikov & Shah, 2013) and this has been aimed at helping universities to better shape the curricula (McCuddy, Pinar, & Gingerich, 2008), improving their professional teacher development strategies (Cook-Sather, 2006) as well as promoting good practice (Shah & Nair, 2011), among others. Although many students are cynical about the motives behind and effective use of student feedback (Gaillard, Mitchell, & Kavota, 2011) the literature elsewhere shows clearly that feedback in the form of positive voice (VOI) can be constructive on the overall relationship (Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007). It is thus proposed in this doctoral dissertation that VOI will also have implications for the overall student-university relationship. This assertion is based on the premise that the EVL framework, first proposed by Hirschman (1970), suggests that individuals that express VOI are will do so from the vantage of being loyal to the organization and therefore are unlikely to look at exiting the relationship.

In support, more recently studies show that VOI leads directly to relationship loyalty (Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020) suggesting that the intention of the persons expressing this form of communication are not looking to EX the relationship. In support, Astvik, Welander, & Hellgren (2021) reveal that social workers expressing VOI are less likely to EX the relationship with their employer suggesting that VOI and EX are negatively related to one another. It is anticipated that this link will also hold in the context of student-university relationships, particularly considering that students are willing to provide information about themselves in order to build their SC in their

student networks (Lui & Brown, 2014). Thus, based on the literature and the above discussion in mind the following is hypothesised:

H11: Voice is negatively related to exit.

2.5.4.2 Impact of Emotional Wellbeing on Exit (H12)

Due to the high global incidence of university students suffering from mental health problems (Storrie, Ahern, & Tuckett, 2010) developing strategies that help enhance student emotional wellbeing (EWB) is one of the key priority actions for university decision makers (Cooke, et al., 2006). Typically, university students are five times more likely to suffer from poor mental health than the general community (Stallman, 2010) and, to further exasperate the problem, those students that are experiencing poor mental health are not inclined to engage in student life and their studies (Steger & Kashdan, 2009). Therefore, these disengaged students cannot take full advantage of the finding that students belonging to social networks during the learning journey can draw upon the inherent social capital (SC) to positively impact on overall student wellbeing (Joanis, Burnley, & Mohundro, 2020).

Moreover, the recent meta-analysis revealing the positive link between student wellbeing and academic performance (Bücker et al., 2018) suggest that students with elevated EWB are likely to be more committed to their studies and this unlikely to exit the relationship with the university. This assertion about the link between EWB and EX is also founded on the premise that students with a high sense of belonging in the learning journey also have elevated academic performance and commitment to their studies (Buskirk-Cohen & Plants, 2019). Moreover, since poor mental health is found to negatively affect the university student's academic life in general and their work performance (Gibbons, et al., 2018) this further suggests that those with reduced EWB are also not willing to engage with student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff. These observations in the literature are underpinned by social capital theory (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) given the presence of SC in the relationships that students have with others during the learning journey is directly linked to positive outcomes for students when they engage with others (Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Thus any disengagement that students have as a consequence of poor EWB will not only impact their own studies but is also likely to have further relational repercussions.

Typically, the literature elsewhere also shows that persons suffering from poor mental health become stigmatized (Martin, Spencer, & Masuda, 2020) and this can often result in internalised self-stigma (Corrigan & Watson, 2002) that potentially results in social withdrawal (Moore & Tangney, 2017). Moreover, in work contexts individuals suffering from poor mental health may also result in them leaving their professions due to low commitment to the workplace and/or organization (Jain, Giga, & Cooper, 2009). Since students with poor mental health are also likely to suffer from self-stigma (Cheng et al., 2018) it is therefore proposed that the aforementioned disassociation with others due to poor EWB will also permeate into the student learning journey. This in turn will have negative implications for both the student and the overall student-university relationship. This assertion has support in the education literature.

Typically, students with poor mental health are likely to have negative experiences, lower academic achievement and increased cancellations to their enrolments (Usher, 2020) further suggesting a negative link between their overall EWB and propensity to EX their relationship with the university. Moreover, students with elevated self-esteem have better academic and social adjustments during the learning journey (Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali, Pohlert, 2003) indicating the positive role that EWB can have on their relationships with others whilst studying at university. Thus based on the literature, and with the above discussion in mind, the following is hypothesized:

H12: Emotional Wellbeing is negatively related to exit

2.5.4.3 Impact of Interaction Quality on Exit (H13)

The theory of social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) dictates that individuals are more likely to remain in relationships if they are able to draw upon the inherent SC to extract value and benefit from being in that relationship. This link will also hold in university settings because SC has been shown to provide benefit to students in a number of ways during their learning journey. For example, SC helps them to adopt and successfully use e-learning technologies (Barton, 2013), helps them to improve to their overall performance (Palmer & Maramba, 2015), elevates their graduation rates (Joanis, Burnley & Mohundro, 2020), as well as helps build their academic and professional identities (Jensen & Jetton, 2015), among others. In

addition to providing students these potential personal learning related outcomes, the presence of SC during the learning journey also has much broader relational consequences for the university.

Typically, the theory of SC indicates that the presence of such capital in the student learning environment is going to be based upon the engagement that the various actors have with others (Coleman, 1988). This means that when students interact with their student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff to leverage the inherent SC this interaction is also going to have direct relational implications. This is because SC capital is all about relationships, access and networking (Perna & Titus, 2005). For example, in educational settings the presence of SC helps facilitate student access to support and guidance (Farmer-Hinton, 2008), helps students build lifelong relationships with fellow like-minded students (Park & Bowman, 2015), provides students much needed access to institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2001), among others.

Conversely, engagements and social interactions that students have with fellow students may also help then to build their SC (Scanlon, Rowling, & Weber, 2007). Similarly, mentoring programs directed at students also provide then access to SC (Smith, 2007) suggesting it is key to overall relationships that students have within and towards the university. Whilst such engagements with stakeholders are clearly valuable to students in a number of ways, and thus deemed valuable to students to help facilitate and navigate their journey through university (Dika, 2012) clearly these interactions also help serve as the foundation upon which the university can build robust relationships with their student base.

Conceptually, elevated interaction in SE based relationships can help individuals build relationships with others (Homans 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). However, the capacity of individuals to take advantage and/or leverage SC in a relationship is largely a function of their ability to access SC as well as the overall quality of that capital (Portes, 1998). Thus, the inference can be drawn is that whilst the interactions students have with peers, teaching, and non-teaching staff dictates the value of the relationship to the student, it is the quality of those interactions (IQ) that helps to drive their desire to stay in the relationship.

The potential relational implications of IQ with peers, teaching and non-teaching staff can also be inferred from literature elsewhere. For example, in their meta-analysis related to employee-to-employee relationships, Chiaburu & Harrison (2008) find that it is the quality of interaction between co-workers that has a negative impact upon both a worker's intentions to quit and actual leaving of their workplace. Similarly in the context of employee-to-customer relationships, Vesel and Zabkar (2008) draw on SE theory to show the presence of personal interaction quality (IQ) received by retail customers (in the do-it-yourself (DIY) marketplace) positively impacts the overall quality of the relationship they have with the retailer. Since these authors also find that elevated levels of IQ with retail staff results helps retain the customer then the specific inference that can be drawn from these findings is that IQ in the context of student learning will help to overcome the ongoing retention problem facing educational providers (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Shah & Widin, 2010; Tight, 2020). In other words reduce the EX intentions of students. This assertion does have support in the education literature. For example, the earlier work of Tinto (1975) reveals that the extent of academic and social integration during the students learning journey has a negative bearing on their desire to leave their studies. Given the extent of quality engagement that students have with faculty and their student peers influences student dropout rates (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002) it is therefore proposed that elevated levels of IQ in the student-university relationship negatively influences student EX intentions. Based on the literature and the above discussion in mind it is hypothesised that:

H13: Interaction Quality is negatively related to exit.

2.5.4.4 Impact of Commitment on Exit (H14)

As discussed in earlier sections the presence of SC within the higher education learning environment and the capacity of university students to leverage that capital through their relationships with peers, teaching and non-teaching staff potentially has both personal (Barton, 2013; Bücker et al., 2018; Joanis, Burnley, & Mohundro, 2020) and relational (Park & Bowman, 2015; Perna & Titus, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2001) implications. The underlying inference drawn in this doctoral dissertation is that given the value students can derive from these relationships then this correspondingly means

that students will also be highly committed (COMM) to maintain that relationship with the university. This assertion also has some basis in the relationship marketing (RM) literature that has been grounded in SE theory (Homans 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). For example, when service customers are able to derive relational benefits then this has a positive impact on their COMM to the service provider (Beatty, Reynolds, Noble, & Harrison, 2012). Similarly in a retail banking context, Alhathal, Sharma, & Kingshott (2019) show that when customers are able to extract social benefits through interactions with the bank's employees then this will lead to elevated levels of affective commitment directed towards the relationship with the bank. These and other benefits derived in relationships are key drivers in maintaining those relationships with the customer (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999) so the inference that can be drawn is that committed customers are less likely to exit (EX) a relationship when they are able to extract benefits from that association. More generally, earlier RM literature points out that COMM is central to the firm's RM efforts and thus intrinsic to nurturing long-term relationships with the customer (Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995). Committed customers are shown to have a lower propensity to leave the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) but being committed also means that parties in that relationship need to have high inputs into that relationship (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987).

From a student learning context such inputs are ongoing and deeply intertwined in the various interactions that students will have with others during the learning journey, thus are grounded in SE theory given interactions are characteristic of SE based relationships (Grönroos, 2017b; Jap, Manolis, & Weitz, 1999). These interactions are also an intrinsic feature of the students' learning journey in terms of the need to engage with student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff in order to extract the potential benefits from the inherent SC. For example, students in doctoral programs need constant interaction with their mentors (supervisors) if they are to be successful in both their studies and any associated work assigned to them (Green & Bauer, 1995) during their higher research degree studies. The education literature overwhelmingly indicates that university students can derive positive benefits when they interact with their peers (Rossmann & Trolian, 2020), teaching (Trolian & Parker, 2020) and/or non-teaching (Lee, Chang, & Bryan, 2020) staff indicating these are highly valuable relationships and therefore students will be committed to them. Davidson, Beck, &

Milligan (2009; p. 384) point out that "commitment was the single most reliable predictor of retention" so it is thus argued in this doctoral research that elevated COMM towards the relationship with the university reduces the EX intentions held by students. Based on the literature and the above discussion it is hypothesised that:

H14: Commitment is negatively related to exit

2.6   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has developed a testable conceptual model comprising 14 hypotheses to help explain how university decision makers are able to reduce the propensity of students to exit the relationship with the university. By grounding the model in the theories of social exchange (SE: Homans 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) and social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) and drawing upon the education, relationship marketing and EVL framework (Hirschman, 1970) the link between six variables (interaction quality, emotional wellbeing, commitment, word of mouth, voice and exit) in the proposed model is discussed and justified in detail. The next section (chapter 3) in this document will outline the underlying methodology used in this doctoral dissertation. This is then followed by a chapter related to the research findings (chapter 4) prior to outlining the specific research limitations, future research directions, scholarly and managerial implications and overall conclusions (chapter 5).

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the overall research design, sample, measures and procedure used to undertake this doctoral research. In summary the study is a quantitative study with a cross-sectional research design that adopted an online approach to capturing the data with a self-administered questionnaire that targeted students studying in a national sample of Australian universities. A non- probability sampling technique was adopted that targeted the population of interest using panel data from a company that specialises in identifying consumers within the Australian market place. The measures used to capture the data were adapted from well-established scales in the extant literature to conform to the conceptual underpinnings and university study setting.

3.2   RESEARCH DESIGN

Like any research project this doctoral dissertation needed to consider the questions that relate to aspects of who, what, when, where and how to help define and articulate the research subject of interest (Cooper & Schindler, 1998). This particular research setting related to the capacity of the university to build long term relationships with their student base so the decision had to be made which of the two conceptually distinct research approaches, namely qualitative or quantitative (Neuman, 2006; Williams, 2007) was to be used. The literature related to the qualitative research methodology indicates this approach examines a phenomenon of interest, which can be either descriptive or exploratory in nature (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). Quantitative research on the other hand has been conceptualised in the literature to focus on hypotheses and theory testing using the confirmatory scientific method (Antwi & Hamza, 2015).

Given this research was focus on testing a conceptual model that was derived from the literature, the inductive qualitative approach (Lee & Lings, 2008) was thus deemed unsuitable for this particular research. To illustrate the point, an inductive approach relates to the building of theory through the interpretations of raw data collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Thomas, 2006). The process of an inductive approach

includes (1) summarising the findings from the raw data, (2) establishing the links between the summary findings from the raw data to the research objectives and (3) theory/model development from the data captured from the study (Thomas, 2006). On the other hand the literature indicates that the deductive approach relates to testing theory (Thornhill, Saunders, & Lewis, 2009). For example, Sekaran (2000) refers to this technique as being hypothetico-deductive in in nature which then follow a process that (1) hypotheses are developed, (2) these hypotheses are tested using a suitable technique, and (3) a determination is made as to whether each of the hypotheses are rejected or supported (McCurray, Pace & Scott, 2004). Therefore a deductive quantitative methodology (Antwi & Hamza, 2015) was used in this doctoral dissertation as this approach enabled an empirically test of the proposed model (comprising the 14 hypotheses) and through that helped determined the research objectives and questions that emerged in the research settings.

There are numerous research strategies that were identified by Thornhill, Saunders and Lewis (2009), namely experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography and archival forms of research. This doctoral dissertation adopts an online survey approach (as discussed later) to collect the data for the research. Accordingly the quantitative research approach adopted herein focused on a survey strategy as it is in line with the deductive approach (Thornhill, Saunders, & Lewis, 2009). This strategy involves the collection of data from a sizable population and thereafter analysing it using the most appropriate statistical techniques to help explain the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2002; Muijs, 2010). In this research, it thus comprised examining the relationship between identified RM constructs in terms of examining the causes and effects between.

Another aspect that needs to be considered relates to the chronology of the research and in particular whether it needs to be cross sectional or longitudinal in nature. Cross sectional studies comprise of data being collected at one single point in time (Zikmund, 2003). On the other hand a longitudinal study pertains to data being collected from respondents at several points in time ((Neuman, 2006). This doctoral dissertation adopts a cross sectional study, in which the justification is discussed in the next section.

3.2.1 Justification for research design

With the above discussion in mind the research adopted in this doctoral dissertation was chosen with the four research objectives and four research questions in mind. Specifically this research address the gap in the RM literature in student university relationship and thereafter empirically examined which relational constructs were important in this student learning context. From that a testable conceptual model was developed by drawing on relevant literatures. Finally the model was used to provide managers with insights as to how to build and nurture the student relationship. The specific research questions that were adopted pertained to whether the student university relationship can be looked at through the lens of social exchange and social capital theory. An attempt was also made to try and establish if students from various backgrounds responded to the RM efforts of the university. With this specifically in mind a causal methodology (Sekaran, 2000) was adopted with the aim of testing the proposed model that comprised 14 hypothesis that were interrelated. Student relationships with university can range from three to seven years (longer if part-time) and the ideal type of research would be longitudinal in nature. However given the time frame associated with undertaking this doctoral dissertation this aspect of the research design was deemed impractical therefore a cross sectional approach was used. Moreover since this research project was focused on testing a proposed conceptual model then cross sectional studies are highly appropriate. This also has much support in the extant literature, specifically those aimed at exploring the role of RM within a service context (Fernandes & Pinto, 2019; Raciti, Ward & Dagger, 2013; Ward & Dagger, 2007) Cross sectional studies are also common practice within the higher education context (Carvalho, & de Oliveira Mota, 2010; Ledden, Kalafatis, & Samouel, 2007; Plewa, C., Ho, Conduit & Karpen, 2016) which is similar to this research project setting.

In order to establish the links between these proposed paths, a SEM analytical technique (Hair et al., 2010) using AMOS26$^{©}$ was adopted for data analysis. Given the complexities and practicalities associated with collecting data in long term relationships, such as the student setting in this doctoral dissertation, a cross-sectional design was adopted. Whilst this method is both common practice and widely used within B2C service relationship (Sekaran, 2000; Thornhill, Saunders, & Lewis, 2009) data about the sample frame was also captured that indicated variance in the longevity

that students had in their relationship with the university. Other types of descriptive data about the sample frame (see table 3.1) was captured to help establish whether the sample was representative of students studying in Australia universities. SPSS was also used to help determine the overall demographically profile of the sample frame, as well as attempting to establish if there were any patterns across the sample frame with respect to the important RM constructs in the model.

3.3 SAMPLE DESIGN

3.3.1 Introduction to the sampling design

The sampling design is an important aspect of any particular research project and provides the basis for a number of key questions about how a sample relates to the population (Lavrakas, 2008). These include aspects such as defining the population, determining the sample size and practical aspects such as collecting the data (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002). These are now discussed.

3.3.2 Defining the population and sample unit

In line with the works of Churchill and Iacobucci, (2002), and Taherdoost (2016) the first step in the sample selection process is to define the target population, which in this instance comprises of students studying in Australian universities. The target population is defined as the entire group of study subjects or put another way the total unit of analysis (i.e. People, events, or things of interests) that is used in a research study (Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Sekaran, 2000). In this doctoral dissertation, a national sample of university students within the Australian HEI context was the focus. This end there are 42 universities in Australia (Study Australia, 2020) with approximately 543,000 of those students commencing university studies during 2017, giving a total number of 1.37 million students studying in the same period (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019). Accordingly these university students were the target population of interest in this doctoral thesis. The chosen sample thus comprised both Australian and international students at all levels of study and across the wide range of disciplines offered by these Australian universities. The sample unit (i.e. unit of analysis) for this research is therefore comprised of university students enrolled in either undergraduate, postgraduate or doctoral programs across the various faculties in each Australian university. The sample selection also targeted students at various stages of study in their degree programs, which ranged from approximately

one to seven years. Those students that were part-time and studied longer than this timeframe were also targeted in the sample.

3.3.3 Sampling Technique

There are two main sampling methods that could be used in studies such as this doctoral dissertation – probability and non-probability sampling techniques (Sreejesh, Mohapatra & Abusree, 2014). The main difference between these two approaches is that probability sampling assures that each member of the population has a 'known non-zero probability' of being selected whilst on the other hand the non-probability technique means that the probability of selection is unknown (Zikmund, Carr & Griffin, 2013). To this end, convenience, judgment, snowballing, and quota sampling techniques are the different types of non-probability sampling techniques that can be used (Hair et al., 2006). While probability sampling techniques include simple random, systematic, stratified random and cluster (Lavrakas, 2008) these were deemed in appropriate for this research due to a number of reasons. First given the limited budget associated with doctoral dissertation this approach would be too costly. Second, the access to identifying and targeting students randomly across Australian universities was impractical as the doctoral student did not have access to this type of information. Finally, this technique requires a sample frame (Daniel, 2012) that would comprise a list of all students studying in Australian universities therefore given the resources of the doctoral student this approach is deemed unviable.

For this doctoral thesis therefore, a non-probability sampling technique was employed, and in particular convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is depicted as a sampling procedure where individuals are sourced as they are most conveniently available (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010) and are characteristic of the target population. This can be best described as a particular type of non-probability sampling procedure where potential respondents are sourced and known and/or readily available to investigators (Visser, Krosnick & Lavrakas, 2000). Therefore using panel data from a company that readily specialises in identifying potential respondents, such as those university students in this research study, represents a typical convenience sample. This technique has been widely used in the service industry to measure the impact of relationships between a service provider and its customers (e.g. Gaur, Kingshott & Sharma, 2019; Pacheco, Pizzutti, Basso, & Van Vaerenbergh, 2019) and more specific

to examining the university student relationship (e.g. Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen, 2001; Sultan & Wong, 2012) therefore was deemed suitable for this research study that examines how universities can build relationships with their student base.

3.3.4 Sample Characteristics and Sample size

In the current research study a national sample potential respondents studying in Australian universities, was targeted that comprised students pertaining to the following broad characteristics: (1) domestic and international students, (2) enrolled in all types of degrees offered by Australian universities, (3) students in Australian universities across all states and territories, (4) different modes of study such as full-time, part-time, face to face, online and blended (5) none specificity about the demographic profile of the targeted respondents, (6) sample size of 450 usable responses. These particular sample parameters were designed so that the respondents were representative of students studying across all Australian universities. Moreover the number of respondents was chosen as suitable to conduct the SEM analysis need to test the proposed conceptual model, in line with the literature (e.g. Choi & Kim, 2020; Hair et. al, 2006; Han, Kwortnik Jr, & Wang, 2008; Hu, Bentler & Kano, 1992).

3.3.5 Sample Characteristics of Study compared to Australian Universities

As highlighted in the previous section a national convenience sample of 450 university students studying in Australian universities helped test the proposed conceptual model. However, on closer examination of the data, a total of 23 'flat-liners' and outliers were identified in the database and thus removed from further analysis. Accordingly, the demographics of the usable sample of 427 respondents was then compared to available data to help determine if the sample of students targeted was representative of those students in Australian universities. The analysis revealed that the sample/population were relatively consistent in a number of key areas indicating that they were similar, implying that the views of the sample were likely to be analogous to students in other Australian universities. First, a comparison between students enrolled institutes in the sample with those in universities in Australia appeared to be relatively similar (see table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Number of students in Australia universities verses sample

Australian University	Population: N=1,398,220[**] Student Count (%)	Sample: n=427 Student Count (%)
Australian Catholic University	34,317 (2.5%)	13 (3.0%)
Australian National University	25,355 (1.8%)	9 (2.1%)
Batchelor University of Indigenous Education	18 (0.0%)	-
Bond University[**]	6,171 (0.4%)	6 (1.4%)
Central Queensland University	23,215 (1.7%)	7 (1.6%)
Charles Darwin University	11,432 (0.8%)	4 (0.9%)
Charles Sturt University	44,159 (3.2%)	11 (2.6%)
Curtin University	48,910 (3.5%)	6 (1.4%)
Deakin University	56,107 (4.0%)	27 (6.3%)
Edith Cowan University	29,454 (2.1%)	2 (0.5%)
Federation University	13,722 (1.0%)	4 (0.9%)
Flinders University	25,269 (1.8%)	2 (0.5%)
Griffith University	47,260 (3.4%)	3 (0.7%)
James Cook University	20,827 (1.5%)	1 (0.2%)
La Trobe University	38,639 (2.8%)	25 (5.9%)
Macquarie University	45,022 (3.2%)	24 (5.6%)
Murdoch University	23,227 (1.7%)	-
Monash University	78,257 (5.6%)	31 (7.3%)
Queensland University of Technology	49,830 (3.6%)	4 (0.9%)
RMIT University	65,538 (4.7%)	23 (5.4%)
Southern Cross University	16,850 (1.2%)	1 (0.2%)
Swinburne University of Technology	41,440 (3.0%)	12 (2.8%)
Torrens University[**]	9,145 (0.7%)	2 (0.5%)
University of Adelaide	26,811 (1.9%)	1 (0.2%)
University of Canberra	16,751 (1.2%)	2 (0.5%)
University of Divinity	1,569 (0.1%)	-
University of Melbourne	65,257 (4.7%)	38 (8.9%)
University of New England	23,480 (1.7%)	4 (0.9%)
University of New South Wales	59,782 (4.3%)	34 (8.0%)
University of Newcastle	34,350 (2.5%)	12 (2.8%)
University of Notre Dame[**]	11,912 (0.9%)	1 (0.2%)
University of Queensland	52,331 (3.7%)	1 (0.2%)
University of South Australia	31,086 (2.2%)	3 (0.7%)
University of Southern Queensland	26,148 (1.9%)	-
University of Sunshine Coast	16,485 (1.2%)	-
University of Sydney	64,444 (4.6%)	36 (8.4%)
University of Tasmania	37,648 (2.7%)	2 (0.5%)
University of Technology Sydney	44,882 (3.2%)	24 (5.6%)
University of Western Australia	25,259 (1.8%)	1 (0.2%)
University of Wollongong	34,447 (2.5%)	9 (2.1%)
Victoria University	26,668 (1.9%)	14 (3.3%)
Western Sydney University	44,746 (3.2%)	15 (3.5%)
Non-specified	-	13 (3.0%)
Total	1,398,220 (100%)	427 (100%)

[**]private universities included in count

(Source: Study Australia, 2020)

Second, the relative distributions of other key demographics, such as the level of award and area of study (see table 3.2) also suggest similarities between the students in the sample and those in the broader university fraternity across Australia.

Table 3.2: Comparison of panel data sample verses population [selected] in 2017

Sample Parameters	Population: N=1,369,423[#] Student Count (%)	Sample: n=427 Student Count (%)
Level of Study (Current)[**]		
Doctorate level	57,647 (4.5%)	7 (1.6%)
Masters	268,792 (20.3%)	76 (17.8%)
Postgraduate	25,937 (2.0%)	61 (14.3%)
Bachelors [Honours]	112,520 (8.5%)	31 (7.3%)
Bachelor	827,847 (62.4%)	215 (50.4%)
Graduate Certificate	30,943 (2.3%)	37 (8.7%)
Other[#]	45,737	-
Gender		
Male	603,961 (44.1%)	216 (50.6%)
Female	765,462 (55.9%)	208 (48.7%)
Other[*]	-	3 (0.7%)
Local/International Student		
Domestic[***]	999,987 (73.0%)	366 (85.7%)
International	369,436 (27.0%)	61 (14.3%)
Area of Study		
Art & Design	78,174 (5.7%)	29 (6.8%)
Business	331,011 (24.2%)	119 (27.9%)
Computer Sciences	73,337 (5.4%)	50 (11.7%)
Education	123,076 (8.9%)	16 (3.7%)
Engineering	111,579 (8.1%)	43 (10.1%)
Health Sciences & Medicine	228,836 (16.7%)	71 (16.6%)
Humanities & Law	294,166 (21.5%)	61 (14.3%)
Science	122,851 (8.9%)	35 (8.2%)
Other	6,393 (0.5%)	-

[***]Interstate domestic students listed as combined domestic in DESE data set. [**]listed percentages based on tertiary level courses specified; [*]not reported; [##]not specified; [#]private universities not included in count

(Sources: Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2019) and analysis from this doctoral dissertation dataset)

3.3.6   Common method bias (CMV)

Given that the data related to independent and dependant variables were collected from students in the same research setting, in order to minimise the potential impact of common method variance CMV (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) a number of procedures were adopted during the data collection phrase of the research. First, we ensured anonymity and confidentiality of the data that was collected from each of the respondents targeted in the survey. This assurance was in the form of a cover letter and information sheet made available to respondents at the beginning of the survey. Second, in line with the approach adopted by Kingshott, Sharma and Nair (2020) in a service setting, the level of potential ambiguity in responses was also reduced by using well developed scales from the extant literature. Finally, in terms of the structure of the questionnaire, each of the scales that captured the dependent and independent variables in the proposed conceptual model were sequenced in the research instrument in such a manner that they were 'separate' from one another in the data collection. More specifically, the items in each of the scales for the online instrument were randomly assigned to different places in the research instrument. This helped ensure respondents did not bring bias into their answers in relation to a particular variable as there was no 'apparent referencing' across items in the same variable. Moreover, the survey was also configured in such a manner that respondents were unable to return to previous answers, therefore reducing the potential for their responses in relation to a particular item (and question) to be influenced by their earlier responses.

Following this, in order to test the effectiveness of these particular strategies in data collection phrase of the methodology a number of statistical test were conducted to further establish if CMV was problematic in the data set. In particular, Harman's single factor test was conducted using EFA that comprised all items that measured the latent constructs in the model. This technique is used to establish if variables (using an un-rotated factor solution) loaded into one common factor with less than 50% of the overall variance. Whilst there are a range of other potential techniques to test for CMV, the 'single factor' approach adopted in this dissertation is in line with existing studies within service marketing and relationship contexts (e.g. Hosie, Sharma & Kingshott, 2019; Kingshott, Sharma & Nair, 2020), so equally deemed as an adequate technique for testing CMV in the university-student setting in this dissertation.

Table 3.3: Unrotated Factor Matrix using EFA to test for CMV

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
C	Total	VAR	CUM	Total	VAR	CUM
1	19.774	39.547	39.547	19.774	39.547	39.547
2	4.955	9.910	49.457	4.955	9.910	49.457
3	3.194	6.389	55.846	3.194	6.389	55.846
4	2.309	4.617	60.463	2.309	4.617	60.463
5	2.248	4.497	64.960	2.248	4.497	64.960
6	1.621	3.242	68.202	1.621	3.242	68.202

C = Component; VAR = % of variance; CUM = cumulative %; Extraction: Principle Component

The data (Table 3.3) indicated that a single one-factor solution was indeed less than 50%, therefore indicating that CMV had little impact on the overall results (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Specifically the largest single factor extracted with un-rotated solution was 39.547%, followed by extractions for the next five components to range between 3.242 and 9.910 with a total cumulative variance for the six largest extractions using EFA to be 68.202% whereas the remainder of items in the scale (total of n=50 items) accounted for the reminder of the variance. In summary the data established that the strategies in the questionnaire design and how they were presented in the instrument contributed to CMV not being problematic in the data.

3.4   PROCEDURE – DATA COLLECTION

The procedure component of any research project essentially deals with the manner that the data was collected and varies depending on the nature of the research design (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this particular study, since the design was cross sectional, quantitative and deductive in nature the data was collected using a self-administered online research instrument survey (see Appendix 1). In order to test the viability of the procedure adopted the research instrument was pretested (n=50) using a similar sample to the targeted respondents in the major field study. In addition to ascertaining the viability of the online survey in the pretest, this activity was also deemed important to help establish whether the targeted respondents were able to understand the language being used in the survey. Typically, pretesting is therefore important as it identifies the issues in the questionnaire that the target respondents may have and helps in the refinement of the research design (Reynolds, Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch 1993). Overall the pretest established that there were no issues associated with using this approach to capturing the data such as their understanding of each of the items in the survey.

Table 3.4: Comparison of means of variables between pilot test and main fieldwork

Conceptual Model Constructs	Pilot Test (*n*=50)			Main Study (*n*=427)		
	Mean	SD	Std. error	Mean	SD	Std. error
Interaction Quality Teaching Staff [IQTS]	5.48	0.865	0.122	5.44	0.798	0.039
Interaction Quality Non-Teaching Staff [IQNTS]	5.31	0.827	0.117	5.19	0.875	0.042
Interaction Quality Class Mates [IQCM]	5.40	0.780	0.110	5.06	0.941	0.046
Emotional Wellbeing [EWB]	5.05	1.027	0.145	4.70	1.222	0.059
Commitment [COMM]	5.49	0.924	0.131	5.43	0.930	0.045
Exit [EX]	3.62	1.622	0.229	3.45	1.641	0.079
Word of Mouth [WOM]	5.50	0.876	0.124	5.28	0.932	0.045
Voice [VOI]	4.76	1.214	0.172	4.59	1.202	0.058

As indicated in table 3.4 the composite scores of each of the model variables indicate that the pilot study (*n*=50) and full field study (*n*=427) were relatively similar regards their means, standard deviation (SD) and standard error statistic. Therefore those respondents in the pilot study were included in the main study as they in effect spoke with the 'same voice' as other students in the sample frame. Furthermore, the respondents in the pilot study were also compared to the full study along demographics and various aspects of their study programs in university. Specifically the analysis compared area of study, mode of study, degrees held, level of study and years studied at university (table 3.5) and the data showed that the two groups were similar in relation to aforementioned student related variables. To help ascertain if the two groups had the same demographics they were also compared to each other in terms of age, gender, residential status, student status, home region, language spoken and time living in Australia (table 3.6). This data also revealed that the respondents in the pilot study were the same as the full study respondents.

Table 3.5: Comparisons between pilot and full-field study [course demographics]

Parameter	Pilot Test (*n*=50)		Main Study (*n*=427)		Parameter	Pilot Test (*n*=50)		Main Study (*n*=427)	
Area of Study	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**Mode of Study**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Art & Design	3	6.0	30	7.0	Face-to-face only	18	36.0	203	47.5
Business	13	26.0	119	27.9	Fully online only	9	18.0	64	15.0
Computer Sciences	7	8.0	50	11.7	Blended Learning	23	46.0	160	37.5
Education	3	6.0	16	3.7					
Engineering	5	14.0	43	10.1	**Degrees Held**				
Health Sciences & Medicine	8	8.0	69	16.2	None, first degree	26	52.0	231	54.1
Humanities & Law	7	8.0	62	14.5	One degree	15	30.0	119	27.9
Science	4	6.0	36	8.4	Two or more degrees	9	18.0	77	18.0
Other	-	-	2	0.5					
					Years Studied				
Level of Study					1 year or less	14	28.0	89	20.8
Graduate Certificate	5	10.0	37	8.7	2 years	12	24.0	96	22.5
Bachelor	21	42.0	215	50.4	3 years	5	10.0	92	21.5
Bachelor [honours]	1	2.0	31	7.3	4 years	4	8.0	72	16.9
Postgraduate	8	16.0	61	14.3	5 years	8	16.0	43	10.1
Masters	15	30.0	76	17.8	6 years	1	2.0	12	2.8
Doctorate	0	0.0	7	1.6	7 years	1	2.0	7	1.6
					> 7 years	5	10.0	16	3.7

Table 3.6: Comparisons between pilot and full-field study [individual demographics]

Parameter	Pilot Test (n=50)		Main Study (n=427)		Parameter	Pilot Test (n=50)		Main Study (n=427)	
Respondent Age	n	%	n	%	**Student Status**	n	%	n	%
18 to 22 years	6	12.0	49	11.5	International	6	12.0	61	14.3
23 to 27 years	7	14.0	98	23.0	Local	34	68.0	327	76.6
28 to 32 years	8	16.0	79	18.5	Local (interstate)	10	20.0	39	9.1
33 to 37 years	10	20.0	61	14.3					
38 to 42 years	10	20.0	46	10.8	**Birth Region**				
43 to 47 years	2	4.0	31	7.3	Australia	34	68.0	290	67.9
48 to 52 years	1	2.0	23	5.4	Asia	11	22.0	100	23.4
53 to 57 years	1	2.0	15	3.5	Europe	4	8.0	19	4.4
58 to 62 years	2	4.0	10	2.3	Others	1	2.0	18	4.2
> 63 years	3	6.0	15	3.5					
Gender					**Home Language**				
Male	27	54.0	216	50.6	English	43	86.0	324	75.9
Female	22	44.0	208	48.7	Non-English	7	14.0	103	24.1
Other	1	2.0	3	0.7					
Residential Status					**Duration in Australia**				
Australian Citizen	43	86.0	357	83.6	3 years or less	5	10.0	39	9.1
Australian PR	4	80.0	37	8.7	4 to 7 years	4	8.0	39	9.1
Others	3	6.0	33	7.7	> 7 years	41	82.0	349	81.7

In addition this pilot test helped establish whether the time frame associated with completing the survey was not too cumbersome on the respondents. The data in the Qualtrics systems provided information about how long each respondents took (not report herein) to complete the survey and this indicated it was well with the parameters specified in information sheet provided to potential respondents (see Appendix 2). In addition, a basic analysis of the data using SPSS also indicated the effectiveness of question ordering to reduce the impact of CMV, as discussed earlier.

The specific procedural technique adopted was the use of an online survey using the Curtin Qualtrics platform. This particular platform enabled an online email link to be generated that was then sent to an Australian online panel data company, namely Growthops. In the Asia Pacific region, this company is one of the largest service providers pertaining to marketing data collection. Specifically, this organization specializes in identifying panels of Australian consumers therefore were able to

identify suitable students needed in the study. In the last decade the use of online panel survey has been increasing popular among researchers (Dennis, 2001; Evans & Mathur 2005) so was equally deemed suitable to capture the data required in this doctoral dissertation to test the proposed conceptual model. There are several advantages of using online panel data, which include - a higher response rates from respondents as they have given prior consent to participate in online surveys and researchers can specify the characteristic of the respondents that the data is obtained for the scope of study (Burns & Bush, 2006; Duffy, Smith, Terhanian, & Bremer, 2005; Zikmund, Carr & Griffin, 2013). In order to ensure that the targeted students were suitably identified, as indicated earlier a series of sample parameters were specified in advance. This helped to ensure that the panel company targeted students studying in Australian universities. Accordingly the email link to the online survey was sent out by the panel company to a national sample of 450 university students across Australia.

In order to ensure that students were fully informed about the purpose of the study and its significance to the building of university-student relationships they were provided with this information (see Appendix 1) at the beginning of the survey. Contact details of the researcher and ethics approval (Curtin University HRE2017-0614) were also included at the start of the survey. This approach conforms to the Dillman (2002) method in term of ensuring quality data. Furthermore providing this information and consent to participate in the study is a requirement by Curtin University to conform to The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research-2007-updated-2018)

3.5   QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN AND MEASURES

3.5.1   Questionnaire Design

The most important consideration in designing the questionnaire is to establish the nature of the information required from the targeted sample in order to achieve the research objectives set in the study (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010). In this particular instance the overall research objectives related to exploring the role that RM played in nurturing the student university relationships and in particular which constructs were critical to help build and nurture such relationships. With that in mind the constructs in the conceptual model that formed part of the questionnaire included interaction quality, emotional well-being, commitment to the university, voice, word of mouth and exit. In addition to these constructs, demographical data also was captured to help determine the profile of the respondents as well as establish whether there were any differences in patterns across each of the constructs in the proposed conceptual model.

3.5.2   Measures

All measures adopted in this research are based on existing scales in the extant literature that displayed suitable psychometric properties. They were also congruous with the research context in this doctorate dissertation. Table 3.7 provides an overall summary of the measures used in the research instrument. In summary, interaction quality (IQ) was measured using the scale developed by Brady and Cronin (2001) that tapped onto extent of perceived interaction quality that students had with teaching, non-teaching and their peers. Emotional well-being was measured from the scales developed by Warr (1990) capturing the frequency and intensity of emotions experienced by students. Affective commitment was measured using the scales developed by Hennig-Thurau, Langer and Hansen (2001) that measured the extent of positive emotion and attachment to the students had towards the university. Word of mouth was measured from scales developed by Harrison-Walker (2001) that established the extent of informal interpersonal communication between the students shared with others about the university they were studying at. Voice was measured using the scales developed by Ping (1993) that was designed to capture the extent that students were willing to work with others to help in the relationship during their studies. Exit was also measured using the scales developed by Ping (1993) but specifically aimed at capturing student's perception about the likelihood they would leave their current universities and study elsewhere.

Table 3.7: Overview of construct measures used for this research

Variable	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition	Instrument Items	Original Scale Source	Variables Related to and Direction
Interaction Quality *Exogenous*	The perception of the quality of interactions that take place during service delivery.	The perceived quality of interactions with (1) teaching staff, (2) non-teaching staff and, (3) classmates	Question 2 1-11 Question 3 1-11 Question 4 1-11	Brady & Cronin (2001)	Emotional Wellbeing (H_1 +ve) Commitment (H_2 +ve) WOM (H_3 +ve) Voice (H_{10} +ve) Exit (H_{13} -ve)
Emotional Well-being *Endogenous*	Feelings in relation to the relationship students have with their university of study.	The frequency and intensity of the emotions that a student experiences while studying in a university.	Question 6 1-6	Warr, (1990)	Commitment (H_4 +ve) WOM (H_5 +ve) Voice (H_7 +ve) Exit (H_{12} -ve)
Affective/Emotional Commitment *Endogenous*	A generalized sense of positive emotion for and for, and attachment that students have towards the university of study	The extent of a sense of positive emotion and attachment towards the university	Question 5 9-12	Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen (2001)	WOM (H_6 +ve) Voice (H_9 +ve) Exit (H_{14} -ve)
Word of Mouth *Endogenous*	An informal, person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organization, or a service	The extent of informal personal communication from the sender to the receiver regarding the university.	Question 6 5-8	Harrison-Walker (2001)	Voice (H_8 +ve)
Voice	Actively working with	The extent a student is	Question 8a 5-8	Ping 1993	Exit (H_{11} +ve)

Endogenous	the relationship partner to remedy problems.	willing to work with involved parties to resolve study related issues.			
Exit *Endogenous*	Leaving the organization or relationship.	Attitude about intentions to leaving the university and seeking another university.	Question 8a 1-4	Ping 1993	DEPENDENT

(Source: Format derived from Pecotich, 1983).

Each of the scales used in this research were carefully selected from those available in the extant literature so that they align with conceptual underpinnings of social exchange (SE: Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) and social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) theories. A summary of key measures (see table 3.8) in selected research in the extant literature for each of the constructs used in the proposed conceptual model and the discussion that follows in the next couple of sections documents the specific measures used in this doctoral dissertation.

Table 3.8: Summary of measures of constructs

Scale Source	Context	Factors & items (N)	Scale Type	Anchors
Interaction Quality				
Dabholkar, Thorpe, & Rentz (1996)	Retail Consumer Shoppers	Inspiring confidence (3) Courteousness/helpfulness(6)	5-point Likert	1=Very unlikely 5=Very likely
Brady & Cronin (2001)*	Consumers	Overall IQ (2) Attitude (3) Behaviour (3) Expertise (3)	7-point Likert type	1=Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree
Vesel & Zabkar (2009)	Club Members	Single Factor (4)	7-point Likert type	1=Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree
Choi & Kim (2013)	Hospital Patients	Single Factor (3)	5-point Likert	1=Strongly disagree 5=Strongly agree

		Positive direct- getting along (3) Positive indirect – observing or overbearing (2) Negative direct – fight or similar (3) Negative indirect – loudness (2) Negative indirect – rudeness (2)		
Kim, Choi & Martin (2020)	Health-care customers (C2C) context		7-point Likert type	1=Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree

Emotional Wellbeing				
Waston, Clark & Tellegen (1988)	Students	Positive Affect (10) Negative Affect (10)	5-point Likert	1=very slightly or not at all 5= extremely
Warr (1990)*	Employees	Job related affect (6) Non-job affect (6)	6-point Likert type	1=Never 6= all the time
McCabe & Johnson (2013)	Social Tourists	Positive Affect (2) Negative Affect (2)	4-point Likert	1=None or almost none of the time 4=all or almost all of the time
Aureliano-Silva, Strehlau, & Strehlau (2018)	Consumers	Single Factor (6)	7-point Likert type	1= Totally disagree 7= Totally agree

Commitment				
Morgan & Hunt (1994)	Automobile tire retailers	Single Factor (6)	7-point Likert type	1=Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree
Kumar, Scheer &Steenkamp (1995)	Car dealers	Affective (3) Expectation of continuity (3) Willingness to invest (3)	7-point Likert type	1=Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree
Allen & Meyer (1990)	Employees	Normative (8) Affective (8) Continuance (8)	7-point Likert type	1=Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree
Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen 2001*	Students	Single Factor (4)	7-point Likert type	1=Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree
Bansal, Irving & Taylor (2004)	Auto-repair customers	Normative (4) Affective (3) Continuance (3)	7-point Likert type	1=Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree

Kingshott, Sharma, Sima & Wong (2020) *scales adapted from Morgan & Hunt (1994)	Australian importers and Asian Suppliers	Single Factor (6)	7-point Likert type	1=Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree
Word of Mouth				
Swan & Oliver (1989)	New automobile buyers	Single Factor (1)	7-point Likert type	1= Mostly negative 7= Mostly positive
Harrison-Walker (2001)***	Consumers	Single Factor (6)	7-point Likert type	1=Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree
Maxham & Netemeyer (2002)	Bank customers	Single Factor (3)	7-point Likert type	1=Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree
Beatty, Reynolds, Noble, &Harrison (2012)	Consumers	Positive WOM (3) Negative WOM (3)	5-point Likert	1=Strongly disagree 5= Strongly agree
Sivadas & Jindal (2017)	Restaurant patrons	Single Factor (1)	5-point semantic differential scale	1= negative 5= positive
Voice				
Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers & Mainous (1988)	Retail Buyers	Single Factor (4)	9-point Bipolar	1=definitely would not react in this way 9= definitely react in this way
Singh (1990)	Households	Compliant Intentions – Voice (3) Expectancy – Voice (3) Value – Voice (3)	6-point Likert type	1=Very likely 6= Very unlikely
Ping (1993)***	Hardware retailers	Single Factor (5)	5-point Likert	1=Strongly disagree 5= Strongly agree
Hagedoorn, Van Yperen, Van de Vliert,	Teachers and	Considerate Voice (11) Aggressive Voice (7)	7-point Likert type	1= definitely not 7= definitely yes

& Buunk, (1999)	maternity nurses			
Turnley and Feldman (1999)	Managerial-level personal	Single Factor (5)	4-point Likert	1=Never 4= Frequently
Kingshott, Sahrma, Sima & Wong (2020)	Australian firms	Single Factor (4)	7-point Likert type	1=Strongly disagree 7= Strongly agree
EXIT				
Farrell (1983)	Employees	Single Factor (3)	9-point Similarity	1= Extremely dissimilar 9= Extremely similar
Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers & Mainous (1988)	Retail Buyers	Single Factor (4)	9-point Bipolar	1=definitely would not react in this way 9= definitely react in this way
Ping (1993)*	Hardware retailers	Single Factor (6)	5-point Likert	1=Strongly disagree 5= Strongly agree
Hagedoorn, Van Yperen, Van de Vliert, & Buunk, (1999)	Teachers and maternity nurses	Single factor (6)	7-point Likert type	1= definitely not 7= definitely yes
Turnley & Feldman (1999)	Managerial-level personal	Single Factor (6)	5-point Likert	1=Strongly disagree 5= Strongly agree
*** Scale employed in this research setting.				

3.5.2.1 Measure of Interaction Quality [IQ]

Whilst the literature has numerous measures of interaction quality (see table 3.8) for a summary of key measures) as indicated this research measured the construct using the scale initially developed by Brady and Cronin (2001). However in order to align this and the other five measures to the context of this research an expert panel and pilot test was used. This helped adapt each items in each of the scales to this particular student-university setting. This resulted in a measure comprising ten items that tapped

the extent of IQ that students had with teaching staff (IQTS), non-teaching staff (IQNTS) and classmates (IQCM). Measuring the extent of IQ in this way would help establish the different types of interaction students had in their learning journey and thus ensured that any variation between key contact staff and their peers were factored into their perceptions of the extent of interaction quality. Each of the items for each of these three interaction relationships was measured using a Likert type scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree in order to ensure variance of views held by the sample.

Analysis of the data related to both the composite measures of each factor and individual items (see tables 3.9-3.11) indicates that each of the items pertaining to the construct provided a reliable measure. For the composite measure of IQTS, the internal reliability was very high ($\alpha = 0.94$) and the responses ranged from 3 to 7 with a mean of 5.44 and standard deviation of 0.80. For the composite measure of IQNTS, the internal reliability was also very high ($\alpha = 0.95$) however the responses ranged from 2 to 7 with a mean of 5.19 and standard deviation of 0.88. Lastly for the composite measure of IQCM, the internal reliability was also very high ($\alpha = 0.94$) and the responses ranged from 2 to 7 with a mean of 5.06 and standard deviation of 0.94.

Table 3.9: Scale items with psychometric and descriptive properties [IQ: Teaching Staff]

SCALE ITEMS [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD	Min	Max	Skew	Kurt
Interaction Quality Teaching Staff [IQTS 1-10] [based on Brady & Cronin, 2001] [α=.94] *Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements regarding the teaching staff at your university, based in your own experience:*			**5.44**	**0.80**	**3.00**	**7.00**	**-0.08**	**-0.49**
IQTS 1: The attitude of the teaching staff demonstrates their willingness to help me.	0.80	0.63	5.55	0.98	3.00	7.00	-0.29	-0.51
IQTS 2: The attitude of the teaching staff shows me that they understand my needs.	0.81	0.65	5.48	0.96	3.00	7.00	-0.27	-0.38
IQTS 3: I can count on the teaching staff to take actions to address my needs.	0.77	0.59	5.42	1.00	3.00	7.00	-0.20	-0.50
IQTS 4: The teaching staff respond quickly to my needs.	0.76	0.57	5.30	1.04	2.00	7.00	-0.30	-0.32
IQTS 5: The behaviour of the teaching staff indicates that they understand my needs.	0.81	0.66	5.41	0.94	3.00	7.00	-0.20	-0.35
IQTS 6: I can count on the teaching staff knowing what they need to do.	0.76	0.58	5.49	0.97	3.00	7.00	-0.20	-0.46

		λ	SMC	M	SD	Min	Max	Skew	Kurt
IQTS 7:	The teaching staff are able to quickly answer my questions.	0.77	0.60	5.42	0.97	3.00	7.00	-0.25	-0.46
IQTS 8:	The teaching staff understand that I rely on their knowledge to meet my needs.	0.76	0.58	5.48	1.01	3.00	7.00	-0.16	-0.45
IQTS 9:	I would say that the quality of my interaction with the teaching staff is high.	0.71	0.51	5.38	1.02	2.00	7.00	-0.30	-0.06
IQTS 10:	Overall I would say the quality of my interaction with the teaching staff is excellent.	0.78	0.61	5.44	1.00	3.00	7.00	-0.39	-0.46

Table 3.10: Scale items with psychometric and descriptive properties [IQ: Non-Teaching Staff]

	SCALE ITEMS [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD	Min	Max	Skew	Kurt
	Interaction Quality Non-Teaching Staff [IQNTS 1-10] [based on Brady & Cronin, 2001] [α=.95] *Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements regarding the non-teaching staff at your university, based in your own experience:*			**5.19**	**0.88**	**2.00**	**7.00**	**-0.18**	**-0.18**
'QNTS 11:	The attitude of the non-teaching staff demonstrates their willingness to help me.	0.77	0.60	5.23	0.97	2.00	7.00	-0.22	0.08
'QNTS 12:	The attitude of the non-teaching staff shows me that they understand my needs.	0.76	0.57	5.16	1.06	2.00	7.00	-0.21	-0.14
'QNTS 13:	I can count on the non-teaching staff to take actions to address my needs.	0.77	0.59	5.11	1.11	1.00	7.00	-0.42	0.44
'QNTS 14:	The non-teaching staff respond quickly to my needs.	0.79	0.62	5.12	1.09	1.00	7.00	-0.36	0.11
'QNTS 15:	The behaviour of the non-teaching staff indicates that they understand my needs.	0.83	0.69	5.19	1.04	1.00	7.00	-0.29	0.23
'QNTS 16:	I can count on the non-teaching staff knowing what they need to do.	0.82	0.68	5.25	1.07	1.00	7.00	-0.52	0.39
'QNTS 17:	The non-teaching staff are able to quickly answer my questions.	0.80	0.63	5.22	1.07	2.00	7.00	-0.33	0.13
'QNTS 18:	The non-teaching staff understand that I rely on their knowledge to meet my needs.	0.79	0.62	5.15	1.12	1.00	7.00	-0.48	0.41
'QNTS 19:	I would say that the quality of my interaction with the non-teaching staff is high.	0.77	0.59	5.16	1.10	1.00	7.00	-0.54	0.68
'QNTS 20:	Overall I would say the quality of my interaction with the non-teaching staff is excellent.	0.84	0.70	5.30	1.06	2.00	7.00	-0.28	-0.43

λ=Standardized factor loadings; M=Mean; SD=Standard deviation; SMC=Squared multiple correlations; MIN=Minimum; MAX=Maximum; α=Cronbach's alpha; Skew=Skewness; Kurt=Kurtosis

Table 3.11: Scale items with psychometric and descriptive properties [IQ: Class Mates]

SCALE ITEMS [N=427]		λ	SMC	M	SD	MIN	MAX	Skew	Kurt
Interaction Quality Classmates [IQCM 1-10] [based on Brady & Cronin, 2001] [α=.95] *Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements regarding your classmates at your university, based in your own experience:*				5.06	0.94	2.00	7.00	-0.17	-0.42
IQCM 21:	The attitude of my classmates demonstrates their willingness to help me.	0.74	0.55	5.07	1.14	1.00	7.00	-0.36	-0.16
IQCM 22:	The attitude of my classmates shows me that they understand my needs.	0.82	0.67	5.03	1.07	2.00	7.00	-0.07	-0.29
IQCM 23:	I can count on my classmates to take actions to address my needs.	0.85	0.73	5.00	1.14	2.00	7.00	-0.17	-0.31
IQCM 24:	My classmates respond quickly to my needs.	0.80	0.65	5.01	1.20	1.00	7.00	-0.30	0.04
IQCM 25:	The behaviour of my classmates indicates that they understand my needs.	0.77	0.60	5.03	1.13	1.00	7.00	-0.34	0.02
IQCM 26:	I can count on my classmates knowing what they need to do.	0.73	0.53	5.13	1.12	1.00	7.00	-0.41	0.17
IQCM 27:	My classmates are able to quickly answer my questions.	0.81	0.65	5.06	1.23	2.00	7.00	-0.29	-0.19
IQCM 28:	My classmates understand that I rely on their knowledge to meet my needs.	0.78	0.60	4.19	1.25	1.00	7.00	-0.47	0.33
IQCM 29:	I would say that the quality of my interaction with my classmates is high.	0.82	0.67	5.21	1.09	1.00	7.00	-0.49	0.30
IQCM 30:	Overall I would say the quality of my interaction with my classmates is excellent.	0.81	0.65	5.19	1.12	1.00	7.00	-0.46	0.05

λ=Standardized factor loadings; M=Mean; SD=Standard deviation; SMC=Squared multiple correlations; MIN=Minimum; MAX=Maximum; α=Cronbach's alpha; Skew=Skewness; Kurt=Kurtosis

3.5.2.2 Measure of Emotional Well-being [EWB]

The literature has numerous measures of emotional well-being (see table 3.8) however this research measured the construct by adapting the scales initially developed by Warr (1990) into one concise measure. The resultant measure used comprised of six items that tapped the extent of EWB that students had during their respective learning journeys whilst studying at university. Although the original scale comprised of both positive and negative emotions the approach taken in this study measured the extent of positive emotions that students had as a consequence of interacting with key contact staff and their peers because the variation on the 7-point scale would capture sufficient variation in student perceptions of emotions experienced as a consequence of their interaction with university staff and peers. Thus each of the items for EWB was measured using a Likert type scale that captured the extent that respondents experienced emotions along a scale that ranged from 1= not at all to 7= very often.

Analysis of the data related to both the composite measure EWB and individual items (see table 3.12) indicates that each of the items pertaining to the construct provided a reliable measure. For the composite measure of construct, the internal reliability was very high (α = 0.94) and the responses ranged from 1 to 7 that demonstrated students experienced the full spectrum of emotions measured. This range of emotions across the sample resulted a mean of 4.70 and standard deviation of 1.22, indicating that the targeted student population expressed quite some variance in their emotions experienced in the learning journey.

Table 3.12: Scale items with psychometric and descriptive properties [Emotional Well-being]

	SCALE ITEMS [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD	MIN	MAX	Skew	Kurt
	Emotional Well-Being [EWB 1-6] [based on Warr, 1990] [α=.94] *Over the past few weeks, how often has your experience at this university made you feel the following?*			4.70	1.22	1.00	7.00	-0.33	-0.08
EWB 1:	Relaxed.	0.79	0.63	4.56	1.44	1.00	7.00	-0.17	-0.53
EWB 2:	Calm.	0.83	0.69	4.57	1.40	1.00	7.00	-0.20	-0.44
EWB 3:	Contented.	0.84	0.71	4.73	1.36	1.00	7.00	-0.23	-0.38
EWB 4:	Optimistic.	0.86	0.74	4.81	1.35	1.00	7.00	-0.33	-0.33
EWB 5:	Enthusiastic.	0.82	0.76	4.85	1.40	1.00	7.00	-0.39	-0.43
EWB 6:	Cheerful.	0.86	0.74	4.70	1.38	1.00	7.00	-0.35	-0.41

=Standardized factor loadings; M=Mean; SD=Standard deviation; SMC=Squared multiple correlations; MIN=Minimum MAX=Maximum; α=Cronbach's alpha; Skew=Skewness; Kurt=Kurtosis

3.5.2.3 Measure of Commitment [COMM]

Whilst there are different forms of commitment in there literature (see table 3.8) for examples of measures), given this study involved a relationships between students and university staff as well as their peers, the scale developed by Hennig-Thurau, Langer and Hansen (2001) that measured the extent of affective commitment was adopted in this study. The resultant measure used comprised of four items that tapped the extent of this form of commitment that students expressed about their strength of relationship that they had with the university. Each of the items was measured using a Likert type scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree in order to ensure variance of views held by the sample. Analysis of the data related to both the composite measure COMM and individual items (see table 3.13) indicates that each of the items pertaining

to the construct provided a reliable measure. For the composite measure of construct, the internal reliability was very high (α = 0.90) and the responses ranged from 3 to 7 with a mean of 5.43 and standard deviation of 0.93.

Table 3.13: Scale items with psychometric and descriptive properties [Commitment]

SCALE ITEMS [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD	MIN	MAX	Skew	Kurt
Commitment [COMM 1-4] [based on Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen, 2001] [α=.90] *Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements regarding your university, based in your own experience:*			**5.43**	**0.93**	**3.00**	**7.00**	**-0.20**	**-0.62**
COMM 1: I feel attached to this university.	0.83	0.68	5.33	1.10	2.00	7.00	-0.31	-0.45
COMM 2: I feel good about my association with this university.	0.88	0.77	5.43	1.06	3.00	7.00	-0.32	-0.58
COMM 3: I am proud to study at this university.	0.86	0.73	5.55	1.04	2.00	7.00	-0.47	-0.06
COMM 4: I have a strong sense of belonging to this university.	0.83	0.69	5.41	1.03	2.00	7.00	-0.39	-0.19

λ=Standardized factor loadings; M=Mean; SD=Standard deviation; SMC=Squared multiple correlations; MIN=Minimum; MAX=Maximum; α=Cronbach's alpha; Skew=Skewness; Kurt= Kurtosis

3.5.2.4 Measure of Word of Mouth [WOM]

Word of Mouth is widely cited in the literature therefore there are numerous measures (see table 3.8) of the construct. This study however has adopted the WOM measure by Harrison-Walker (2001) to capture how students communicated positive messages about the university to others. As a result of the discussion with the expert panel and subsequent analysis the final measure used in this study comprised three items. Each of the items was measured using a Likert type scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree to capture the extent of views held by the sample with respect to disseminating positive messages about the university. Analysis of the data related to both the composite measure WOM and individual items (see table 3.14) indicates that each of the items pertaining to the construct provided a reliable measure. For the composite measure of construct, the internal reliability was very high (α = 0.80) and the responses ranged from 2 to 7 with a mean of 5.28 and standard deviation of 0.93.

Table 3.14: Scale items with psychometric and descriptive properties [WOM]

SCALE ITEMS [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD	MIN	MAX	Skew	Kurt
Word of Mouth [WOM 1-3]			**5.28**	**0.93**	**2.00**	**7.00**	**-0.17**	**-0.42**
[based on Harrison-Walker, 2001] [α=.80] *Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements regarding your university, based in your own experience:*								
WOM 1: I mention this university to others quite frequently.	0.81	0.65	5.36	1.12	2.00	7.00	-0.26	-0.55
WOM 2: I seldom miss an opportunity to share good news about this university.	0.73	0.54	5.19	1.11	2.00	7.00	-0.36	-0.16
WOM 3: I have only good things to say about this university.	0.80	0.64	5.29	1.08	3.00	7.00	-0.20	-0.60

λ=Standardized factor loadings; M=Mean; SD=Standard deviation; SMC=Squared multiple correlations; MIN=Minimum; MAX=Maximum; α=Cronbach's alpha; Skew=Skewness; Kurt= Kurtosis

3.5.2.5 Measure of Voice [VOI]

Capturing the extent of voice expressed by students towards the university was based on the measure developed by Ping (1993) and similar to measuring WOM, the discussion with the expert panel and subsequent analysis the final measure used in this study comprised of three items. Each of the items was measured using a Likert type scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree to capture the extent that students expressed their concerns about aspects of their learning journey directly to the university. Analysis of the data related to both the composite measure VOI and its constituent items (see table 3.15) indicated that each of the items pertaining to the construct provided a reliable measure. For the composite measure of construct, the internal reliability was very high (α = 0.82) and the responses ranged from 1 to 7 with a mean of 4.59 and standard deviation of 0.88.

Table 3.15: Scale items with psychometric and descriptive properties [Voice]

SCALE ITEMS [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD	MIN	MAX	Skew	Kurt
Voice [VOI 1-3] [based on Ping, 1993] [α=.82]			**4.59**	**0.88**	**1.00**	**7.00**	**-0.53**	**0.40**
Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements:								
VOI 1: If I have problems with my study plan, I approach the student advisor.	0.70	0.48	4.54	1.43	1.00	7.00	-0.56	-0.01
VOI 2: I work with the teaching staff to resolve study-related problems.	0.82	0.76	4.75	1.12	1.00	7.00	-0.69	0.42
VOI 3: I often discuss my grades with the concerned teaching staff.	0.73	0.54	4.47	1.45	1.00	7.00	-0.43	-0.25

λ=Standardized factor loadings; M=Mean; SD=Standard deviation; SMC=Squared multiple correlations; MIN=Minimum; MAX=Maximum; α=Cronbach's alpha; Skew=Skewness; Kurt= Kurtosis

3.5.2.6 Measure of Exit [EX]

The dependent variable in this research, namely exit is a widely researched construct in the marketing discipline therefore has a wide range of measures (see table 3.8) that have been developed to cater to various settings. However since this research was interested in attempting to establish whether the RM efforts of the universities was capable of keeping their students the measure used by Ping (1993) was adapted to this context. Similar to measuring VOI, the discussion with the expert panel and subsequent analysis the final measure used in this study comprised of four items. Each of the items was measured using a Likert type scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree to capture likelihood that students would leave the university. Analysis of the data related to both the composite measure EX and its constituent items (see table 3.16) indicated that each of the items pertaining to the construct provided a reliable measure. For the composite measure of construct, the internal reliability was very high (α = 0.93) and the responses ranged from 1 to 7 with a mean of 5.45 and standard deviation of 1.64.

Table 3.16: Scale items with psychometric and descriptive properties [Exit]

	SCALE ITEMS [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD	MIN	MAX	Skew	Kurt
	Exit [EX 1-4] [Ping, 1993] [α=.93] *Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements:*			**5.45**	**1.64**	**1.00**	**7.00**	**0.11**	**-0.16**
EX 1:	Sometimes I think about leaving this university.	0.82	0.68	3.49	1.77	1.00	7.00	0.10	-1.15
EX 2:	I am not likely to continue studying with this university.	0.84	0.70	3.42	1.75	1.00	7.00	0.19	-1.10
EX 3:	I may consider looking for another university in the near future.	0.91	0.82	3.59	1.79	1.00	7.00	0.04	-1.14
EX 4:	I am actively looking for another university.	0.93	0.86	3.28	1.91	1.00	7.00	0.27	-1.24

λ=Standardized factor loadings; M=Mean; SD=Standard deviation; SMC=Squared multiple correlations; MIN=Minimum; MAX=Maximum; α=Cronbach's alpha; Skew=Skewness; Kurt= Kurtosis

3.6   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the research design, sample frame, measures adopted and procedure used to capture the data. The research design was cross-sectional in nature and comprised a quantitative study. Since the study focused on testing 14 hypotheses derived from the literature, a deductive quantitative methodology (Antwi & Hamza, 2015) was adopted. The targeted sample (N=427) comprised of a national sample of students studying in Australian universities, at all levels of award (from Bachelors to Doctorate) and modes of study (face-to-face, online and blended). The sample encapsulated both local Australian and international students in which the data indicated that the students were similar to the national population of Australian university students. This sample comprised a panel of students drawn from a well-established panel company database that specializes in the Australian marketplace.

The construct measures were based on well-established scales in the extant literature and subsequently adapted to suite the university setting. Specifically, interaction quality (IQ) was based on the work of Brady and Cronin (2001). Emotional well-being (EWB) was derived from Warr (1991). Commitment was adapted using Hennig-Thurau, Langer and Hansen (2001). Word of mouth (WOM) was based on the work of Harrison-Walker (2001). Voice (VOI) and exit (EX) was based on the earlier work of Ping (1993). The analysis shows that psychometric properties of each scale indicates that each of the measures were suitable to operationalise the six constructs in the conceptual model. Finally, the procedure adopted comprised an online self-administered survey using the qualtrics platform, whereby a link to the survey was sent to Australian students by the panel company.

The next chapter focuses on presenting the doctoral research findings (chapter 4) followed by the final chapter (5) that highlights the scholarly and managerial implications, limitations, and future research directions The pre-test (n=50) indicated that the research instrument was suitable for the target population.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the different types of analysis undertaken in this the doctoral research used to examine the characteristics of the sample as well as empirically testing the proposed conceptual model. Accordingly, a number of well-established analytical techniques were used for the analysis. AMOS26$^©$ was used to empirically test the proposed conceptual model and through that helped to answer the first three research questions posed. Specifically: (1) whether student relationships can be viewed through the lenses of SC and SE theories (2) whether RM be used as an effective tool to help nurture the student relationship, and (3) which SC and SE based variables are important determinants of robust student relationships. SPSS helped provide an overview and profile of the respondents in the research as well as ascertain the characteristics related to their learning practices. This analysis was also used to help answer the fourth research question, namely (4) whether students from varying demographic backgrounds and student enrolment profiles respond differently to the RM efforts of Australian tertiary institutes. Each of the analytical techniques employed in the research will now be discussed, followed by a more detailed overview of the sample characteristics, before detailing each of the 14 hypotheses in the proposed model.

4.2   STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING [SEM]

The application and use of the structural equation modelling (SEM) technique has gained prominence in the social science literatures (Hair et al., 2006; 2010) since its inception by Jöreskog and Sörbom (1982; 1986). In line with this doctoral research setting, SEM is now widely used in the marketing (e.g. Chin, Peterson, & Brown, 2008; Liang & Frösén, 2020; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), services (e.g. Chang, Shen, & Liu, 2016; Kingshott, et al., 2020; Voorhees & Brady, 2005) and education (Muntaner-Mas, Vidal-Conti, Sesé, & Palou, 2017; Mwangi, Cabrera, & Kurban, 2019) literatures. Its widespread use has thus been adopted in the various literatures because SEM represents a power analytical technique that can test models with multiple types of variables. Specifically, since models can simultaneously comprise

endogenous and exogenous variables the SEM technique is capable estimating the relationships between each of these types of variables at the same time test the robustness and stability of the whole model. SEM is this therefore popular with researchers in a wide range of social sciences settings, such as the specific context of this doctoral dissertation, because of the many advantages offered by the analytical technique. These advantages include: (1) being capable of testing models through combining factor analysis and multiple regression. (2) allowing researchers to test models that can simultaneously comprise multiple independent and dependent variables. (3) helping to account for both the measurement properties and measurement error of constructs in a single model. (4) the simultaneous testing of both latent and manifest variables. (5) and, providing researchers with a more powerful tool than earlier techniques, such regression, cluster and exploratory factor analysis (Barclay, Higgins & Thompson, 1995; Hair et al., 2006; 2010).

Given these advantages, this SEM technique was deemed necessary to employ in this doctoral dissertation because the proposed conceptual model comprised 14 hypotheses reflecting an anticipated relationship between a single exogenous (IQ) and five endogenous (EWB, COMM, WOM, VOI & EX) variables. Four of the endogenous variables (EWB, COMM, WOM & VOI) also acted as both dependent and independent variables indicating that SEM was the ideal analytical tool to test their inter-relationships. The six constructs that comprised the conceptual model were also latent in nature so the technique enabled their psychometric properties to be tested, along with an overall examination of the measurement and structural models. To this end, AMOS26$^©$ software was used for the analysis to test the proposed conceptual model because it is one of the most user-friendly SEM packages available and linked to SPSS$^©$. Accordingly, version 26 of SPSS helped with the analysis of other aspects of the data gathered from the targeted population, such as profiling the demographics of the respondents and examining patterns related to their learning journey.

The AMOS26$^©$ software package was used as it is also capable of instantaneously generating the wide of output statistics needed to test the psychometric properties of the constructs used as well as the proposed model. Moreover, this software is also directly configured to be highly user friendly when testing both the measurement

and structural models. This two-step procedure (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) was also used in the analysis and is widely accepted in the literature as the standard practice for analysis of conceptual models comprising latent variables. Typically, testing the measurement model is the first step in the process as it helps to ascertain the reliability and validity of the measures that were used to represent each of the constructs in the model. Once the psychometric properties have been tested, established, and deemed suitable, then SEM can used once again to test the structural model, namely the hypothesised relationships between each of the variables in the model.

From a technical analysis vantage, SEM allows the researcher to ascertain the 'best-fit' of the data for both the structural and measurement models. The literature has identified the various types of fit-statistics needed to test the models and the range of acceptability thresholds for each of these parameters. Hair, et al., (2006; 2010) define three types of fit-statistics that need considering when assessing models, namely absolute, incremental and parsimony measures. Hoyle and Panther (1995) make the point that since there is no real consensus in the literature about the best index to test models they therefore recommend that multiple indices, such as the three types of measures specified by Hair, et al., (2006; 2010), are needed to evaluate proposed models. Due to the wide-ranging fit statistics that are potentially available from the SEM analysis, Jaccard, Wan and Jaccard, (1996) recommend the use of at least one fit index form each of the three types of measures. The main purpose of multiple indicators is to help establish the extent that the model is congruent with the captured data to make a determination about whether to support the measurement and/or structural model and its constituent hypothesized paths.

In that respect, the suggested measures of absolute fit provide a 'global' perspective that help the researcher determine the extent that the data predicts the robustness of both the overall measurement and structural models. These include chi-square statistic (χ^2), the goodness of fit index (GFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), root mean square residual (RMSR), and, the scaled non-centrality parameter (SNCP). On the other hand, incremental measures help compare the proposed model a 'realistic' base-line model (null model) that all other potential models are reasonably likely to exceed. Typically, AMOS generates its

own base-line models [saturated and interdependence] that allow comparisons to be made to proposed model. The fit-statistics in this category include adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), the normed fit index (NFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), as well as the comparative fit index (CFI) and the incremental fit Index (IFI). Finally, the measures of parsimony help determine whether the model was 'over-fitted' and if a much simpler model should be used in the research and through that the implication is that the initial model would needs to be compared again to the theory and then re-specified to provide a much more realistic perspective on empirical reality (Hair, et al. 2006). Measures in this group include normed chi-square (Normed χ^2), the parsimonious goodness of fit index (PGFI), and the parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI).

The specific measures recommended to assess both the measurement and structural models, along with their recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2006, p.753) for a sample size greater than 250 with less than 12 variables (see table 4.1) were also used as in this research to help determine the acceptability of the measurement and structural models. The data output from the analysis suggests that both models were within the recommended thresholds so indicates that both the measurement and structural models in this research are acceptable.

Table 4.1: Suggested SEM fit statistics and thresholds compared to study data

Fit Statistic[#]	Threshold*	Measurement	Structural
CMIN/df	Less than 5	1.39	1.43
GFI	Approaching 0.90	0.87	0.99
AGFI	Approaching 0.90	0.85	0.99
TLI	Greater than 0.95	0.97	0.99
RMSEA	Less than 0.07	0.03	0.03
CFI	Greater than 0.90	0.97	-
SRMR	Less than 0.08	0.04	-
p-value	Non-significant	0.00	0.23

*N=427; model constructs 6; [#] two decimal places reported

(Source: Hair, et al., 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999)

Whilst there are a few SEM methods of analysing the data (Hair, et al., 2013) the approach taken in this doctoral research was covariance-based, as recommended by a number of scholars (e.g. Bollen, 1989; Schumacker & Lomax 1996). This model

specification approach ensures model parameter estimates have minimal error (Cudeck, 1989) and furthermore the standard errors are less accurate when using a correlation matrix to estimate the models (Bollen, 1989). Bollen (1989) adds further that 'corrections' for the standard errors need to be made when correlations and/or standard coefficients are assessed, which can be avoided altogether through the use of the covariance matrix. In addition to using a covariance approach this doctoral research also adopted the maximum-likelihood estimation (MLE) procedure because of its capability to help 'average-out' the "estimates to find the model's best estimate" (Hayduk 1987, p.157) therefore provides the most reasonable estimate of the proposed models. A detailed discussion of the analysis undertake in the structural and measurement models follows in sections 4.4 and 4.5, respectively.

4.3   DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE [ANOVA]

A number of analytical tools and features in version 26 of the SPSS$^©$ package helped with the analysis, namely descriptive and frequency analysis, reliability analysis, correlation, t-tests, factor analysis (EFA), and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The demographic profile and characteristics of the respondents in the target sample studying in Australian universities was established using descriptive and frequency analysis. The reliability analysis helped contribute to establishing the robustness of each of the measures used in the proposed conceptual model. Bivariate correlation analysis helped to compare the correlation using the composite scores of each of the six constructs in the model. EFA helped test for common method variance (Podsakoff, 2003) in the dataset. Finally, analysis of variance (ANOVA) helping establish whether different groups, based on their demographical characteristics, showed any variance regards the six constructs of interest in the conceptual model. This particular technique helped answer the final research question, namely whether students from varying backgrounds respond differently to the RM efforts of Australian tertiary institutes. A more detailed discussion of the analysis undertaken now follows.

4.4   PROFILE OF THE SURVEYED RESPONDENTS

Table 4.2 provides an overall summary of the demographic profile of the total sample that comprised 427 respondents. The data captured represents the overall analysis from the national sample of students studying in 37 of the 42 Australian universities. To provide a much clearer picture of the students in these universities, this data pertained to the individual demographics of the respondents as well as aspects of their study and courses taken. Given the increasing nature of multi-cultural Australia (Foroutani, 2020; Koerner & Pillay, 2019) and its high presence in the international marketplace (Universities Australia, 2020) data reflecting this socio-cultural aspect shows that 69.1% of respondents were born in Australia, 24.1% in Asia, 5.6% from Europe and the United States and the remainder (1.2%) were born elsewhere. Whilst, 7.7% of students were currently international residents, 83.6% were Australian citizens, and, 8.7% of respondents had Australian permanent resident (PR) status. However, 14.3% of the sample still regard themselves as being international students, whereas 76.6% were local Australian students and a further 9.1% being local but listed themselves as studying in another state or territory.

A more accurate picture of the ethnic diversity in Australia and its university's reflects in the ethnic background of the students and language they spoke at home. The data indicates that 59.7% of students were Caucasian, 34% Asian, and the remainder comprised 5.6%. Furthermore, 75.9% used English at home and 24.1% spoke another language. In terms of living in Australia, the vast majority (81.7%) have been there for more than 7 years, with 9.1% being in Australia for 4 to 7 years and a further 9.1% for 3 years or less. In relation to gender, student respondents comprised of 50.6% males, 48.7% females, and 0.7% of non-specified. Since the age of students ranged from 18 to above 64 years of age, for analysis purposes responses were grouped into cohorts comprised of five-year bands. A total of 10 cohorts were used to help distinguish the different ages in the sample. The largest number of students were in the 23 to 27 year old cohort (23.0%) but notably more than half of those studying (53.0%) were 32 years of age or younger. Overall, the distribution of these 10 cohorts indicate that the age profile of Australian university students skew towards younger persons, which is also reflected in the level of award being studying.

Table 4.2: Sample characteristics (*N* = 427)

Parameter	Frequency	Parameter	Frequency
Respondent Age		**Degrees Held**	
18 to 22 years	49 (11.5%)	None, first degree	231 (54.1%)
23 to 27 years	98 (23.0%)	One degree	119 (27.9%)
28 to 32 years	79 (18.5%)	Two or more degrees	77 (18%)
33 to 37 years	61 (14.3%)		
38 to 42 years	46 (10.8%)	**Ethnic Background**	
43 to 47 years	31 (7.3%)	Caucasian	255 (59.7%)
48 to 52 years	23 (5.4%)	Asian	148 (34.7%)
53 to 57 years	15 (3.5%)	Other	24 (5.6%)
58 to 62 years	10 (2.3%)		
63 years and above	15 (3.5%)	**Mode of Study**	
		Face-to-face only	203 (47.5%)
Gender		Fully online only	64 (15.0%)
Male	216 (50.6%)	Blended Learning	160 (37.5%)
Female	208 (48.7%)		
Other	3 (0.7%)	**Level of Study (Current)**	
		Graduate Certificate	37 (8.7%)
Residential Status		Bachelor	215 (50.4%)
Australian Citizen	357 (83.6%)	Bachelor [honours]	31 (7.3%)
Australian PR	37 (8.7%)	Postgraduate	61 (14.3%)
Others	33 (7.7%)	Masters	76 (17.8%)
		Doctorate	7 (1.6%)
Local/International Student			
International	61 (14.3%)	**Area of Study**	
Local Student	327 (76.6%)	Art & Design	30 (7.0%)
Local Student (from interstate)	39 (9.1 %)	Business	119 (27.9%)
		Computer Sciences	50 (11.7%)
Birth Region		Education	16 (3.7%)
Australia / NZ	295 (69.1%)	Engineering	43 (10.1%)
Asia	103 (24.1%)	Health Sciences & Medicine	69 (16.2%)
Europe / US	24 (5.6%)	Humanities & Law	62 (14.5%)
Others	5 (1.2%)	Science	36 (8.4%)
		Other	2 (0.5%)
Years Studied			
1 year or less	89 (20.8%)	**Home Language**	
2 years	96 (22.5%)	English	324 (75.9%)
3 years	92 (21.5%)	Non-English	103 (24.1%)
4 years	72 (16.9%)		
5 years	43 (10.1%)	**Duration in Australia**	
6 years	12 (2.8%)	3 years or less	39 (9.1%)
7 years	7 (1.6%)	4 to 7 years	39 (9.1%)
More than 7 years	16 (3.7%)	More than 7 years	349 (81.7%)

Specifically, 54.1% were studying for their first degree, whereas 27.9% held one degree already, and 18% held two or more degrees. This also reflects in the level of award studied, with 50.4% studying at Bachelors' level, and 7.3% undertaking a Bachelor's degree with honours. Masters (17.8%) and postgraduate (14.3%) programs were similar in terms of student numbers, followed by graduate certificate students (8.7%). As expected the smallest cohort of students were studying in doctoral (1.6%) programs. The number of years studying varies from 20.8% of students having studied for 1 year or less, and at the other end of the spectrum 3.7% have studied for more than 7 years. However, this variation is relatively consistent with the level of award studied, given 81.7% of students have studied up to 4 years in their respective programs (2 years: 22.5%, 3 years: 21.5% & 4 years: 16.9%).

Students also chose different modes of study in their respective programs, which also reflects the ongoing changing nature of the provision of university education (Asarta & Schmidt, 2020; Dziuban, et al., 2018). Face-to-face (47.5%) still represented the largest study mode, closely followed by blended learning (37.5%), with fully online still being the lowest preference (15.0%). In terms of disciplines chosen, the data shows that business (27.9%) is the most preferred area of study, followed by health & medicine (16.6%), humanities & law (14.3%), computer sciences (11.7%), engineering (10.1%), science (8.2%), art & design (6.8%), education (3.7%) and other disciplines (0.7%).

4.5   MEASUREMENT MODEL

The constructs used in the model comprised interaction quality (IQ), emotional well-being (EWB), commitment (COMM), word-of-mouth (WOM), voice (VOI) and exit (EX). For the purposes of the measurement model, IQ was comprised of three factors, namely the extent of interaction quality with teaching staff (IQTS), non-teaching staff (IQNTS), and classmates (IQCM) so decomposing the construct into these factors helped to determine the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The measurement model examines the relationship between the latent variable with its underlying measures and good fitting models are prerequisite to testing the structural model. Thus, in line with Hair et al., (2011), each of the loadings of the scales used (tables 4.3) had a factor loading of greater than 0.70 was used in further analysis. Moreover, all constituent items of each scale had a Cronbach alpha of greater than 0.70, as well as the square of multiple correlations being greater than 0.4, each of the items exceeded the minimum thresholds (Hair et al., 2010) required for inclusion in the analysis.

Table 4.3a: Scale summaries for interaction quality of teaching staff

Interaction Quality Teaching Staff [IQTS] (Cronbach alpha = 0.94) [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD
1. The attitude of the teaching staff demonstrates their willingness to help me.	0.80	0.63	5.55	0.98
2. The attitude of the teaching staff shows me that they understand my needs.	0.81	0.65	5.48	0.96
3. I can count on the teaching staff to take actions to address my needs.	0.77	0.59	5.42	1.00
4. The teaching staff respond quickly to my needs.	0.76	0.57	5.30	1.04
5. The behaviour of the teaching staff indicates that they understand my needs.	0.81	0.66	5.41	0.94
6. I can count on the teaching staff knowing what they need to do.	0.76	0.58	5.49	0.97
7. The teaching staff are able to quickly answer my questions.	0.77	0.60	5.42	0.97
8. The teaching staff understand that I rely on their knowledge to meet my needs.	0.76	0.58	5.48	1.01
9. I would say that the quality of my interaction with the teaching staff is high.	0.71	0.51	5.38	1.02
10. Overall I would say the quality of my interaction with the teaching staff is excellent.	0.78	0.61	5.44	1.00

λ= standardized factor loading; SMC= squared multiple correlations; M= mean; SD= standard deviation

Table 4.3b: Scale summaries for interaction quality of non-teaching staff

Interaction Quality Non-Teaching Staff [IQNTS] (Cronbach alpha = 0.95) [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD
1. The attitude of the non-teaching staff demonstrates their willingness to help me.	0.77	0.60	5.23	0.97
2. The attitude of the non- teaching staff shows me that they understand my needs.	0.76	0.57	5.16	1.06
3. I can count on the non-teaching staff to take actions to address my needs.	0.77	0.59	5.11	1.11
4. The non-teaching staff respond quickly to my needs.	0.79	0.62	5.12	1.09
5. The behaviour of the non-teaching staff indicates that they understand my needs.	0.83	0.69	5.19	1.04
6. I can count on the non- teaching staff knowing what they need to do.	0.82	0.68	5.25	1.07
7. The non- teaching staff are able to quickly answer my questions.	0.80	0.63	5.22	1.07
8. The non-teaching staff understand that I rely on their knowledge to meet my needs.	0.79	0.62	5.15	1.12
9. I would say that the quality of my interaction with the non-teaching staff is high.	0.77	0.59	5.16	1.10
10. Overall I would say the quality of my interaction with the non-teaching staff is excellent.	0.84	0.70	5.30	1.06

λ= standardized factor loading; SMC= squared multiple correlations; M= mean; SD= standard deviation

Table 4.3c: Scale summaries for interaction quality of classmates

Interaction Quality Class Mates [IQCM] (Cronbach alpha = 0.95) [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD
1. The attitude of my classmates demonstrates their willingness to help me.	0.74	0.55	5.07	1.14
2. The attitude of my classmates shows me that they understand my needs.	0.82	0.67	5.03	1.07
3. I can count on my classmates to take actions to address my needs.	0.85	0.73	5.00	1.14
4. My classmates respond quickly to my needs.	0.80	0.65	5.01	1.20
5. The behaviour of my classmates indicates that they understand my needs.	0.77	0.60	5.03	1.13
6. I can count on my classmates knowing what they need to do.	0.73	0.53	5.13	1.12
7. My classmates are able to quickly answer my questions.	0.81	0.65	5.06	1.23
8. My classmates understand that I rely on their knowledge to meet my needs.	0.78	0.60	4.19	1.25
9. I would say that the quality of my interaction with my classmates is high.	0.82	0.67	5.21	1.09
10. Overall I would say the quality of my interaction with the my classmates is excellent.	0.81	0.65	5.19	1.12

λ= standardized factor loading; SMC= squared multiple correlations; M= mean; SD= standard deviation

Table 4.3d: Scale summaries for emotional well-being

Emotional Well-being [EWB] (Cronbach alpha = 0.94) [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD
1. Relaxed.	0.79	0.63	4.56	1.44
2. Calm.	0.83	0.69	4.57	1.40
3. Contented.	0.84	0.71	4.73	1.36
4. Optimistic.	0.86	0.74	4.81	1.35
5. Enthusiastic.	0.82	0.76	4.85	1.40
6. Cheerful.	0.86	0.74	4.70	1.38

λ= standardized factor loading; SMC= squared multiple correlations; M= mean; SD= standard deviation

Table 4.3e: Scale summaries for emotional well-being

Commitment [COMM] (Cronbach alpha = 0.90) [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD
1. I feel attached to this university.	0.83	0.68	5.33	1.10
2. I feel good about my association with this university.	0.88	0.77	5.43	1.06
3. I am proud to study at this university.	0.86	0.73	5.55	1.04
4. I have a strong sense of belonging to this university.	0.83	0.69	5.41	1.03

λ= standardized factor loading; SMC= squared multiple correlations; M= mean; SD= standard deviation

Table 4.3f: Scale summaries for word-of-mouth

Word of Mouth [WOM] (Cronbach alpha = 0.80) [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD
1. I mention this university to others quite frequently.	0.81	0.65	5.36	1.12
2. I seldom miss an opportunity to share good news about this university.	0.73	0.54	5.19	1.11
3. I only have good things to say about this university.	0.80	0.64	5.295	1.08

λ= standardized factor loading; SMC= squared multiple correlations; M= mean; SD= standard deviation

Table 4.3g: Scale summaries for voice

Voice [VOI] (Cronbach alpha = 0.82) [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD
1. If I have problems with my study plan, I approach the student advisor.	0.70	0.48	4.54	1.43
2. I work with the teaching staff to resolve study-related problems.	0.82	0.76	4.75	1.12
3. I often discuss my grades with the concerned teaching staff.	0.73	0.54	4.47	1.45

λ= standardized factor loading; SMC= squared multiple correlations; M= mean; SD= standard deviation

Table 4.3h: Scale summaries for exit

Exit [EX] (Cronbach alpha = 0.93) [N=427]	λ	SMC	M	SD
1. Sometimes, I think about leaving this university.	0.82	0.68	3.49	1.77
2. I am not likely to continue studying with this university.	0.84	0.70	3.42	1.75
3. I may consider looking for another university in the near future.	0.91	0.82	3.59	1.79
4. I am actively looking for another university.	0.93	0.86	3.28	1.91

λ= standardized factor loading; SMC= squared multiple correlations; M= mean; SD= standard deviation

A small number of items (five in total) were deleted in some scales due to not meeting the prescribed minimum threshold of 0.40 for SMC (Hair et al., 2010), thus eliminated from further analysis. Specifically, voice had one item deleted ["I discuss any study-related problems with my classmates"]. Word of mouth had one item deleted ["I am proud to tell others that I use this university"]. Finally, one item from each type of interaction quality [IQTS = "I can count on teaching staff being friendly"; IQNTS = "I can count on non-teaching staff being friendly", and "I can count on class-mates being friendly"] was deleted from any further analysis. All items in the remainder of scales were used in the analysis. In all, a total of 50 items were used to represent the 6 constructs in the model, in which the reliability and validity was ascertained using the composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), maximum shared variance (MSV), and the maximum reliability (MaxR(H)) statistics. The initial internal reliability of each of the constructs was gauged using Cronbach alpha (see tables 4.3), which ranged from 0.80 to 0.95, indicating high reliability for each measure as they all surpassed the minimum threshold (0.70) suggested by Hair et al., (2010). Moreover, the MaxR(H) statistic ranged from 0.95 to 0.99 for each variable, which exceeds the 0.7 threshold (Drewes, 2000; Gagne & Hancock, 2006), suggesting further reliability for each measure.

Table 4.4: Reliability and validity results for measurement model

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. IQT	0.94	0.60	0.54	0.97	(0.77)							
2. IQNT	0.93	0.64	0.47	0.95	0.63	(0.80)						
3. IQCM	0.94	0.63	0.49	0.98	0.52	0.62	(0.79)					
4. EWB	0.93	0.70	0.42	0.98	0.51	0.44	0.47	(0.84)				
5. COMM	0.91	0.72	0.60	0.99	0.67	0.57	0.58	0.52	(0.85)			
6. EX	0.93	0.77	0.18	0.99	-0.20	-0.05	0.14	-0.73	-0.19	(0.78)		
7. WOM	0.82	0.61	0.60	0.99	0.63	0.57	0.60	0.58	0.76	-0.05	(0.78)	
8. VOI	0.81	0.59	0.18	0.99	0.21	0.23	0.36	0.29	0.26	0.33	0.33	(0.77)

CR=composite reliability; AVE=average variance extracted; MSV=maximum shared variance;
square root of AVE shown on diagonal in (parenthesis); MR(H)=McDonald construct reliability

In line with the widely accepted two-step approach recommended by Anderson & Gerbing (1988), CFA was used to assess the measurement model using AMOS26© to help determine the reliability and validity of constructs representing the proposed conceptual model. The analysis revealed a relatively close and acceptable fitting model with all the fit indices (CMIN/df=1.39; GFI=087; AGFI=0.85; TLI=0.97, CFI=0.97, SRMR=0.04, RMSEA=0.03, p=0.00) conforming to the recommended thresholds proposed by Hair, et al., (2006) and, Hu and Bentler (1999) (see table 4.1). Further analysis of the data also indicated strong evidence

(table 4.4) of both discriminant and convergent validity. Since the correlations between constructs is significantly less that one (Bagozzi & Heatherton, 1994), this suggests initial discriminant validity. Furthermore, in line with Fornell and Lackner (1981), the average variance extracted (AVE) for all the pairs of constructs was also found to be larger than the squared structural path coefficients between these constructs. The AVE for all construct's was found to be more than its MSV, providing further evidence of discriminant validity of each of the constructs. Since all the AVEs were greater than 0.50 and the CRs were also found to be greater each AVE (Fornell & Lackner, 1981), this provides evidence of convergent validity. In line with reporting conventions (Cudeck, 1989) the correlations between the composite scores of each of the six manifest indicators of the latent constructs and their standard deviations (see table 4.4) help to provide an early preview of the relationship between the model constructs. The relationship between the constructs in the model are now discussed.

Table 4.5: Correlation \ Covariance Matrix

MODEL CONSTRUCTS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Interaction Quality Teaching Staff [IQTS][#]	**.77**	.421	.354	.473	.487	-.227	.483	.186
2. Interaction Quality Non-Teaching Staff [IQNTS][#]	.629[**]	**.80**	.448	.455	.473	-.110	.492	.201
3. Interaction Quality Class Mates [IQCM][#]	.519[**]	.619[**]	**.79**	.488	.491	.151	.494	.320
4. Emotional Wellbeing [EWB]	.505[**]	.444[**]	.465[**]	**.84**	.584	-.157	.646	.346
5. Commitment [COMM]	.671[**]	.572[**]	.584[**]	.523[**]	**.85**	-.232	.649	.302
6. Exit [EX]	-.197[**]	-.046[ns]	.143[**]	-.073[**]	-.188[**]	**.88**	-.119	.604
7. Word of Mouth [WOM]	.628[**]	.572[**]	.597[**]	.583[**]	.755[**]	-.053[**]	**.78**	.327
8. Voice [VOI]	.206[**]	.232[**]	.356[**]	.290[**]	.262[**]	.330[**]	.327[**]	**.77**
Mean (M)	5.44	5.19	5.06	4.70	5.43	3.45	5.28	4.59
Standard deviation (SD)	0.80	0.88	0.94	1.22	0.93	1.64	0.93	1.20
Average variance extracted (AVE)	0.60	0.64	0.63	0.70	0.72	0.77	0.61	0.60
Composite reliability (CR)	0.94	0.93	0.94	0.93	0.91	0.93	0.82	0.81

Note: Square root of average variance explained (AVE) on diagonal; Co-variances are above the diagonal; Correlations are below the diagonal; [**]$p < .001$; ns = not significant; [#]these factors were combined into one composite score of IQ to help test the proposed conceptual model

4.6 STRUCTURAL MODEL: RESULTS OF HYPOTHESIS TESTS AND DISCUSSION

As indicated the proposed conceptual model comprised 14 hypotheses, reflecting causal relationships between the exogenous (IQ) and five endogenous (EW, COMM, WOM, VOI & EX) constructs. To simply the analysis, the variables in the structural model were comprised of composite scores, and represented by calculating the means of responses in the data set. Means were derived from each of the items that represented each underlying construct. Further to this, the various forms of IQ (peers, teaching and non-teaching staff) were also represented by a single composite mean score in the model, as this approach helped further simplify the testing of each hypotheses using AMOS. Whilst the approach to analyze the model through 'collapsing' the six constructs, due to each comprising multiple items into a single composite score, is consistent with the RM literature (e.g. Kingshott, 2006) the composite scores for each of the three types of IQ were also reported in correlation matrix (table 4.5). This approach to representing the three IQ variables as composite means was deemed most suitable as this helped ensure that the ANOVA used to help show differences across the various groupings (tables 4a and 4b) within the Australian university student body was more meaningful. Figure 4.1 shows of each of the hypotheses, along with path weightings (calculated by using composite scores for each variable) and significance levels of each of the 14 links in the model to reveal the overall impact of the variable on the students exit intentions from the their relationship with the university.

Figure 4.1: Conceptual Model with Path Weightings

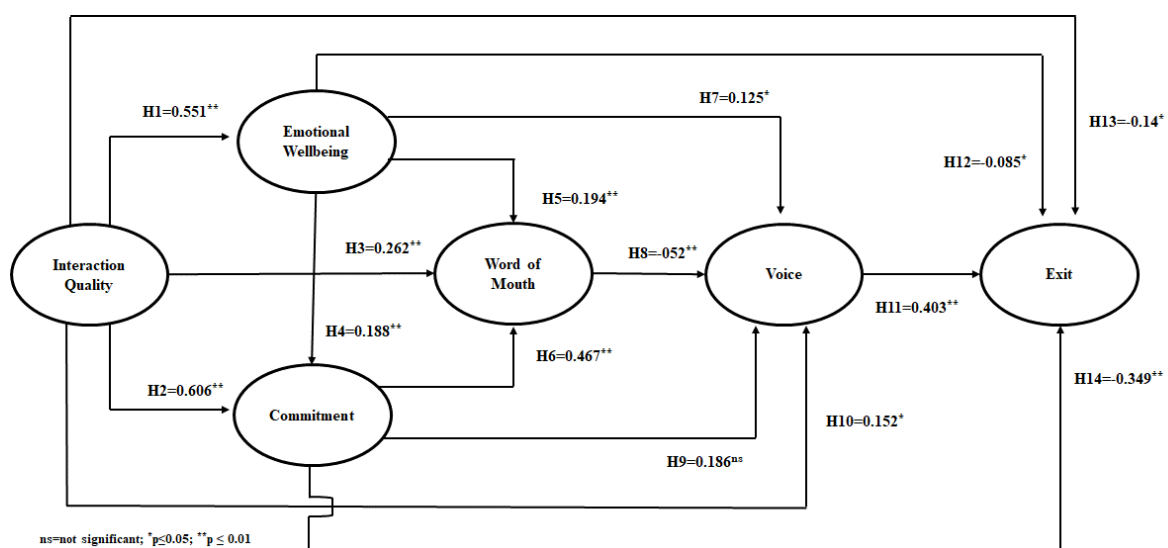ns=not significant; $^*p \le 0.05$; $^{**}p \le 0.01$

Table 4.6 provides an overview of the analysis. As indicated by the data the overall model yielded an acceptable fit with respect to the threshold statistics as recommended by Hair et al., (2006). Specifically, these are as follows: χ^2/df=1.43<5; GFI=0.99>0.90; AGFI=0.99>0.90; TLI=0.99>0.90; RMSEA=0.03<0.70; and p=0.23<0.10. As indicated the data supported 10 of the 14 proposed hypotheses. However, the data indicated lack of support for three of the hypotheses in the model. Specifically, the proposed positive impact of word-of-mouth and commitment on voice (+H8 & +H9, respectively) and the negative impact of emotional well-being on exit (-H12). Each of these hypotheses and their link to the first three (of the four) research questions posed by this doctoral dissertation are now discussed.

Table 4.6: Structural model: Hypotheses tests

Hypothesis		β	*p-value*	Results
H1 (+)	Interaction Quality → Emotional Wellbeing	0.551	0.000**	Supported
H2 (+)	Interaction Quality → Commitment	0.608	0.000**	Supported
H3 (+)	Interaction Quality → Word of Mouth	0.262	0.000**	Supported
H4 (+)	Emotional Wellbeing → Commitment	0.188	0.000**	Supported
H5 (+)	Emotional Wellbeing → Word of Mouth	0.194	0.000**	Supported
H6 (+)	Commitment → Word of Mouth	0.467	0.000**	Supported
H7 (+)	Emotional Wellbeing → Voice	0.125	0.030*	Supported
H8 (+)	Word of Mouth → Voice	-0.052	0.015*	*Not Supported*
H9 (+)	Commitment → Voice	0.186	0.487ns	*Not Supported*
H10 (+)	Interaction Quality → Voice	0.153	0.030*	Supported
H11 (-)	Voice → Exit	0.403	0.000**	*Not Supported*##
H12 (-)	Emotional Wellbeing → Exit	-0.085	0.114ns	*Not Supported*
H13 (-)	Interaction Quality → Exit	-0.140	0.032*	Supported
H14 (-)	Commitment → Exit	-0.349	0.000**	Supported

P=.232; χ^2/df=1.43; GFI=.999; AGFI=.997; TLI=.994; RMSEA=.032; **$p < .001$; *$p < .05$; ns = not significant
##Note that whilst statistically significant (p<0.001) the path weighting of H11 (0.403) is opposite to what was hypothesized so not supported

4.6.1 Interaction Quality and Emotional Wellbeing ([+]H1)

The hypothesis that higher levels of interaction quality will result in higher emotional wellbeing within the university-student relationship ([+]H1) is fully supported at the *p*=0.001 level. Moreover, the path weighting in the relationships is quite large (H1=0.551) showing the critical role that quality of interactions that students have with the university is critical to their emotional wellbeing. This adds further support that student wellbeing is going to be a function of the interactions they have during the university learning journey (Baik, Larcombe, &

Brokker, 2019; Kilgo, et al., 2019). However, this hypothesis also reveals two further aspects of that interaction that helps to drive a student's emotional wellbeing. Specifically, it is not only interaction with teaching and non-teaching staff, along with student peers that counts but also the quality that such interaction in the learning journey that is important to overall student emotional wellbeing. As previously highlighted the various interactions between individuals is one of the primary vehicles to yield and/or draw upon social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Clearly, the presence of IQ in the data supports the earlier literature of its presence and importance within the university student context (Brown & Davis, 2001; Tierney & Venegas, 2006), as well as the capacity of SC to improve the mental health of university students (Backhaus, et al., 2020; Koutra, Roy & Kokaliari, 2020). However, this hypothesis also reveals that the interaction quality that would be a direct result of the SC helps account for student wellbeing (EWB). This finding therefore provides part of the answer to the first research questions posed, namely that student relationships with the university can be viewed through the lens of SC theory.

4.6.2 Interaction Quality and Commitment ([+]H2)

The hypothesis that higher levels of interaction quality will result in elevated commitment of students directed towards the university ([+]H2) is fully supported at the p=0.001 level. Moreover, since the path weighting in the relationship between these two variables is quite large (H2=0.608) this also reveals the significant and critically important role that quality interactions students have with the university has on their level of commitment. This finding provides overall support in the education literature that student interactions with peers and faculty impacts on their persistence levels (Micari & Pazos, 2012; Rendón, 2002) but shows the truer impact it can have when the quality of such interactions are factored into that relationship. As indicated earlier the interactions involve those with other students, teaching and non-teaching staff however closer examination of the decomposed data in the correlation matrix (see table 4.5) suggests that each play a similar role in influencing commitment. From a theory viewpoint, the findings in this student setting add further support to the view in the services literature that commitment is a central feature of the SE based service relationships (Alhathal, et al., 2019; Beatty, el al., 2012; Kingshott, et al., 2020). Support for this hypothesis also helps to answer the first two research question posed in this doctoral dissertation. However, it partially answers the third research question by suggesting the RM variables of IQ and commitment are also core to relational longevity with the student.

4.6.3 Interaction Quality and Word-of-Mouth ([+]H3)

The hypothesis that higher levels of interaction quality (IQ) will result in elevated levels of word-of-mouth (WOM) that students will direct towards others ([+]H3) is fully supported at the p=0.001 level. Moreover, the path weighting in the relationships is relatively large (H3=0.262) showing that it is the quality of interactions students have with the university that impact the positive messages students are likely to spread. This finding confirms the positive impact that service quality has on positive WOM within the services setting in general (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996) but it also reveals that the source of that quality in university settings potentially impacts on their RM efforts both internally and external to the learning institution. To date the importance of interactions with student peers, faculty and support staff has been well documented in the higher education literature (Cole & Griffin, 2013; Diep, et al., 2017), so this finding offers further support for the core underpinnings of the education literature that social capital is intrinsic to the learning journey (Jensen & Jetten, 2015). The finding encompasses the summative effects of IQ that students have with their peers, teaching and non-teaching staff on the propensity of students to exhibit WOM, revealing how the university can navigate an interaction environment that is highly complex in nature (Clynes, Sheridan, & Frazer, 2020). IQ therefore has the capacity to build and retain relationships with their students due to the inherent social capital associated with such interactions. However, the impact IQ has on the propensity of students to communicate positive WOM messages to persons 'outside' of the domain of these particular learning engagements (H3) potentially has a bearing on the broader RM efforts of the university. WOM is a regarded as a key aspect of social exchange based relationships in student learning environments (Loh, Wong, & Kingshott, 2012) thus support for H3 indicates building relationships with students through leveraging interaction quality also means they will act as ambassadors for the university.

4.6.4 Emotional Wellbeing and Commitment ([+]H4)

The hypothesis that higher levels of emotional wellbeing (EWB) will result in elevated levels of commitment students direct towards the university ([+]H4) is fully supported at the p=0.001 level. However, the path weighting in the relationship is relatively moderate (H4=0.188) but the data nonetheless confirms that student EWB will impact their desire to remain committed to continuing studying. Whilst ensuring EWB during the learning journey is a key responsibility of the university (Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019) this finding shows the benefits of elevated student wellbeing is likely to have longer-term consequences because elevated commitment will contribute to them completing their studies. Given retention and

completion rates is a core challenge facing universities (Baik, Naylor, Arkoudis, & Dabrowski, (2019) this finding has clear implications on the effectiveness of the RM efforts of higher education providers. Typically, since commitment is the most reliable indicator of university student retention rates (Davidson, Beck, & Milligan, 2009) this finding corroborates the impact that EWB has on the universities RM efforts. Moreover, this finding also indicates that strategies aimed to positively impact on student EWB will result in further cost benefits to the university and the wider community. For example, elevated retention rates result in cost benefits to the university (Ormond, 2005) so this finding suggests that nurturing EWB has direct financial implications for universities.

4.6.5 Emotional Wellbeing and Word of Mouth ([+]H5)

The hypothesis that higher levels of emotional wellbeing (EWB) will result in elevated word of mouth (WOM) that students direct towards others ([+]H4) is fully supported at the *p*=0.001 level. Whilst the path weighting in the relationship between these two constructs is relatively moderate (H5=0.194) this finding still shows that elevated student EWB will result in them communicating positive messages about the university of their study choice to others. Whilst EWB is well researched in the higher education literature (Geertshuis, 2019; Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005) a central theme in this body of research has been examining the direct benefits to the student (Bücker, et al., 2018; Morton et al. 2020). This finding (H5) extends this to provide clear evidence of the broader benefits to the university in improving student EWB, such as becoming institutional ambassadors through their WOM activities. This means that having students with high EWB not only helps the university in their relationship with students but potentially enhances their RM efforts in attracting new students and/or helping to improve the image and standing of the institute in the wider community.

4.6.6 Commitment and Word of Mouth ([+]H6)

The hypothesis that higher levels of commitment (COMM) directed towards the university will also result in elevated word of mouth (WOM) that students direct towards others ([+]H6) is fully supported at the *p*=0.001 level. Moreover, the path weighting in the relationship between these two constructs is relatively large (H6=0.467) showing that student COMM is a key determinant in students communicating positive messages about the university to others. This finding is not surprising given that commitment is regarded as a core relational building block across all RM contexts that are grounded in SE theory (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1997; Kingshott et al., 2020; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and furthermore is directly related to communication between

relationship parties (Theron, Terblanche, & Boshoff, 2008). Gundlach, Acrol and Mentzer (1995) point out that commitment also comprises an instrumental element that "demonstrates something more than a mere promise" (p.79) so in a student learning context this finding demonstrates how this translates into WOM, as it is likely the student's way to contribute to the overall relationship with their education provider. Previous literature in the higher education domain does show the importance of commitment towards the university and their studies (Green & Bauer, 1995; Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, & Yonai, 2014; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008). However, this particular finding (H6) shows the key role that commitment towards the university can also play in helping to build the social exchange based relationship with that educational provider, and in particular the ambassadorial role that students can play when this translates into WOM.

4.6.7 Emotional Wellbeing and Voice ($^+H_7$)

The hypothesis that higher levels of emotional wellbeing (EWB) will also result in elevated voice (VOI) that students direct towards the university ($^+H_7$) is fully supported at the $p=0.05$ level. Whilst the path weighting in the relationship between these two constructs is moderately large (H7=0.125) it nonetheless reveals that student EWB is a determinant in this particular form of relational building activities directed towards the university. Specifically, since the action of displaying VOI is constructive in nature (Turnley & Feldman, 1999; Zhao et al., 2007) and further that that particular behaviour helps to build relationships with others (Bashshur & Oc, 2015) this action is observed in H7 to take place when the students have elevated EWB. This finding adds supports to the view that EWB is premised by an underlying assumption that elevated wellbeing means individuals feel good about themselves, have more satisfying and successful relationships with others, and are being motivated to contribute to their community (Huppert, 2009). From a student perspective, such a community can be regarded as their learning community because they comprise themselves, their peers and staff (Bo & Rensheng, 2010) and involve interaction, interdependence and shared educational goals (Rovai, 2002). In that regard, the hypothesis indicates that actions taken by students in the form of VOI helps to shape, promote and enhance the effectiveness of this learning context. Conceptually, support for this hypothesis and reflects the view in the literature that persons with high wellbeing often have a sense of obligation to care for the organizations wellbeing they are affiliated with (Aggarwal-Gupta, Vohra, & Bhatnagar, 2010) meaning that the 'moral obligation' rudiments of social exchange based relationships (Kingshott, 2006) are helping to underpin the link between EWB and VOI.

4.6.8   Word of Mouth and Voice ($^+$H$_8$)

The hypothesis that higher levels of word of mouth (WOM) results in elevated voice (VOI) that students direct towards the university ($^+$H$_8$) is not be supported. Despite the *p*=0.05 level the path weighting in the relationship between these two constructs was found to be negative and close to zero (H8= -0.052) showing that student EWB has little or no impact on the level of VOI expressed towards the university. Since WOM in a university educational setting represents positive communication students make to others about the university (Casidy & Wymer, 2015), it was anticipated (through H8) that such positivity would also translate into internalised relational building activities in the form of VOI. Moreover, since WOM is a direct reflection of the extent of loyalty directed towards the service organization (Chiou, Droge, & Hanvanich, 2002) and the EVL typology (Hirschman, 1970) depicts loyal customers to express VOI, then WOM and VOI should have been intrinsically linked. However, since the finding indicated that these two relational building constructs are not related to one another within the university student context this observation may simply be a reflection that when students express WOM things are going well. In simple terms that means there is no need to resort to VOI to help remedy a problem that simply does not exist. Another potential explanation for the lack of support for this hypothesis might be that students often provide feedback to their learning institutes university to help improve teaching practices and curriculum development (Seale, 2010) meaning that trigger for VOI is directly related to the quality of the service that they receive in the learning journey. Clearly, the finding indicates that there are other drivers of VOI than WOM, which has managerial implications, discussed in chapter 5.

4.6.9   Commitment and Voice ($^+$H$_9$)

The hypothesis that higher levels of commitment (COM) towards the university will result in elevated voice (VOI) that students direct towards the university ($^+$H$_9$) is not supported by the data. Despite the prima facie moderate positive impact of COM on student VOI expressed towards the university, as reflected through the path weighting (H9=0.186), this path was however found to be statistically insignificant (*p*=0.487), suggesting that VOI is not a function of the level of commitment students have towards the university. Conceptually though, the theory of social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) does support the general supposition that committed parties will are able to draw upon their SC to express their concerns about relational matters. In simple terms, if students are committed to their studies this translates into VOI to help make the relationship better. Specifically, in the university setting SC helps elevate COM by encouraging active participation where individuals work together to

attain joint goals (Oberg De La Garza & Moreno Kuri, 2014), meaning students commitment to attaining learning and other goals are also going to express VOI to ensure the university plays their role in that process. Moreover, since student feedback mechanisms are designed to solicit VOI about how to improve the curricula and teaching practices (Ferguson, Hanreddy, & Draxton, 2011) as well as help to enhance the effectiveness of academic development and enhancements to the student learning experience (Campbell, Beasley, Eland, & Rumpus, 2007). This means committed students should work closely with the university to help enhance their learning journey and that would have been be revealed through support for hypothesis 9, given that VOI is a core part of helping to improve relationships (Turnley & Feldman, 1999; Zhao et al., 2007). It is quite plausible that lack of support for H9 may be due to the view in the education literature that such feedback is often overlooked in the process of designing teaching approaches, courses and changes to curricula (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felton, 2010) and students are aware of this. Thus the net impact is that COM does not drive their feedback. In fact, many students do not feel comfortable and/or have little confidence in soliciting feedback from faculty (Pokorny & Pickford, 2010) so committed students may not envisage a real need to provide VOI to the university and rather choose to channel their energies elsewhere, therefore not reflected through H9.

4.6.10 Interaction quality and Voice ($^{+}$H$_{10}$)

The hypothesis that higher levels of interaction quality (IQ) will result in elevated voice (VOI) students direct towards the university ($^{+}$H$_{10}$) is fully supported at the $p=0.05$ level. Whilst the path weighting in the relationship between these two relational based constructs is moderately large (H10=0.153) the data nonetheless reveals that IQ will have an impact on the level of student VOI expressed towards the university. This confirms the view that student feedback can be used to help provide valuable insights to educators about how a particular course and/or program can be improved through informing and changing teaching behaviours (Steyn, Davies, & Sambo, 2019) in terms of being based on the student perception of quality, ability and clarity of the learning experience (Blair & Valdez Noel, 2014). Since VOI is known in the services literature to be a constructive relational building behaviour (Kingshott, et al., 2020) this finding also means that the highly interactive student learning journey experienced by students can also help universities in the RM efforts. Conceptually, this finding also supports previous studies in the higher education literature that argue the presence of social capital (SC) is potentially an integral part of the university student learning experience (Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Sandefur, Meier & Campbell, 2006; Tierney & Venegas, 2006). However, this finding confirms the

inherent factors directly underpinning the yielding of SC during the learning journey also must play a key role. Specifically, since SC is directly linked to the nature and extent of interaction students have with their student peers (Kim & Kim, 2017), teaching (Dika, 2012) and non-teaching staff (Parks-Yancy 2012), these three types of interactions were found in H10 to help drive student VOI behaviours directed towards the university. This finding also offers general support to the education literature. Specifically, the role that SC plays in the student-university relationships in terms of engendering open and honest communication (Smith, 2007), providing a platform whereby graduate students feel comfortable about providing feedback to their supervisors about their work (Gu, Zhang and Liu, 2014), as well as the underlying mechanism driving feedback students gave to each other (Lui & Brown, 2014). However, support for this hypothesis extends this thinking further to reveal that it is not the interactions that students have with their peers, and, teaching and non-teaching staff that drives VOI directed towards the university students but rather the quality such interactions entail.

4.6.11 Voice and Exit (⁻H₁₁)

The hypothesis that higher levels of voice (VOI) will result in lower levels of students intending to exit (EX) their studies at university ($^-H_{11}$) was not supported. In fact the path weighting was found to be quite high and positive (H11=0.403; p=0.001) which was in stark contrast to the indications in the literature. At the theoretical level, the earlier work of Hirschman (1970) was founded on the premise that loyal customers are committed to the relationship, in which VOI was often expressed by them as a constructive behaviour to help reinforce their loyalty towards the organisation. Furthermore, since VOI is constructive in nature (Turnley & Feldman, 1999; Zhao et al., 2007) then those individuals expressing it would, certainly on the face of it, not likely want to EX the relationship. There is little light shed on the link between voice and exit in a higher education setting. This is because studies largely focus on highlighting how student feedback is a process designed to help change curricula, teaching methods, assessments and other 'support services' needed during the learning journey (Shah & Richardson, 2016), and/or how to improve the quality of the learning experience (Grebennikov & Shah, 2013). Despite this, there are a number of potentially plausible explanations for this observation in the data given the path strength and high statistical significance in the empirical finding is not in dispute. First, given VOI is often regarded as action taken by one party to remedy a problem in the relationship (Thomas, Au, & Ravlin, 2003; Withey & Cooper, 1989) it is quite plausible that the link between VOI and EX in the data reflects the relational consequences should the issue not be remedied. This may be possible because the EX construct was measured in this research

as a behavioural intention, which is a future anticipated action. Second, a number of researchers have highlighted the potential for various exit strategies on separation (Alajoutsijärvi, Möller, & Tähtinen, 2000; Baxter, 1985) that indicate that the disengaging party may not explicitly state their exit intentions directly but rather seek an alternative approach. It is also possible that the silent exit strategy (SES) is being observed in the path relationship because of there appears to be no intention to communicate the exit and the student does not appear to attempt to hurt the other party (Habib, Bastl, Karatzas, & Mena, 2020). Clearly, the data shows VOI is playing a role in the EX decision so it is also possible that what is being observed in the data is the underlying obligations associated with the social capital and social exchange that may have accumulated in the relationship. In rudimentary terms, this means that students may simply feel obligated to offer the university the chance to remedy any relational problems before they exit.

4.6.12 Emotional Wellbeing and Exit ($^-$H$_{12}$)

The hypothesis that higher levels of emotional wellbeing (EWB) will result in elevated levels of students wanting to exit (EX) their studies at university ($^-$H$_{12}$) is not supported by the data. Not only is this proposed negative relationship insignificant (p=0.114) but the path weighting in the relationship between these two constructs is very small (H12=-0.085). This finding runs contrary to the literature elsewhere that shows diminished EWB will invariably result in EX of relationships altogether (Bardasi & Francesconi, 2004), as well as the link between student well-being and retention rates (Wingert, Jones, Swoap, & Wingert, 2020). There are a number of possible explanations for this observation in the data. First, according to the ELVN framework, when individuals are experiencing poor outcomes in a relationship they often act in a neglecting manner (Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988) and in doing so simply let things in the relationship fall apart (Mellahi, Budhwar, & Li, 2010). On that basis, what is potentially reflected in the finding is that those students with reduced EWB are simply resorting to the 'neglect option' rather than choosing to EX, and thus the hypothesised impact of EWB on EX is not showing up in the data. This is quite feasible considering students with reduced EWB reduces their class attendance levels (Ratelle, Simard, & Guay, 2013; Thomas & Borraya, 2013) and furthermore that poor class attendance potentially foreshadows student retention rates (Fike & Fike, 2008; Gray & Perkins, 2019; Kelly, 2012). This perspective also implies that the data in H10 may not be 'capturing' the link between EWB and EX due to the potential that neglecting behaviour may need to act as a mediator in the relationship between these two variables. Second, on a more conceptual level, the interactive aspects of the student learning journey may be observed in this hypothesis as these interactions are underpinned by the

theories of social capital (SC) and social exchange (SE) that can potentially help to dampen the student's desire to EX the relationship, despite their overall poor EWB. That is, there is no link shown between EWB and EX because of the effects of SC and SE in the relationship that students have built with their peers and university staff. According to the theory of SE (Homans 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) students in general may be obligated to each of the parties they interact with in the learning journey and this may reduce their EX intentions due to the moral obligations and reciprocity inherent within SE based relationships (Homans 1958; Kingshott, 2006; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). Typically then, those students considering exiting the relationship with the university may be influenced by the potential impact of severing the relationships they have built up with their peers, teaching and non-teaching staff. This may have particular significance because the university learning context is underpinned by elevated interaction between these parties during the learning journey (Dika, 2012; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009) so relationship severance potentially means accumulated SC with these parties is going to be lost. Students may have also nurtured personal relationships with their fellow students outside of the learning journey so are aware that support from friends is a powerful coping mechanism (Meadows, 2019) thus exiting the university relationship may been seen as having wider consequence for them and their personal friendships. The final plausible attribution for lack of support for hypothesis 10 could be due to a range of other economic and/or cultural consequences of exiting their university studies. For example, during 2019, at least one-fifth (19% or 3.2 million) of 15-64 years olds were studying in Australia whilst still in the workforce (ABS, 2019) suggesting that the two life-domains are intricately linked. Specifically, attendance at university may be linked to their work, such as student visas, scholarships, or simply part of the role, so students suffering reduced EWB may prefer to 'tough it out' rather than EX their studies. Moreover, there are many students from international and/or culturally diverse backgrounds living and studying in Australian universities with cultural backgrounds that regard poor mental health as a sign of weakness (Jung, Cho, Rhee, & Jang, 2020; Ng, 1997; Ryff et al., 2014; Weil & Lee, 2004). This cultural stigma associated with poor wellbeing is also translated into students at university. For example, Asian students are less inclined to seek help for their mental health problems due to the stigma attached to the issue (Gee, Khera, Poblete, Kim, & Buchwach, 2020). Thus, having to 'explain' to their families and friends that they exited their university studies due to poor EWB may not be culturally appropriate to do so this may also be reflected in the lack of support for the link between EWB and EX.

4.6.13 Interaction Quality and Exit (⁻H₁₃)

The hypothesis that higher levels of interaction quality (IQ) will result in lower levels of students exiting (EX) their studies at university (⁻H₁₃) is supported at the *p*=0.05 level. Whilst the path weighting in the relationship between these two relational marketing (RM) constructs is relatively moderate (H13=-0.140) the finding nonetheless shows that the IQ students have with the university will reduce their propensity to EX from their studies. The data thus shows the relational building capacity that quality interactions can have in the relationship thus offering further support that university-student relationships can be view from the perspective of social exchange (SE) theory (Homans 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). Conceptually, interaction is a core aspect of developing SE relationships (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987) so this finding not only reveals that such interactions are intrinsic to student relationships but the level of perceived quality of such engagements play a critical relational building role in the student's learning journey. Specifically, the impact of such interactions on EX are shown to involve students, their peers, as well as those with teaching and non-teaching staff. This finding also supports studies in the services literature that highlight the importance of service quality in relationships across a range of ever-expanding service contexts (Alhathal, Sharma, & Kingshott, 2019; Choi, Choi, Oh, & Kim, 2020; Bitner, 1990; Dabholkar, Thorpe, & Rentz, 1996; Sharma & Patterson, 1999). Although the service literature in unclear on the direct and linear link between perceived service quality and loyalty (De Ruyter, Wetzels, & Bloemer, 1998) the literature is relatively clear that customer satisfaction with the service is directly linked to loyalty (Lee, Kang, & Kang, 2019). Satisfaction is well known to be a function of service quality (Falk, Hammerschmidt, & Schepers, J2010) suggesting the established link between Quality, satisfaction and loyalty may also be present in the student relationship with the educational provider. In a university student context, satisfaction is found to mediate the link between service quality and loyalty towards the educational provider (Teeroovengadum, Nunkoo, Gronroos, Kamalanabhan, & Seebaluck, 2019) suggesting an indirect link between IQ and EX intentions. Although the IQ is found to positively influence customer satisfaction with a service (Ekinci & Dawes, 2009) support for H10 does however reveal a more direct link between the quality of the interactions that students have with others and their overall EX intentions. Conceptually, this direct link within a student learning environment can be directly attributed to the bonding impact of social capital (SC) directly resulting from the level of IQ in the various relationships that students have with others (Diep, Cocquyt, , Zhu, Vanwing, & de Greef, 2017). Thus support for H10 potentially implies that the presence of SC built though interactions with peers and the university staff helps directly drive loyalty, and this does not

result in a simple linear relationship between well-established quality, satisfaction and loyalty link (Kasiri, Cheng, Sambasivan, & Sidin, 2017). When these interactions are perceived by students to be of a certain quality level then that directly impacts on their EX intentions.

4.6.14 Commitment and Exit ($^-H_{14}$)

The hypothesis that higher levels of commitment (COM) directed towards the university will result in lower levels of students intending to exit (EX) their studies ($^-H_{14}$) is fully supported at the *p*=0.001 level. Commitment is empirically shown to be a core relational building block in the literature (Altathal, Sharma, & Kingshott, 2019; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) so this finding offers further support for the construct being instrumental in the RM efforts within a university student context. Indeed, since the path weighting in the relationship between these two constructs is relatively strong (H14=-0.349) thus means that committed students are very unlikely to exit from their studies. Commitment to the university and studies is a key aspect of helping students attain personal outcomes and goals during the learning journey (Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Tinto, 1993). However, this finding reveals one of the important ways in which universities are able to deal with the ongoing challenge of student retention (Davidson, Beck, & Milligan, 2009) in terms of acting as the brake in the exit decision. In this university setting, the finding also helps to confirm the intrinsic presence of both social exchange (SE) and social capital (SC) in the relationship students have with the provider because commitment manifests from strong social bonds, networks of small groups, and norms of reciprocity (McGrath & Van Buskirk, 1999, p. 17). Since those bonds, networks and reciprocity translate into lower exit intentions due to the interactions between students and others during their learning journey via the building of relational commitment (H2), this finding provides the strongest support for grounding this doctoral dissertation in the theories of SC (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) and SE (Homans 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959).

4.7 SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESIS TESTING AND DISCUSSION

In this doctoral dissertation, 14 hypothesised relationships were proposed in the form of a conceptual model (figure 4.1) grounded in the theories of SC and SE to help determine the first three research questions. The results of the test for each in individual hypothesis was were discussed in section 4.4.1 to 4.4.14 and the combined impact of interaction quality, emotional well-being and commitment, along with voice and word-of-mouth is summarised in table 4.7. As indicated earlier, these hypotheses were tested with SEM using the AMOS26$^{©}$ software package. An overall discussion of the model now follows.

Table 4.7: Summary of hypotheses findings

Hypothesis		Results
	INTERACTION QUALITY	
H1 (+)	Interaction Quality → Emotional Wellbeing	Supported
H2 (+)	Interaction Quality → Commitment	Supported
H3 (+)	Interaction Quality → Word of Mouth	Supported
H10 (+)	Interaction Quality → Voice	Supported
H13 (-)	Interaction Quality → Exit	Supported
	EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	
H4 (+)	Emotional Wellbeing → Commitment	Supported
H5 (+)	Emotional Wellbeing → Word of Mouth	Supported
H7 (+)	Emotional Wellbeing → Voice	Supported
H12 (-)	Emotional Wellbeing → Exit	*Not Supported*
	COMMITMENT	
H6 (+)	Commitment → Word of Mouth	Supported
H9 (+)	Commitment → Voice	*Not Supported*
H14 (-)	Commitment → Exit	Supported
	WORD OF MOUTH & VOICE	
H8 (+)	Word of Mouth → Voice	*Not Supported*
H11 (-)	Voice → Exit	*Not Supported*[*]

[*]Note that whilst statistically significant ($p<0.001$) the path weighting of H11 (0.403) is opposite to what was hypothesized so not supported

4.7.1 Impact of Interaction Quality (H1, H2, H3, H10 & H13)

Interaction quality (IQ) in this research setting pertained to the quality of the experience that students have when engaging with teaching, non-teaching and student peers (classmates) during their learning journey at university. Interaction with others is a fundamental component of the learning journey that students have while studying at university (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Rugutt, & Chemosit, 2009) and thus reflected in the conceptual model as a requisite relational aspect. This core element helps to drive the relationship students have

with staff, their peers and through that the overall relationship that they potentially have with the university. Accordingly, this research project proposed that IQ helps to shape various student attitudes and behaviours as well as the way they felt about themselves in terms of contributing to their overall wellbeing. Interaction quality was found to directly impact on five variables in the model

Specifically, support was offered for the hypotheses that when students perceived the level of interaction quality to be high then this 'interactive' relational dimension was found to result in elevated wellbeing (+H1), helped to enhance their commitment towards the university (+H2), encouraged students desire to express positive word of mouth towards others (+H3). IQ also helped to shape their voice behaviours directed towards the university (+H4) and reduced their desire to exit (-H13) the relationship with the university. However, closer examination of the various sources of such interaction indicated that each potentially played a role in helped to shape attitudes and behaviour. The correlations (see table 4.5) between composite scores of each of the IQ factors, namely teaching staff (IQTS), non-teaching staff (IQNTS) and student peers (IQCM) provide an even more insightful picture that suggests that when composing the source of interaction then student peers (ICQM) potentially has a more profound impact on student voice (VOI) and exit (EX) intentions. Specifically, the correlations between classmates and voice [$corr$(IQCM, VOI)=0.356, $p<0.001$)] are much larger than the correlations of voice with teaching [$corr$(IQTS, VOI)=0.206, $p<0.001$)] and non-teaching [corr(IQNTS, VOI)=0.206, $p<0.001$)] staff suggesting that student peers play a more prominent role in influencing the voice behaviour of others. However, the most notable difference between the source of the IQ and the impact this potentially has on exit intentions of students is reflected in the direction of the correlation being positive [$corr$(IQCM, EX)=0.143, $p<0.001$)]. This is a reversal of the correlations between exit intentions and IQ for teaching [$corr$(IQTS, EX)= -0.197, $p<0.001$)] and non-teaching [$corr$(IQCM, EX)= -0.151, $p>0.05^{ns}$)] staff and tends to suggest that student peers play a role in influencing the exit intentions of their student peers. Whilst the overall hypothesis between interaction quality (IQ) and exit (EX) was supported by the relatively weak path (H13= -0.140, $p=0.031$), since the data used in the analysis comprised of the composite score from all three sources IQ this tends to corroborate the role that student peers have on the exit intentions of others.

4.7.2 Impact of Emotional Wellbeing (H4, H5, H7 & H12)

Emotional well-being (EWB) in this doctoral dissertation was reflected in the type of, and level of intensity of, emotions experienced by students through their learning journey. Whilst that data reveals that student EWB was directly impacted on by the nature their interaction with others, its presence also shown directly impact three variables in the model. Specifically, it was found to help drive the level of commitment students had towards the university (+H4) as well as helping to shape their word-of mouth (+H5) and level of voice (+H7) expressed. Considering that one of the core challenges in RM is to nurture relationships (Cambra-Fierro, Melero-Polo, et al., 2018; Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Grönroos, 2004) then in a university context the data indicates that RM success is going to be a function of student wellbeing. Despite this, the proposed link between the extent of emotional wellbeing and the student exit intentions (-H12) was not supported in the data related to empirically testing the conceptual model. At first glance the correlation data does tend to suggest that low emotional wellbeing (EWB) will result in students wanting to exit (EX) the relationship [$corr$(EWB, EX)= -0.157, $p<0.05$)] but clearly this was not evidenced by the conceptual model test (-H12= -0.085, p=0.114).

However, the conceptual model tends to suggests that the relationship that students have with the university is quite complex in nature and the desire to exit is going to be a big decision on their part as it would have wide-ranging ramifications on their future careers. Overall, the decision to exit is more likely to be influenced by a compilation of other important factors, such as those highlighted in the conceptual model. Emotional wellbeing is potentially an important factor in determining student academic outcomes (Pekrun, et al. 2011) this observation is a reflection that the literature is still unclear on the intricate links between emotional wellbeing and associated learning journey outcomes (Geertshuis, 2019). Steger and Kashdan (2009) do however point out that students experiencing depression and anxiety are not inclined to engage in 'student life' and/or their studies so 'coping strategy' is likely to have been observed in the data – rather than them simply exiting the relationship, as proposed in hypothesis 12.

4.7.3 Impact of Commitment (H6, H9, & H14)

Data in the conceptual model revealed that commitment (COM) was directly impacted upon by the level of perceived interaction quality (IQ) received by students and their level of emotional wellbeing (EWB). In that process, the COM construct partially mediated the link between IQ and a number of other important relational constructs in the student relationship

with the university. More specifically, COM partial mediated the link between IQ and word-of-mouth (WOM), voice (VOI) and exit (EX). In light of this partially mediating role, COM was found to directly impact two variables in the model. Specifically, it had a positive impact on student WOM (+H6) and a negative impact on EX (-H14) but surprisingly had little effect on the propensity of students desire to express VOI towards the university (+H9=0.186, p=0.487). This finding means that elevated levels of COM that students have towards the university would translate directly into positive communication they had with others external to this relationship but not into constructive criticism (i.e. voice) that can be readily addressed by the university. Commitment was found to have a strong negative impact on exit (-H14) so acts as one of the primary drivers of maintaining student retention rates.

4.7.4 Impact of Word-of-Mouth and Voice (H8 & H11)

Voice (VOI) was found to play a direct role in determining the overall propensity of students to exit (EX) their relationship (-H11) with the university, however the strong positive link (β=0.403, p<0.001) suggests that whilst voice is constructive it also potentially acts as the precursor to leaving the relationship. As such, voice is a potential proxy signal of the students' intention to leave their studies, rather than being a relational building block. This contrary finding aligns with the recent work of Habib, et al., (2020) whom in a B2B setting note that the decision and subsequent execution of exiting a relationship may either comprise of a silent, disguised, negotiated or communicated exit strategy. This model voice-exit finding in the data is somewhat congruous with their depiction of the *negotiated exit strategy* (NES) as it is very "direct and informed" (p. 239) and provides an opportunity to agree on the terms of separation. Habib, et al. (2020) add further that the NES approach to separation results in the party exiting the relationship also giving up some of their relational interests at the same time doing their best to avoid hurting the other party. From a student vantage, this translates into students potentially leaving their studies but in that process providing some feedback to the university to improve their offerings. Conceptually, since voice is invariably constructive in nature and provides the opportunity to remedy relationship issues (Ferguson & Johnson, 2011; Withey & Cooper, 1989) but this observation in the data tends to suggest that students will give feedback but are likely to exit.

Furthermore, such constructive behaviour reflects in the partial mediating role that voice plays in the link between the student's emotional wellbeing, commitment to the university, and their overall exit intentions. In that regard, since the connections between EWB and COMM and

voice (+H7 & +H9, respectively) was found to be positive thus further suggests that the student's voice intention was meant to be constructive in nature and thus acted as a positive change agent (Rusbult et al., 1986) for the university. However, the key message in the data being that whilst voice was constructive in nature it potentially served the dual purpose of signalling to the university that the student may be about to exit the relationship altogether. Given that word-of-mouth did not have any impact on voice (+H8= -0.052, p=0.015) also meant the proposed mediating impact of the voice in the link between WOM and exit could not be substantiated in the data. Overall, this tends to add further support that voice should be potentially regarded as the precursor to exiting the relationships, which has clear managerial implications - discussed in chapter 5.

4.8   IMPACT OF STUDENT DIVERSITY ON THE UNDERLYING ELEMENTS OF THE RM EFFORTS OF THE UNIVERSITY

In an attempt to establish whether students from varying study patterns and/or diverse backgrounds responded differently to the various elements that underpin the RM activities of the university, and thus help to answer research question 4, the well-known ANOVA technique helped further analyse the data. This analysis will provide some clue as to where students from various backgrounds and/or programs of study are likely to respond differently to the RM efforts of university. Specifically, the composite scores (means) of each of variables in the proposed conceptual model was tested using ANOVA to help determine if there were any differences across the sample. The standard descriptors of demographics of students engaging with Australian universities are reported in Tables 4a and 4b. These are used to analyse the means of each grouping across the six variables in the model. Whilst this analysis was designed to ascertain whether any differences exist across the assigned demographic groups, such classifications also align with the standard demographics used to reflect the diversity of Australia's university students (Study Australia, 2020) that are used for reporting purposes to the Australian Government (Australia Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019). Specifically, these demographical groupings/ classifications include personal (gender, age, residential status, local or international student, birth region, ethnic background, home language, and, length of time living in Australia) and course related (number of years studies, degrees held, mode of study, level of award currently studying, and specific disciplinary areas of study) details. Any variance across the mean scores in each of the six model constructs will provide Australian university decision makers a further understanding how to optimise/ align their RM strategies to each grouping.

Accordingly, data related to the demographics of the student respondents (table 4.8a) and their study profiles (table 4.8b) helped to determine if any significant differences emerged in the data. The purpose of this analysis was to help determine if any particular cohort of the students would likely respond to differently to each model variable thus suggesting to university decision makers where to focus their RM efforts. Data reported in the tables that follow represent the composite means of items in each of the variables but also includes means of the decomposed interaction quality (IQ) variable, namely interaction quality with teaching staff (IQTS), non-teaching staff (IQNTS) and classmates (IQCM). Each of the variables were tested for differences related to gender, age, residential status, birth region, ethnic background, language at home, duration in Australia, and whether the student regarded themselves as being a local or international. Those that were statistically significant ($p \leq 0.01$) are indicated with an asterisk (*) adjacent to the composite mean score.

In terms of demographics of the respondents, the data indicated that the segments related to age, gender, residential status and ethnic background had little impact on any of the six variables. Similarly, these segments were found to have no impact on the decomposed interaction quality construct in the conceptual model. More specifically, table 4.8a indicates that the composite means in each of these demographic segments group were found to be statistically insignificant ($p > 0.10$). However, the data did reveal that word-of-mouth (WOM) was impacted upon the student's home location and their home language. Domestic students that were from a different state/territory to where they were studying at university tended to express more WOM than local students studying in the state/territory where the university was located ($x=5.65$ verses $x=5.25$, respectively; $p \leq 0.001$). However, WOM from international students was not found to be statistically significant ($x=5.21$; $p > 0.10$) so any variance from that segment had no bearing on the construct. Language did play a role in the WOM activities given students that spoke English at home were found to express themselves more to others than those that did not ($x=5.33$ verses $x=5.12$, respectively; $p \leq 0.001$). Moreover, the data indicated that those students from non-English speaking households tended to have higher exit intentions to students that spoke English at home ($x=3.74$ verses $x=3.35$, respectively; $p \leq 0.001$). Birth region also played a role on the student's exit intentions, given those born in Europe/US have a lower level of exit intentions than those born in Asia ($x=3.51$ verses $x=3.70$, respectively; $p \leq 0.001$). The data did however indicate that students born in Australia were not significantly to these two groups with respect to wanting to exit the relationship with the university ($x=3.40$; $p > 0.10$).

Data related to the study profile of the student respondents (table 4.8a) indicated that the number of years studies, level of study and disciplinary area of study have no bearing on the RM efforts of the university. Of particular relevance to the university regards improving overall retention rates reflects through the dependent variable, namely the intention of students to exit (EX) the relationship with the university. In a similar manner to home language and birth region, the number of degrees held by student respondents has a bearing on their overall exit intentions. In particular, the more degrees held by respondents (first degree, one degree & two or more degrees) the greater their exit intentions (x=3.11 verses x=3.69 verses x=4.08, respectively; p≤0.001). Clearly, this implies that when students have more qualifications then they are likely to have more employment options and it reflects through their exit intentions.

Moreover, the number of degrees held and mode of study played a role. In that regards, students with two or more degrees were found to have more interaction quality with classmates (IQCM) than those studying for their first degree (x=5.28 verses x=4.94, respectively; p≤0.001) suggesting they value interaction with their peers more, whereas those students holding one degree were not found to be statistically significant (x=5.16; p>0.10). Students undertaking their studies in a blended learning mode also indicated higher levels of interaction quality with their classmates (IQCM) that fully online students (x=5.21 verses x=4.75, respectively; p≤0.001). However, face-to-face only students were not found to be statistically significant in relation to these two groups (x=5.05; p>0.10) suggesting that blended learning students exhibit elevated IQCM as they are in a position to assess all modes of interaction with their peers. This pattern also reflects in the composite of interaction quality (IQ) suggested further that students get more out of the interaction with their peers when studying blended learning (x=5.32; p≤0.001) than fully online (x=5.04; p≤0.001) and/or face-to-face (x=5.21; p>0.10) modes of study.

Table 4.8a: ANOVA for conceptual model constructs [student demographic profile]

Gender (*n*)	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
Male (216)	5.26	5.42	5.20	5.16	4.81	5.40	5.28	4.56	3.62
Female (208)	5.20	5.45	5.17	4.96	4.60	5.46	5.27	4.51	3.26
Other (3)	5.42	5.30	5.47	5.50	4.17	6.00	5.67	5.33	4.00

Age groups (*n*)	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
18 to 22 years (49)	5.21	5.53	5.08	5.03	4.85	5.56	5.22	4.35	2.82
23 to 27 years (98)	5.22	5.48	5.24	4.95	4.72	5.41	5.26	4.48	3.39
28 to 32 years (79)	5.36	5.47	5.40	5.22	4.69	5.37	5.27	4.68	3.99
33 to 37 years (61)	5.02	5.20	4.95	4.92	4.51	5.30	5.18	4.49	3.84
38 to 42 years (46)	5.40	5.48	5.34	5.35	4.96	5.73	5.43	4.94	3.40
43 to 47 years (31)	5.18	5.43	5.04	5.07	4.77	5.48	5.29	4.69	3.20
48 to 52 years (23)	5.18	5.33	5.14	5.06	4.38	5.36	5.29	4.78	3.29
53 to 57 years (15)	5.18	5.40	5.14	5.00	4.88	5.32	5.49	4.47	3.28
58 to 62 years (10)	5.06	5.39	4.91	4.89	4.18	5.10	5.20	4.80	2.75
≥63 years (15)	5.28	5.76	5.15	4.94	4.72	5.38	5.36	4.36	2.95

Residential Status (*n*)	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
Australian Citizen (357)	5.22	5.44	5.18	5.04	4.67	5.42	5.28	4.58	3.43
Australian PR (37)	5.36	5.46	5.39	5.23	4.95	5.51	5.36	4.68	3.60
Others (33)	5.19	5.38	5.08	5.12	4.78	5.48	5.22	4.55	3.43

Local/International (*n*)	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
International (61)	5.22	5.41	5.18	5.07	4.86	5.39	5.21	4.72	3.87
Local (327)	5.21	5.42	5.18	5.03	4.64	5.40	5.25*	4.52	3.35
Local (from interstate) (39)	5.42	5.60	5.30	5.36	5.00	5.72	5.65*	4.91	3.59

Birth Region (*n*)	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
Australia (295)	5.21	5.42	5.18	5.03	4.66	5.40	5.26	4.57	3.40
Asia (103)	5.25	5.42	5.18	5.14	4.78	5.44	5.28	4.63	3.70*
Europe / US (24)	5.34	5.59	5.31	5.11	5.12	5.79	5.61	4.81	2.51*
Others (3)	5.30	5.56	5.21	5.14	4.57	5.53	5.24	4.44	3.79

Ethnic Background (*n*)	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
Caucasian (255)	5.26	5.49	5.23	5.07	4.69	5.44	5.31	4.58	3.32
Asian (148)	5.18	5.36	5.13	5.05	4.74	5.40	5.22	4.61	3.68
Other (24)	5.17	5.33	5.05	5.14	4.62	5.53	5.36	4.53	3.40

Home Language (*n*)	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
English (324)	5.24	5.47	5.21	5.06	4.73	5.45	5.33*	4.57	3.35*
Non-English (103)	5.18	5.34	5.13	5.08	4.61	5.37	5.12*	4.65	3.74*

Duration in Australia [N=427]	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
3 years or less (39)	5.21	5.40	5.15	5.09	4.86	5.38	5.18	4.53	3.47
4 to 7 years (39)	5.33	5.39	5.27	5.32	5.01	5.51	5.40	4.67	3.87
More than 7 years (349)	5.22	5.45	5.18	5.03	4.65	5.42	5.28	4.58	3.40

*p<0.001; **IQ=composite of IQ teaching staff, IQ non-teaching staff and IQ class mates

Table 4.8b: ANOVA for conceptual model constructs [student study profile]

Years Studied [N=427]	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
1 year or less (89)	5.17	5.49	5.10	4.91	4.58	5.45	5.25	4.42	3.15
2 years (96)	5.19	5.43	5.15	4.99	4.79	5.43	5.32	4.47	3.19
3 years (92)	5.30	5.46	5.24	5.21	4.78	5.46	5.31	4.70	3.69
4 years (72)	5.21	5.37	5.22	5.05	4.53	5.35	5.15	4.64	3.55
5 years (43)	5.23	5.33	5.20	5.16	4.72	5.37	5.34	4.84	3.83
6 years (12)	5.08	5.20	5.17	4.88	4.49	5.19	5.03	4.42	3.83
7 years (7)	5.51	5.80	5.43	5.30	5.29	5.54	5.76	4.19	3.21
More than 7 years (16)	5.45	5.68	5.32	5.35	5.05	5.75	5.46	4.98	3.58

Degrees Held [N=427]	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
None, first degree (321)	5.16	5.41	5.11	4.94*	4.61	5.38	5.02	4.47	3.11*
One degree (119)	5.27	5.43	5.22	5.16	4.69	5.51	5.38	4.68	3.69*
Two or more degrees (77)	5.39	5.51	5.37	5.28*	4.99	5.44	5.37	4.80	4.08*

Mode of Study [N=427]	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
Face-to-face only (203)	5.21	5.42	5.17	5.05	4.62	5.37	5.24	4.54	3.46
Fully online only (64)	5.04*	5.32	5.06	4.75*	4.52	5.29	5.17	4.53	3.60
Blended Learning (160)	5.32*	5.51	5.26	5.21*	4.89	5.56	5.38	4.67	3.36

Level of Study [N=427]	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
Graduate Certificate (37)	5.13	5.42	5.09	4.87	4.68	5.20	5.12	4.49	3.36
Bachelor (215)	5.17	5.38	5.15	4.98	4.67	5.40	5.23	4.52	3.52
Bachelor [honours] (31)	5.31	5.53	5.18	5.23	4.87	5.57	5.32	5.14	3.78
Postgraduate (61)	5.37	5.51	5.36	5.24	4.75	5.68	5.48	4.64	3.16
Masters (76)	5.30	5.50	5.22	5.18	4.69	5.39	5.35	4.58	3.28
Doctorate (7)	5.21	5.54	4.94	5.16	4.93	5.18	4.86	4.19	4.29

Area of Study [N=427]	IQ**	IQTS	IQNTS	IQCM	EWB	COMM	WOM	VOI	EX
Art & Design (30)	5.27	5.62	5.25	4.93	4.50	5.44	5.48	4.02	3.06
Business (119)	5.17	5.36	5.12	5.04	4.53	5.36	5.26	4.59	3.59
Computer Sciences (50)	5.26	5.32	5.27	5.19	4.82	5.36	5.16	4.72	3.72
Education (16)	5.52	5.88	5.61	5.07	4.98	5.61	5.50	4.75	2.28
Engineering (43)	5.37	5.52	5.26	5.32	5.04	5.50	5.41	4.80	3.95
Health Sciences & Medicine (69)	5.20	5.39	5.09	5.10	4.56	5.41	5.14	4.70	3.28
Humanities & Law (62)	5.21	5.49	5.23	4.93	4.83	5.51	5.30	4.49	3.19
Science (36)	5.14	5.40	5.09	4.94	4.81	5.45	5.31	4.47	3.61
Others (2)	5.17	5.80	5.35	4.35	4.92	5.88	5.67	4.83	3.00

*$p<0.001$; **IQ=composite of IQ teaching staff, IQ non-teaching staff and IQ class mates

Clearly, the conceptual model (figure 4.1) indicates that the RM efforts of the university do play a role in building and nurturing the student relationship through support for 10 of the 14 hypotheses but data presented in table 4.8a and table 4.8b indicates that this may vary a little in relation to selected demographics and student's study profile. However, given that the patterns are limited to those statistically significant relationships, as discussed above, the ANOVA data presented tends to offer general support for the universality of the RM approach

to building and nurturing relationships within a university student setting. The next section discusses the implications of the findings in this doctoral dissertation, along with limitations and future research directions.

4.9   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter was used to present the findings from the data captured by the national sample (N=427) of students studying in Australian universities. The descriptive data revealed that the sample was very similar to the population of students studying in Australia's universities. Closer analysis of the different cohorts of the sample (i.e. age, gender, mode and level of study, domestic or international student, etc.) using ANOVA in relationship to the 6 model constructs indicated that whilst there was some variation across the sample this was not sufficient to conclude that the universities RM efforts need to differ across these categories. In fact this data tended to suggest that RM is a generalizable approach to marketing that can also be applied in the university context.

In terms of testing the 14 hypotheses in the conceptual model using AMOS26$^{©}$, the analysis adopted the well-established two-step approach (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) to reveal that both the measurement and structural models were supported by the data. However, not all of the hypotheses in the model could be supported as 4 paths (H8, H9, H11 & H12) were not supported. Included in those 4 unsupported hypotheses were 2 paths (H11 & H12) that were found to behave differently to expected, so the potential attributions for these findings was discussed in detail. The final chapter (5) in this doctoral dissertation details the scholarly and managerial implications, limitation and future research directions, conclusions and summary. It is followed by an epilogue section that contextualises this research by discussing the global COVID-19 pandemic.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This doctoral dissertation focused on exploring how theories of social exchange (SE: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) and social capital (SC: Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) helped to explain the relationships that students had with the universities. To that end, this research has been constructed around relevant literature pertaining to education, relationship marketing, services marketing and the EVL framework, first proposed by Hirschman (1970). Specifically, the research focused on developing and testing a conceptual model comprising six constructs that helped to establish salient factors that contributed the exit intentions of students with respect to their university of choice. The relationship between the six constructs in the proposed model were represented through 14 hypotheses, in which the data offered support for 10 of the proposed relationships. Overall support for the model provided an empirical insight into examining the specific research questions which helped to underpin the core challenge facing university decision makers, namely improving student retention rates. Consequently, this yielded a number of scholarly implications and/or considerations that may help to shape future thinking in the domains of this research underpinning this educational setting, namely: (1) the role of relationship marketing and underlying theory, (2) role of interaction and interaction quality, and (3) differing impact of various actors. , and (4) role of underlying theory. Each of these implications are now elaborated on in more detail.

5.2 SCHOLARLY IMPLICATIONS

5.2.1 Role of relationship marketing and underlying theory

This doctoral dissertation focused on examining the student-university relationship from the perspective of relationship marketing (RM) due to the capacity of this domain of the marketing discipline to help explain how to model long-term relationships (e.g. Anderson & Narus, 1990; Ashley, Noble, Donthu & Lemon, 2011; Kingshott, et al. 2020; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Safari & Albaum, 2019). The approach adopted draws inspiration from and builds on previous RM literature and the subsequent findings has a number of implications for how scholars need to view such relationships in student settings. First, this research does reveal RM to be a suitable conceptual perspective in which to help explain the relationships that universities have with their students. In particular, the role RM can potentially play in helping to improve the endemic problem in the higher education sector of poor student retention rates (Palmer & Gasman, 2008;

Shah & Widin, 2010; Tight, 2020). Therefore this study reveals how the RM perspective that is widely cited in the services and marketing literatures used to help explain how nurturing relationships (e.g. Kingshott, Sharma. Sima, & Wong, 2020; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) are equally important in higher education settings. Second, whilst universities are known to deploy marketing tactics designed to attract students (Gardiner & Olt, 2020; Levinson & Hawes, 2007; Naude & Ivy, 1999) this study reveals that universities can also draw upon the RM approach to model the student relationship to better understand how ensure they remain in their current studies, and potentially beyond.

Although students have finite relationships with the university that potentially ranges up to 7 years, depending on the level of study, the deployment of RM can still apply to relationships that have limited timeframes. Third, the education literature largely infers that the role of the education provider should be to help the student attain pedagogical and/or learning outcomes (Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Joanis, Burnley & Mohundro, 2020; Wyn et al., 2000). Whilst such outcomes are then modelled to help explain how their attainment is related to retention rates (Li & Carroll, 2020; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Shah & Widin, 2010; Tight, 2020) this research takes a much wider perspective by looking at the relationships students have with others as the key driver in retention rates, in the form of student exit (EX) intentions. Accordingly, scholars need to be cognizant that relationships between the student and university can also be are more than simply them attaining tangible outcomes such as marks, professional and academic development and identities (Jensen & Jetten, 2015) but rather recognize that RM directed towards them also has a role to play.

In order to gauge the effect of relational marketing (RM) in the educational context the conceptual model was aptly grounded in the theories of social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) and social exchange (SE: Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). These are well-established theories in the education (Anderson, 2003; Dika, 2012, Soria & Stebleton, 2013) and marketing (Dwyer, Scuhrr, & Oh, 1987; Kingshott, 2006; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) literatures. However, this was the first attempt at integrating these two well-aligned theories to help explain the way that students can draw on the SC inherent within their learning networks (Putman, 2000) at the same time helping universities to yield robust relationships with them. In a university context, SC has been shown to help students navigate the learning journey (Dika, 2012) as well as develop their academic and professional competence (Jensen & Jetten, 2015) through the ability to take advantage of the bridging and bonding aspects of SC (Steger &

Kashdan, 2009). In the marketing and services literature, scholars have shown how SE based relationships can help organizations build more robust relationships with customers (Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020) as a direct consequence of the underlying reciprocity social engagements (Alhathal, Sharma, & Kingshott, 2019; Homans, 1958; Malhotra et al., 2005) inherent in these types of relationship.

By integrating the two theories together and linking this to the EVL framework (Hirschman, 1970) this doctoral research highlights to scholars in the educational domain that they need to widen the approach to modelling the relationship that educators have with their students. This is because the underlying elements inherent within the SE based relationship can also help better understand how to deal with the underlying retention problem facing decision makers in the education their sector (Li & Carroll, 2020; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Shah & Widin, 2010; Tight, 2020). Moreover, by drawing on the services marketing literature regards service quality (Ahmadi, 2018; Chaniotakis & Lymperopoulos, 2009; Molinari, Abratt, & Dion, 2008; Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008) this conceptual perspective shows educational scholars that simply viewing the effects of drawing on SC in the interactions that students have with peers, teaching and non-teaching staff alone is not sufficient to help explain the student-university relationship. Specifically, it is the quality of those interactions that count most (rather than the interactions, per se) in helping to build the relationship with students, as well as help explain to decision makers how they can deal with the endemic student wellbeing problem (Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019; Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013; Koutra, Roy, & Kokaliari, 2020; Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005; Wingert et al., 2020).

The application of these two theories in an educational setting also helps provide scholars services marketing with a better understand how to model customer relationships in a more nuanced fashion. In particular, the need to consider the effects of more participants in the 'service network' on the overall relationship. Moreover, this doctoral dissertation also highlights the role that SC can play in helping to reduce student EWB (Bye, Muller, & Oprescu 2020; Wyn et al., 2000) and illuminates the impact this construct plays in helping them navigate their learning journeys, as well as the role improved student EWB plays on the overall relationship. Service scholars have recently begun researching the role that wellbeing plays in the service experience under the auspices of transformative research (TR: Anderson & Ostrom, 2015; Berry, Mirabito, & Baun, 2010; Dodds & Hess, 2021) so this research can help add to existing knowledge in this important area of the services discipline. Therefore this doctoral

research setting provides those service marketing scholars examining TR in services some additional insights into the role that relationships with others (in the learning network) can play in potentially improving customer wellbeing. The educational research setting in this dissertation also indicates to service scholars the role that the theory of SC (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) can potentially play in helping to explain how the service organization can deal with wellbeing related issues likely to emerge in their customer and wider stakeholder relationships.

5.2.2   Role of different theory in explaining university-student relationships

One of the underlying motivations for undertaking this doctoral dissertation is the view held by the author that the existing body of literature used to help explain (and subsequently help address) the various challenges facing decision makers in university settings is somewhat limited. This limited understanding results in not being able to fully explain how to improve student wellbeing (e.g. Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019; Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013; Koutra, Roy, & Kokaliari, 2020; Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005; Wingert et al., 2020) and increase retention rates (e.g. Baik, Naylor, Arkoudis, & Dabrowski, 2019; Li & Carroll, 2020). Given these dual challenges are still ongoing and have not been solved then the broad question posed in this doctoral dissertation is whether these need to be viewed through the lens of alternative approaches and/ or theories. To date much of the education literature draws on SC theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) to help reveal for example how university students rely on the inherent social capital (both bridging and/ or bonding) to advance their interests to either gain access higher education and/ or complete their programs of study. Accordingly, the main impetus (or rather endgame) intrinsic to this body of knowledge is devoted to help explain how the various forms of SC can be leveraged to help university students complete their programs of chosen study and/or perform at higher levels (e.g. Sandefur, Meier & Campbell, 2006; Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). More studies recent studies have also focused on the role SC can potentially play in helping better explain how to improve overall student wellbeing (Backhaus, Varela, Khoo, & Siefken, et al., 2020; Koutra, Roy & Kokaliari, 2020).

However, these literatures draw on SC theory to examine the two core challenges (poor wellbeing and retention rates) as separate issues. This doctoral dissertation scrutinizes these two challenges/ issues concurrently from the RM vantage by building on existing SC

perspectives and integrating this with SE theory. This expanded viewpoint offers an alternative theoretical perspective that could potentially help university decision makers understand/ address both problems at the same time. From a broad disciplinary basis, RM thus offers a potential alternative managerial solution to the dual challenges of improving student wellbeing and elevating retention rates that is constantly facing the higher education sector. However, by drawing on the existing theory of SC (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) and integrating this into SE (Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) to also comprise elements of the EVL framework (Hirschman, 1970) a conceptual model has been developed to help understand the problems by examining the wider student-university relationship. Accordingly, this conceptual model comprises 6 constructs and 14 hypotheses to help provide an alternative explanation of how these dual challenges can be potentially dealt with in a simultaneous manner.

Typically, SC theory pertains to building both bridging and bonding capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988), which is shown to be a critical aspect of the student learning journey (e.g. Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Martin, 2009; Park & Bowman, 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). Thus by drawing on this theory, the model presented in this dissertation reveals precisely how the antecedent IQ variable, involving interaction that students can have with peers, teaching and non-teaching staff, provides the learning context to help build such capital. However, SE theory (Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) plays a role in helping to explain these interaction dynamics in the model in a more detail. This is because SE theory is premised on the notion that all relationships that social in nature involve interactions that individuals are able to draw on to extract current and future value. Typically, SE theory posits such derived value can also help to drive various relational outcomes (e.g. Gaur, Kingshott & Sharma, 2019; Kingshott, Sharma & Nair, 2020), and theses can be directly seen in the model. In particular, the role that elevated IQ has in driving COMM (H2: 0.608, p<0.001), WOM (H3: 0.262, p<0.001), VOI (H10: 0.153, p<0.05) and reducing EX (H13: -0.140, p<0.05). Whilst the literature shows the role that building various forms of SC potentially has on student wellbeing (Backhaus, Varela, Khoo, & Siefken, et al., 2020; Koutra, Roy & Kokaliari, 2020), only by integrating this theoretical lens with SE theory (in this dissertation) can the true role that elevated IQ plays on enhancing student wellbeing (H1: 0.551, p<0.001) is fully revealed.

Moreover, by integrating the theories of SC and SE into the ELV framework other important RM outcomes within the university-student relationship setting are also uncovered that could potentially help decision makers fine tune their approach to helping improve retention rates.

For instance, the role COMM plays in helping explain reduced student EX intentions (H14: -0.349, p<0.001) suggests the key to elevating the critical RM construct of COMM is through improved quality interactions (H2) in the learning environment. Indeed, by drawing on SE and SC theory and linking this to the ELV framework help introduce VOI and WOM into the student-university relationship, the conceptual model also helps to reveal how decision makers can make the mistake of simply focusing on providing the conditions that promote these two important RM variables. Specifically, by observing the lack of support for the hypothesized paths these two RM constructs were expected to play in helping improve the student-university relationship (H8: -0.052, p<0.05 and -H11: 0.403, p<0.001) was only possible by grounding these relationships in SC and SE theory. Indeed, such a conceptual grounding has made it possible to further illuminate the critical importance that IQ plays in the student learning journey, to show the central role that this construct must play in all the university's RM activities directed towards their students.

5.2.3 Role of interactions and interaction quality

Whilst RM has been shown in this doctoral dissertation to help model the student-university relationship the data also reveals that the nature of interactions that students have with others also play a critical part how to engage with students. This finding is in line with previous studies in the education literature that have highlighted the importance of interactions that students have with various stakeholders during their learning journeys (e.g. Clynes, Sheridan, & Frazer, 2020; Dika, 2012; Scanlon, Rowling, & Weber, 2007). From a service marketing vantage, the current findings derived from this research also corroborates the perspective in the literature that interactions are central to the RM efforts of the service organization (e.g. Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Kim & Qu, 2020; Laksamana, Wong, Kingshott, & Muchtar, 2013). More specifically to the higher education context of this research setting, the findings also confirm the view held in the education literature that interactions between students, teaching and non-teaching staff are key drivers of being able to yield positive outcomes for students (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020;; Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Steger & Kashdan, 2009). In addition to this, since the data reveals that interactions between these members of the 'learning network' also contribute to the capacity of the university to build relationships with students then future studies that focus on pedagogy that involve interactions need to factor in the relation consequences that interactions potentially yield. In other words, education scholars researching this domain of their discipline should consider broadening their thinking about the potential outcomes interactions have for both the student and the higher education institute.

Moreover, whilst the findings also extend the services literature that depicts interactions to be a component of the overall service quality experience that customers receive (Brady & Cronin, 2001) they also provide scholars a further insight into modelling service quality. By decomposing interactions of the student's service experience into the IQ students have with others this research provides a clear indication that quality interactions can be a 'stand-alone' aspect of the student learning experience. This finding also adds to the growing body literature stemming from the work of Lusch and Vargo (2006) revealing how value co-creation by the customer plays a potential role in the service experience. In particular, since this doctoral dissertation specifically examined how IQ in the learning journey involved students, teaching and non-teaching staff in the process of creating value and its effects on the overall relationship, the data empirically reveals the central nature of how multiple actors are critical in a modern service setting. Specifically, rather than just focusing on the 'value in use' that is being created through interactions (Ballantyne & Varey, 2016) it is also the quality of interactions between actors that are key elements to be consider in the RM efforts of the service firm.

5.2.4 Effects of various actors in student relationships

By building on previous education literature that shows the importance of students engaging with fellow students (Rovai, 2002; Wisneski, Ozogul, & Bichelmeyer, 2017), teaching (Frankel & Swanson, 2002; Hoffman, 2014) and non-teaching (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020, Martin Smith, Takewell, & Miller, 2020) staff this research shows how such interactions can also influence the university-student relationship. Since the underlying premise in this doctoral dissertation was the role that quality interactions (IQ) between these members of the 'learning network' played in helping the university build relationships with their current students, IQ was aggregated along with the other six model constructs. Thus the proposed conceptual model comprising the six constructs (IQ, EWB, COMM, WOM, VOI and EX) modelled these as composite scores (mean of the underlying items) to test each of the 14 hypotheses. Whilst the model tested the effects of IQ as a composite of the interactions students had with all members of the 'learning network' the mean scores of the IQ for each showed their relative magnitude across the sample differed.

Typically, students perceive teaching staff (x=5.44/7) to provide the best source of quality interaction in their learning journeys, closely followed by non-teaching staff (x=5.19/7) and then classmates (x=5.06/7). From a service perspective, this means that customers potentially

get the most value out of the service experience whilst interacting with front-line service (teaching), followed by backline (non-teaching) staff, and other customers (fellow students). Since service encounters are likely to comprise such multiple actors in the service network (Holmqvist, Wirtz, & Fritze, 2020) this means that scholars need to be mindful of the role that each can potentially play in helping to not only enhance the service experience but in contributing to building the overall relationship with their customers. Further to this, should service failures occur as a direct consequence of encounters (Hoffman, Kelley, & Rotalsky, 1995) with one or more of these 'service network members' then this also needs to be factored into understanding how the service recovery action can work and/or the potential relational consequences of resultant 'interaction failure' in the service network.

5.3   MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

From a managerial perspective, the research provides a number of key insights that can help educational decision makers build stronger relationships with their students at the same time as optimizing outcomes for the university. The proposed model in this doctoral dissertation model indicates a perspective that university decision makers can adopt to help overcome the ongoing problem of increasing student retention rates (Li & Carroll, 2020). Based on the findings the specific managerial implications in this research relate to the role of: (1) relationship marketing, (2) emotional wellbeing, (3) voice, (4) social capital, (5) and, underlying precursor variable to predict exit. Each of these areas are now elaborated in more detail.

5.3.1   Role of relationship marketing in the student-university relationship

Although the education research outlines the marketing approach that universities have taken to attract students (Gardiner & Olt, 2020; Levinson & Hawes, 2007; Naude & Ivy, 1999) this body of work does not show how universities approach this activity from the perspective of relationship marketing (RM) and in particular from the vantage of building social exchange (SE) based relationships. However, RM and SE based relationships advocate that marketing success is not determined by attracting customers alone but rather the organization's capacity to maintain and nurture the customer relationship. As maintenance is one of the hallmarks of the RM approach to dealing with the customer (Cambra-Fierro, Melero-Polo, Sese, & van Doorn, 2018; Kingshott, 2006) the empirical findings in this doctoral dissertation provide a clearer indication that the SE based approach to RM can be directed towards students and is also a feature of the student learning experience. This can be seen directly through the role that

interaction quality (IQ) in terms of having positive relational implications for the university-student relationship due to positively influencing COMM (H2=0.608; *p*<0.000), WOM (H3=0.262; *p*<0.000) and VOI (H10=0.153; *p*=0.030), as well reducing student EX intentions (H13=-0.140; *p*=0.32). Since IQ is intrinsic to nurturing relationships (REF) this means that university decision makers need to ensure they consider RM as part of the student learning journey rather than simply a tool to attract students to enroll in the university. University decision makers should also recognize that in addition to the role of RM in nurturing and maintain the relationship, since current students are also able to influence others to join the university through elevated WOM they can also potentially become ambassadors for the university.

5.3.2   Role of student emotional wellbeing in the relationship

Although interaction quality (IQ) is shown to be a key driver in the overall relationship that students have with the university, decision makers also need to be aware that it is also shown as an important driver of student emotional wellbeing (H1=0.551; *p*<0.000). Whilst the need to focus on enhancing student EWB is well documented in the literature (e.g. Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019; Bye, Muller, & Oprescu 2020) these findings indicate the role this construct potentially plays in the context of the overall university relationship. In addition to the obvious effect of students of poor mental health for the individual, making sure that students have elevated EWB should be a priority from the perspective of the role it can play in helping to build the overall student-university relationship. Specifically, the positive impact EWB has on COMM (H4=0.188; *p*<0.000), WOM (H5=0.194; *p*<0.000) and VOI (H7=0.125; *p*=0.030) indicates clearly to managers that if you look after the welfare of the students they in turn will reciprocate this and help look after the relationship. However, the lack of support for the link between EWB and EX intentions (H12: β=-.085, p=.114) should be of particular concern to university decision makers and educators given the data potentially suggests that those students with lower levels of EWB will not leave the university but will continue to study. Managers need to be aware of this eventuality as a continuation of this situation may be problematic if not addressed. Thus in the first instance, mechanisms need to be put in place help identify students with reduced EWB and then additional support structures need to be developed and deployed to improve the wellbeing of these students.

5.3.3 Role of student voice in the relationship

Voice (VOI) is largely depicted in the literature as a constructive behavior (Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Kingshott, Sharma, Sima & Wong, 2020) however the data indicates that when students express VOI directly to the university there is a high likelihood that they will leave the relationship (H11: β=0.403, p=.000). Managers therefore need to recognize that whilst VOI can help universities improve their programs, offerings and service quality, they also need to have internal mechanisms that identify these students and encourage them to continue their studies.

Since the impact of VOI on EX is not supported in the data this could also indicate that the traditional feedback mechanisms available to the student may not be working as effective as they should. Students are then resorting to VOI as the 'final working' before actual leaving the relationship. This means that managers need to look for (or develop) alternatives mechanisms to solicit positive and constructive feedback from students because feedback mechanism that measure the quality of the education package are not likely to be capturing the full picture regards the student learning experience.

Managerially, the findings also indicate that feedback solicited from students are of two types and akin to measuring functional and technical service quality (Brady & Cronin, 2001). More specifically in light of the findings in this doctoral dissertation, students will afford feedback to the university that pertains to the quality of the education (technical) and other one in terms of the quality of the relationships (functional) that contribute to their learning journey. This means that rather than wait for students to express VOI university decision makers need to pre-empt this and take a much more proactive role much earlier. Typically, it was anticipated that poor student EWB would trigger the need to EX but this was not supported in the findings (H12:β=-0.085; p=114), which tends to suggest that students with poor wellbeing are more inclined to 'wait it out' before they EX. If there were no avenues for students to vent their frustrations this EWB is more than likely going to fester and add to the problem later. Once it gets to the VOI stage then this may be too late to address. In effect that means universities need mechanisms in place to not only identify students with poor EWB but these must then simultaneously encourage these students to express VOI that has relational building properties (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007). Doing so would then ensure that VOI on part of the students does not serve as the precursor to EX the relationship. Since VOI can also be negative (Hagedoorn, Van Yperen, Van de Vliert, & Buunk, 1999) the findings in this doctoral

dissertation indicate to decision makers that the key to 'converting' VOI to being constructive in nature (Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Kingshott, Sharma, Sima & Wong, 2020) is the early detection of students with poor EWB. Once these students have been identified, the next step is to ensure that the interaction with them is converted into positive opportunities via elevated IQ with skilled support staff aimed at improving EWB and through that build the relationship.

5.3.4 Role of social capital in the relationship

Previous studies in the education literature show the role that social capital (SC) plays in helping students in the learning journey attain their academic and professional identity (Jensen & Jetten, 2015) as well as achieve academic achievements (Martin, 2009). Whilst this domain of research also shows how students can draw upon SC to help gain access to others in their learning networks (Park & Bowman, 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979) the findings in this doctoral dissertation show how elevated levels of IQ in these networks also help to drive the student relationship. Based on the findings, university decision makers should be aware of the potential role that the various learning networks students associate with during the learning journey are a core element in nurturing the relationship. However, the inference that can be made from the data also is that quality interactions are also potentially transferable to other network contexts, so decision makers need to be aware that these too can help to strengthen the relationship they have with students, teaching and non-teaching staff.

With that in mind, the findings indicate that the university should have more events, social clubs and/or mechanisms available where students can interact with one another and the various university staff. In addition to promoting student associations and guild membership, university decision makers could develop other bodies where students and staff, both teaching and non-teaching, could interact with one another and learn things about each other, and so on. These need to be potentially formalised into the university and thus decision makers would need to provide further support for these mechanisms as the data clearly indicates that they have a potential bearing on the overall relationship with students. These mechanisms can bring students together with their peers but can also be potentially used to bring teaching and non-teaching staff together across the range of learning and non-learning related forums.

That way the university can take advantage of the inherent SC that can be built as well as drawn upon in these forums to help enhance the relationship that not only students have with the university but the relationship that various staff have with their employer. In terms of the

student-learning journey, which can potentially range from 1-7 years, some students will engage with their peers, teaching and non-teaching staff through the whole duration of their learning. For example, doctoral students will engage with their supervisors for the whole learning journey but this can equally be applied to other levels of award if some staff teach at various stages of the program. However, some members of a student's learning network will inevitably vary every semester, whilst some will vary from time to time during their program. For example, some students may leave a learning network for one semester only to return later in their studies, depending on what courses they are studying. Some students (who are friends with others) may stay in the same learning network the whole time of their studies by enrolling in the same course of study.

Although, teaching staff may vary it is most likely that students will get exposure to them occasionally throughout the learning journey. On the other hand non-teaching administrative staff potentially stay in the network for the whole duration. Therefore, this potential blend of exposure students get to one another, teaching and non-teaching staff also means that the structure of that learning network and thus structure of the learning experience in terms of players/actors will change over time. Moreover, when students that extend their studies into different degrees in the same university, such as graduating with a Bachelor of Engineering and then progressing into a Master of Business Administration (MBA), this also means that many the network members will change, but in some instance non-teaching administrative staff may remain the same. Thus in order to take full advantage of the potential relational building capacity of SC inherent in these networks the university needs to develop a more formal structure that can link the various learning and non-learning networks (e.g. guild, social clubs, student associations, etc.).

5.3.5 Precursor variables to student exit

The proposed conceptual model in this doctoral dissertation draws upon the RM approach to building relationships in order to provide managers with a different vantage to help explain potential reasons why students are likely to EX the university relationship. In doing so, it also reveals to university decision makers the relationship they have with their students comprises a complex mosaic of core relational constructs that are also intricately linked to one another that jointly and individually influence the relationship. Conceptual the literature indicated that elevated levels of IQ, EWB, COMM and VOI would help to improve student retention rates by reducing their intention to EX the relationship with the university. However, the empirical

reality captured by the research data paints a slightly different picture that reveals just how complicated and multidimensional these university-student relationships can get. As indicated earlier, the student expression of VOI should be a driver of more robust relationships and that would be anticipated to lower EX intentions but the findings show otherwise (+H11: β=0.404; p=0.032), suggesting other relational factors must also be coming into play. Similarly, elevated levels of student EWB would be expected to reduce the student's EX intentions but this was also not found to be the case (-H12: β=-0.085; p=0.114). On the other hand, both elevated levels of IQ between students, their peers, teaching and non-teaching staff (-H13: β=-0.140; p=0.032) and COMM that students had towards the relationship (-H14: β=-0.348; p=0.000) were found in the data to reduce the student's EX intentions. These two variables affected EX as expected.

However, managers also need to appreciate that whilst both IQ and COMM help build the student relationship by influencing student EX intentions these two core relational elements also serve to influence EWB and VOI in different ways. Specifically, since elevated IQ is shown to positively impact both EWB and (+H1: β=0.551; p=0.000) and VOI (+H10: β=0.153; p=0.030) managers need to be mindful that the 'downstream' relational effects of IQ could in fact have potential negative relational repercussions if decision makers do not take steps to adequately deal with poor EWB and elevate VOI. Moreover, managers need to be aware that since the core relational building block COMM (Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995; Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen, 2001) was not found to influence VOI as anticipated (+H9: β=0.861; p=0.487). It did however positively influence WOM (+H6: β=0.467; p=0.000) but then did not have any positive influence on VOI (+H1: β=-0.052; p=0.015) showing managers that there are some limits to the capacity of COMM to build the student relationship. Expressed differently, managers need to understand that COMM in the student relationship thus potential serves two main purposes, namely reducing the EX intentions of their students and results in them portraying positive messages about the university to others through elevated WOM.

5.4 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Like any empirical study that adopts the same methodological approach and scope undertaken in this doctoral dissertation this study has a number of limitations that future research needs to adopt to have a more through picture. At the time of undertaking this research, the limitations in this research that help to guide future studies relate to the following: (1) focus on Australian universities, (2) focus on single part of the educational service sector, (3) focus one service sector, (4) cross-sectional study design, and (5) examination of one participant in the value chain. Each of these limitations and associated research directions are now discussed in a little more detail.

5.4.1 Australian University Focus

The findings in this research was based upon a national sample of students studying in Australian universities and therefore the ability to generalize the findings of this research to other universities in western and non-western contexts may be limited. Typically, much research around the globe related to the university sector tends to focus on one 'country context' (like this study) but the literature is also abundant with studies that examine the sector across countries (e.g. Backhaus et al., 2020; Liu, Dervin, Xu, & Moloney, 2019). By testing the proposed model in other countries this will help to reduce the 'one-country' perspective taken in this doctoral dissertation. Moreover, this study does view the university-students relationship from the perspective of the RM paradigm. Studies elsewhere indicate the universality of the RM perspective (Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020) suggesting further that a cross-national setting to test the model is a valid proposition. Future research that encapsulates information from other countries might be therefore be considered for a variety of reasons.

First, many other nations participate in the international education market (Marinoni, 2020) so there is a need to examine the RM effects in those context. Second, whilst the Australian economy has a well-established and high quality higher education sector (DESE, 2020) the RM efforts directed towards students in less developed service economies would also benefit from testing the proposed conceptual model in their student-university contexts. Nations that are evolving their service economies may need to model their university-student relationships different to their Australian university counterparts. Such research would help to provide decision makers in universities that operate in less developed countries much needed direction. Finally, whilst the focus was on a national sample of students studying in Australian

universities in one market setting (namely, Australia) many Australian (and other) universities also have offshore campuses (Kleibert, Bobée, Rottleb, & Schulze, 2020). Thus, further studies that test the proposed conceptual model to compare how a university operates a deals with students in their own domestic market and overseas markets, and in particular how this differs across campuses may be beneficial to helping them understand how to recruit and nurture the university-student relationship across learning contexts.

5.4.2 Focused on the higher educational sector

In addition to the Australian context of the study, this research also limits the inferences drawn from the findings to the higher educational sector, more specifically universities. Therefore, to test the overall robustness of the proposed conceptual model future research can focus on other areas of the educational sector. Typically, Australia's education sector also comprises primary and secondary levels of study that service the domestic, and to a lesser extent the international marketplace (DFAT, 2020). Whilst the focus of this research pertained to university educated professional graduates across the various disciplines and levels of award (see table 3.2) this part of the education sector in Australia only comprise one area of the educational system in the country. For instance, there is estimated to be over 1,200 educational institutions in Australia that offer more than 22,000 courses to students (Tornos, 2020) so the scope of educational experiences as well as the student learning journey has the potential to vary quite significantly across each type of provider. In addition, this research did not examine providers that undertake "internal" educational as a formal part of the job (i.e. military, professional bodies, in-house training, etc.).

Moreover, professional bodies that undertake educational activities to ensure university and other graduates meet professional standard requirements and how these relate to the overall student-learning journey was not examined in this doctoral dissertation. However, whilst the learning pedagogies are likely to differ across the different primary, secondary and tertiary levels, to varying degrees the student learning potentially involves multiple interactions with student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff. Thus, future research designed to explore student learning experiences in other types of providers in the education sector will help contribute to a better understanding of the student learning journey across the whole education sector. Furthermore, such studies also means that direct comparison can be made between education provider types in terms of interaction quality and its overall impact on the student learning journey and other variables in the model. Thus further examination of each of these

learning contexts may provide further insights into the ability and/or capacity of the various types of education providers can build and maintain robust relationships with their students.

5.4.3 Single service sector focus

This doctoral research focused on the higher education industry in Australia but never examined other service industries in the economy that involve customers who engage with a variety of stakeholders in the delivery of service value to customers. For instance, whilst the education sector is by far Australia's largest service exporter (DFAT, 2017) the Australian economy is well developed so the services sector comprises over 70 percent of GDP (ABS, 2020) across a wide range of industries that involve customers interacting with others to varying degrees. Typical examples include airlines, banking, education, healthcare, tourism, among others. In these and other service contexts, persons that customers interact with in the value creation process would be slightly different to the higher education context namely fellow customers (students), frontline staff (teaching) and support/backline (non-teaching) but each would still play a role in contributing to the service experience. In service settings there is much literature on service quality (e.g. De Ruyter, Wetzels, Bloemer, 1998; Sharma, Kong, & Kingshott, (2016), and to a lesser extent interaction quality (Choi & Kin, 2013; Laksamana, Wong, Kingshott, & Muchtar, 2013) in building customer relationships.

However, the role that interaction quality plays in helping to drive variables that lead to exit intentions, as proposed in doctoral dissertation, has not been previously tested across varying service contexts. Moreover, the relationship that universities potentially have with their students is largely finite in nature that can potentially range between 1 to 7 years. Whilst drawing upon the relational marketing paradigm to nurture the student relationship is therefore 'capped' timeframe wise, due to the specific nature of the service offered by universities, other services do not necessarily have that constraint as they may have customer relationships for longer timeframes. In B2B service settings for instance it is not unusual for customer relationships to extend for more than 20 years (Kingshott, Sharma & Chung, 2018) so the dynamics in the relationship over such extended periods) may vary in their impact upon the relationships between variables in the model underpinning this doctoral dissertation. For example, the exposure that service customers have to different customers, front-line and backline staff is likely to vary considerably over extended time periods (in comparison to education and across services) and that will inevitably impact on interaction quality over time.

5.4.4 Cross-sectional research design

The cross-sectional nature of the research restricted the analysis to one point in time but university students normally have relationships in their learning journey (depending of their degree of study) from between 1 to 7 years. Whilst this varies on the level of award undertaken (which potentially ranges from studying in a Bachelors' degree through to Doctorate) the length of the relationship students have with the education provider is also contingent upon whether the student is part-time or full-time. Moreover, as students may potentially study all 7 years (up to doctorate full-time) with one education provider and/or change providers for different levels of award (i.e. Bachelor in one institute and Masters in another) this potentially has a bearing on the duration of the relationship. The basic data pertaining to these aspects of the relationship were also captured in the fieldwork (see tables 3.5 & 3.6) but given the study comprised a cross-sectional research design this methodology has limitations. Specifically, given the potential timeframes involved in the university-student relationship, the cross-sectional data clearly cannot fully explain the complex and dynamic nature of the students' learning experiences as this comprises an ongoing learning journey over time.

Hence, following this study up (using the same variables) with further fieldwork using a longitudinal design will be able to help establish if the link between the variables in the model vary with the ebbs and flows over time during the student learning journey. To have valid findings, the data would need to be captured using the same students (to monitor any individual and/or aggregate changes) but given the time constraints of this doctoral study undertaking such a study is not feasible but future studies using the same instrument would be beneficial. Moreover, students that graduate will potentially become active members of the university's Alumni (Iskhakova, Hoffmann, & Hilbert, 2017) so the impact of their experiences gained during the learning journey on the type and intensity of activity undertaken would be most beneficial for the university to understand. Furthermore, Alumni are also potential contributors to current student experiences (Cownie & Gallo, 2020) so further studies could also examine how their own experiences at university helped this Alumni shape the learning experiences of current student. The role that this feedback loop (from Alumni to current students) plays on variables in the conceptual model in this doctoral dissertation would potential help decision makers improve their overall RM efforts directed at students. Whilst such research would requires students in this sample to be followed once they graduate this is would be impractical to do so the best option would be to design studies that factor in Alumni activities and feedback to current students when re-testing the conceptual model offered by this doctoral research.

5.4.5 Range of variables in the proposed model.

Further studies should also consider whether the variables of interest adopted in the model in this dissertation were sufficient to help fully explain their impact on students exiting the relationship they have with the university. For example, this dissertation adopted the perspective that VOI behavior was intrinsically constructive in nature and therefore had positive consequences for the relationship. Although it is common to adopt such an approach (e.g. Kingshott, Sharma, Sima & Wong, 2020) the literature also reveals that VOI can be negative in nature (e.g. Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014) with destructive consequences. Thus, further students might consider factoring this negative facet of VOI behavior in the student-university relationship. Studies with positive/negative VOI could be simultaneously included in future models and/or just having a focus on negative VOI to gauge how destructive it potentially is on the university's RM efforts directed at students. Similarly, the conceptual model did not directly account for trust in the relationship, which is one of the underpinnings of SE theory (e.g. Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In that regard, the implicit assumption was made in this dissertation that student-university relationships would be founded on the presence of trust, so that particular construct was not specifically included in the proposed conceptual model. Future studies might wish to include trust to help further explain the direct impact that trust has on variables of interest and/or student exit intentions. As this limitation could also apply to other SE based variables, future studies might identify and use them to model student-university relationships.

5.4.6   Examine one participant in the value chain

This research only examined the building of the student-university relationships from the perspective of one participant in the value chain, namely higher degree students studying in Australian universities. As indicated throughout this dissertation students need to interaction with their peers, teaching and non-teaching staff during the learning journey, and through that can draw on the inherent SC in those relationships to yield positive outcomes for themselves (Martin Smith, Takewell, & Miller, 2020; Wisneski, Ozogul, & Bichelmeyer, 2017). However, the model can also be contextualized to test the propensity of teaching and non-teaching staff to EX the relationship with the university as a direct consequence of the IQ they receive from one another and students. The literature has highlighted the significance of teaching (Larson, Miller, & Drury, 2020) and non-teaching (Cooper & Barton, 2016) staff wellbeing. Testing the model offered in this doctoral with these two groups as the target sample to help determine the impact that IQ with others has on their EWB and how this translates into the EX intentions of

wither group of employees will provide university decision makers further insights how best to retain their valuable staff.

5.4.7 Potential mediating effects in the conceptual model

The primary aim of this research was to examine the antecedent role that interaction quality (IQ) has in the university student relationship. Accordingly, the IQ construct was conceptualized as the extent of perceived quality that the surveyed students had with fellow students (peers), teaching (faculty) and administrative staff. In that regard, IQ was hypothesized to positively influence the students emotional wellbeing (EW: H1), commitment (COM: H2), word of mouth (WOM: H3), and voice (VOI: H10). The extent of perceived IQ was simultaneously hypothesized to influence their exit (EX: H13) intentions within the relationship students had with the university. In total there were 14 hypothesized paths (of which 10 were supported) in the proposed conceptual model. However, the nature of the hypothesized paths model meant that there were four variables (e.g. EWB, COMM, WOM & VOI) that could potentially act as either fully or partially mediators. However, the focus of research was not to explore how variables could mediate the link between variables of interest in the university-student relationship. As this 'mediation effect' was not reflected in the conceptual discussion (also not expressed in the hypotheses) this represents a further limitation associated with this research. However, since studies elsewhere have shown the mediating effects that employee emotional wellbeing for instance plays between internal service quality and employee performance (Sharma, Kong & Kingshott, 2006) the mediating role that student EWB potentially plays between IQ and WOM; IQ and   COMM; IQ and VOI; and, IQ and EX in the student relationship with the university does warrant further examination. Similarly, the mediating effects of COMM, WOM and VOI could also be the focus in future studies dedicated to exploring the role that RM can potentially play in the university-student relationship.

5.5   CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTION

This doctoral dissertation was specifically designed to explore factors that can help contribute to the student-learning journey and how these potentially affect student exit intentions. The ultimate aim of the research is therefore to help managerial decision makers within Australian universities, and elsewhere, better understand how to address the ongoing challenge of improving student retention rates (e.g. Li & Carroll, 2020; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Shah & Widin, 2010; Tight, 2020). In doing so, as indicated earlier, this doctoral dissertation has highlighted there are a number of contributions that can add to our understanding of the student-university relationship and through that to the education, services and relationship marketing (RM) literatures.

First, it offers the first study of its kind in an Australian university context in terms of the role that interaction potentially plays in relation to the relationship marketing (RM) efforts devoted to help nurture the relationships that university have with their students. According to the earlier empirical work by Morgan and Hunt (1994), this RM perspective should be capable of helping build all types of relationships. This research therefore adds to that thinking by offering another service related context that further demonstrates the universality of RM in building relationships with university students. Given the sample frame comprised students studying across disciplines and all levels of award, as well as having diverse national and cultural backgrounds, this research also provides further evidence of the value of viewing students through the lens of the RM perspective.

Second, the well-established conceptual underpinning of the RM perspective, namely social exchange theory (SET: Homans 1958; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959) and subsequent empirical studies in services marketing and elsewhere in the marketing discipline (e.g. Kingshott, Sharma, Sima, & Wong, 2020; Lambe, Wittmann & Spekman, 2001) are also shown to be a suitable perspective to ground the university-student relationship. This conceptual grounding was also integrated into the well-established theory of social capital (SC: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) and subsequent empirical studies used to help explain aspects of the student-learning journey (e.g. Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Tierney & Venegas, 2006) to reveal how interaction quality (IQ) between students, their peers, teaching and non-teaching staff serves as the key driver in those relationships. Thus, the evidence from the findings indicate that these two conceptual perspectives can work in unison to help explain the student-university relationship. Third, this research offered a comprehensive conceptual model grounded in the

theories of SE and SC and through that integrated aspects of the ELV framework (Hirschman, 1970) to show key variables played in helping to shape the voice (VOI) behavior and exit (EX) intentions of university students in Australian universities. However, the lack of empirical support for the hypothesized negative link between VOI and EX (H11: H11=0.403; p=0.001) does indicate that whilst this form of communication behavior is largely constructive in nature (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007) it also signals that relational matters brought to the service providers attention need to be remedied. If this does not occur then VOI serves as the signal that EX from the overall relationship is imminent.

Finally, since university students both globally and within Australia suffer from poor mental health (Storrie, Ahern, & Tuckett, 2010; Usher, 2020) this doctoral dissertation therefore integrates the role of student EWB into the proposed conceptual model to show that this is also an important facet of the student learning experience. The services literature has begun to highlight the importance of considering customer wellbeing in the provision of services (e.g. Anderson & Ostrom, 2015; Berry, Mirabito, & Baun, 2010) as well as the role that EWB has in the context of internal services that employees receive and the subsequent impact that has on their overall performance (Kong, Sharma, & Kingshott, 2016). This doctoral dissertation adds to this emergent literature by highlighting the important role that IQ plays in helping to shape student EWB (H1: β=0.551; p<0.001) and thus provides empirical support that interactions that service customers have with others highlights the critical role it potentially places on student EWB. This doctoral dissertation thus adds another perspective to the overarching concern in the literature to look after the welfare of students (Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019) and the role that the university's RM efforts can play in that relationship.

In concluding this doctoral dissertation, it would be fitting to bring it to the attention of the reader that the research idea underpinning this piece of work was originally conceived as a direct consequence of the author's personal experiences as an international student going through her own learning journey in Australia. The various interactions that were endured through numerous contacts with fellow students, teaching and non-teaching staff were often at times a source of frustration and great inspiration in my personal learning journey. Whilst the empirical model tested in many ways do reflect my own personal empirical reality as a student, as an educator in the marketing and management disciplines at both the Bachelor and Masters in Australia it also confirms my personal view that all students (irrespective of background) face many of the same challenges needed to succeed in their university studies. With that

personal observation specifically in mind, those managerial decision makers responsible for educating students can now reflect on this research and recognise that there is much more to learning than simply developing and delivering curricula. Rather, the focus should be on better understanding the student as they not only a valuable asset but also offer a mirror image of the educational institution.

5.6   EPILOGUE

In concluding, it is perhaps most fitting to note that the higher education industry globally, like many other industries, is currently facing its greatest challenge in the modern era due to the advent of COVID-19 (Marinoni, van't Land, & Jensen, 2020). This global pandemic has created both a health and economic problem on a global scale never before seen in the modern era and this has subsequently permeated across almost all sectors of the global economy (Sharma et al., 2020). At the time of writing this particular section of this doctoral dissertation [Saturday, 17th October, 2020] there were more than 38.79 million cases of people effected worldwide, and in addition 1.09 million persons across the globe have unfortunately perished due to the disease (John Hopkins University, 2020). As can be expected a growing body of literature has begun (and will continue) to emerge that outlines the consequences of the wide-ranging social and economic upheaval and subsequent challenges facing humankind because of this COVID pandemic. To illustrate the impact of COVID in shaping research in the education sector, using a Google Scholar Search with the keywords "COVID" "Education" [as at Sunday, 11th October, 2020) this generated 751,000 articles. When this basic search was refined to using "COVID" "College" as key words this particular university context search generated 551,000 articles to indicate the extent that this has impacted the global university sector.

Clearly, as the global economy progresses through this Pandemic there will be many domains across disciplines of research related to both the specific context of this doctoral dissertation, other settings shaped by COVID and related events. At the time of enrolling and conceiving this research, through to data collection, data analysis, and for the most part writing up the dissertation, the world did not face the range of challenges afforded by COVID-19. Whilst such an event was unforeseen during most of the author's doctoral learning experience, the findings in this research are also likely to need tempering with the potential consequences of COVID. Rather than embedding these into the limitations and scholarly/managerial implications section of the dissertation, it is worth mentioning a few of those in this section. First, due to the advent

of 'social distancing' as a strategy to curb the growth of the disease (Greenstone & Nigam, 2020) many students are now engaging with the university using online platforms (Dhawan, 2020), either solely or in blended (Nerantzi, 2020) formats. Whilst it is uncertain whether this is likely to continue post-pandemic period one thing is for certain, this has changed the way students (and universities) will need to think about engaging with their student peers, teaching and non-teaching staff, and this is likely to have implications for the nature of interaction between these individuals and/or interaction quality. This will then change the dynamics in the student learning journey and needs to be accounted for (both from a scholarly and managerial perspective), particularly if using online platforms become the norm in the education sector.

Second, the literature has previously shown that the mental health of university students both in Australia (Usher, 2020) and globally is relatively high (Wingert et al., 2020) so the current and future impact of COVID needs factoring into how universities model the relationship with their students. The reason being that COVID induced mental health potentially means that student EWB may potentially play a different role in the university-student relationship, as was tested in the conceptual model offered through this doctoral dissertation. For example, many of the sample included international students (N=61, 14.3%: table 3.2) but at the time of data collection, these students were not restricted to home travel. However, due to the Australian Federal governments' current international travel restrictions (Department of Home Affairs, 2020) many international student that elect to stay in Australia to study are unable to see family and friends back in their home countries. This is likely to add pressure to their learning journey but not reflected in the data, so student EWB may now potentially play a more prominent role on the COMM, WOM and VOI variables in the proposed model. For local students, since there are no restrictions to travel home this potentially means that EWB may lead to higher EX intentions.

Finally, since many persons studying in Australian universities are concurrently employed in the workforce (Christiansen et al, 2019) many students may have their lost jobs due to COVID and/or have suffered economically. The unforeseen economic event stemming from the pandemic may also impact have an on their view of the relationship with the university. For example, in time of economic downturns, such as the recent global financial crisis, the data tends to suggest that university enrolments increase (Eggins & West, 2010) but little is known how that contextually driven commitment to studying translates into the core variables highlighted in the conceptual model proposed in this doctoral dissertation. Similarly, in light

of students losing their jobs or being economically disadvantaged due to COVID-19, how this plays out in the context of pandemic-fuelled economic crisis, was not reflected in the data collected in this doctoral dissertation. Whilst the pandemic is likely to impact on many of the variables in the model (i.e. reduced EWB and increased COMM, etc.) it is still relatively unclear how the current context is going to reflect on all the variables and/or the hypothesised paths in the model. In summary and conclusion, the advent of the COVID-19 global pandemic was not foreseen and thus could not be factored into the data collection phase of this doctoral dissertation. Hence, whilst the above discussion related to its potential effects on university-student relationships is largely conjecture clearly there will be further ongoing studies related to COVID-19 in relation to its effects on both the education and other sectors of countries in the global economy. Thus, in light of the overall findings in this doctoral dissertation and the above commentary related to COVID-19, this hopefully provides scholars and managers alike further inspiration how to respond to this pandemic in a positive manner as they understand how to build and nurture the relationship with students.

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Appendix 1 Questionnaire

Impact of University Experiences on Student-University Relationships

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GENERAL INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

1. **This survey is designed to understand your experience with your current university.**
2. **Please answer all questions in relation to *this university* only.**
3. **Where applicable circle one of the choices for each of the statements in the questionnaire.**
4. **Confidentiality is assured. Information will be used on an aggregate basis only.**

Q1. Please indicate the <u>extent</u> to which you <u>disagree</u> or <u>agree</u> with the following statements regarding the <u>teaching staff</u> at your university, based on your own experience: (Please select one number for each statement).

		STRONGLY DISAGREE						STRONGLY AGREE
1.	I can count on the teaching staff being friendly. ***	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	The attitude of the teaching staff demonstrates their willingness to help me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	The attitude of the teaching staff shows me that they understand my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	I can count on the teaching staff in taking actions to address my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	The teaching staff respond quickly to my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	The behaviour of the teaching staff indicates that they understand my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	I can count on the teaching staff knowing what they need to do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	The teaching staff are able to answer my questions quickly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	The teaching staff understand that I rely on their knowledge to meet my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	I would say that the quality of my interaction with the teaching staff is high.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	Overall, I would say the quality of my interaction with the teaching staff is excellent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q2. Please indicate the <u>extent</u> to which you <u>disagree</u> or <u>agree</u> with the following statements regarding the <u>non- teaching staff</u> at your university, based on your own experience: (Please select one number for each statement).

		STRONGLY Disagree						STRONGLY Agree
1.	I can count on the non-teaching staff at this university being friendly. ***	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	The attitude of the non-teaching staff demonstrates their willingness to help me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	The attitude of the non-teaching staff shows me that they understand my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	I can count on the non-teaching staff taking actions to address my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	The non-teaching staff respond quickly to my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	The behaviour of the non-teaching staff indicates to me that they understand my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	I can count on the non-teaching staff knowing what they need to do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	The non-teaching staff are able to answer my questions quickly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	The non-teaching staff understand that I rely on their knowledge to meet my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	I would say that the quality of my interaction with the non-teaching staff is high.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	Overall, I would say the quality of my interaction with the non-teaching staff is excellent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q3. Please indicate the extent to which you <u>disagree</u> or <u>agree</u> with the following statements regarding your <u>classmates</u> at your university, based on your own experience? (Please select one number for each statement).	STRONGLY Disagree ... STRONGLY Agree
1. I can count on my classmates being friendly. ***	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. The attitude of my classmates demonstrates their willingness to help me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. The attitude of my classmates shows me that they understand my needs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. I can count on my classmates taking actions to address my needs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. My classmates respond quickly to my needs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. The behaviour of my classmates indicates to me that they understand my needs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. I can count on my classmates knowing what they need to do.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. My classmates are able to answer my questions quickly.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. My classmates understand that I rely on their knowledge to meet my needs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. I would say that the quality of my interaction with my classmates is high.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. Overall, I would say the quality of my interaction with my classmates is excellent.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Q4 Please indicate the extent to which you <u>disagree</u> or <u>agree</u> with the following statements regarding your university, based on your own experience? (Please select one number for each statement).	STRONGLY Disagree ... STRONGLY Agree
1. I mention this university to others quite frequently.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. I seldom miss an opportunity to share good news about this university.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. I have only good things to say about this university.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. I am proud to tell others that I use this university.***	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. I feel attached to this university.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. I feel good about my association with this university.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. I am proud to study at this university.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. I have a strong sense of belonging to this university.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Q5. Over the past few weeks, how often has your experience at this university made you feel the following? (Please select one number for each statement).	Never ... All the time
1. Relaxed	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. Calm	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. Contented	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. Optimistic	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. Enthusiastic	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. Cheerful	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Q6. Please indicate the <u>extent to which</u> you disagree or <u>agree</u> with the following statements: (Please select one number for each statement).				STRONGLY Disagree						STRONGLY Agree
1.	Sometimes I think about leaving this university.			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	I am not likely to continue studying with this university.			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	I may consider looking for another university in the near future.			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	I am actively looking for another university.			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	I often make suggestions to teaching staff (e.g. tutors, lecturers etc.)***			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	If I have problems with my study plan, I approach the student advisor.			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	I work with the teaching staff to resolve study-related problems.			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	I often discuss my grades with the concerned teaching staff.			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	I discuss any study-related problems with my classmates. ***			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	I discuss any non-study related problems with non-teaching staff (e.g. student advisor)***			1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q7. What is your Gender Identity? (Please select one only).

[1] Male   [2] Female   [3] Other Gender Identity

Q8. What is your Age (years)? (Please select one only).

[1] 18-22   [2] 23-27   [3] 28-32
[4] 33-37   [5] 38-42   [6] 43-47
[7] 48-52   [8] 53-57   [9] 58-62
[10] 63 and above

Q9. What is your current Level of University Study? (Please select one only).

[1] Graduate Certificate.   [2] Bachelor.   [3] Postgraduate.
[4] Masters.   [5] Doctorate.   [6] Bachelor [Honours].

Q10. At this University how many years have you studied to date? (Please select one only).

[1] 1 year or less.   [2] 2 years.   [3] 3 years .
[4] 4 years.   [5] 5 years.   [6] 6 years.
[7] 7 years.   [8] more than 7 years.

Q11. What is the Major Area of your Course of study? (Please select one only).

[1] Art & Design.   [2] Business.   [3] Computer Sciences
[4] Education.   [5] Engineering.   [6] Health Science & Medicine.
[7] Humanities & Law.   [8] Science.   [9] Other (please specify) _____

Q12. How many Degrees have you already completed? (Please select one only).

[1] None, first degree.   [2] One.   [3] Two or more.

Q13. What is your current Mode of Study? (Please select one only).

[1] Face-to face only.   [2] Fully online.   [3] Blended Learning.

Q14. What is your Student status? (Please select one only).

[1] International student.   [2] Local student.   [3] Local student [interstate].

Q15. What is your Birth Region? (Please select one only).

[1] Australia/NZ. [2] Asia. [3] Europe/United States.
[4] Others.

Q16. What do you regard as your Ethnicity/Race? (Please select one only).

[1] Caucasian. [2] Asian. [3] Other.

Q17. What Language(s) do you speak at home? (Please circle one only).

[1] English. [2] Non English.

Q18. What is your Permanent Residence status? (Please circle one only).

[1] Australia Citizen. [2] Australia PR. [3] Others.

Q19. How long have you lived in Australia? (Please circle one only)

[1] 3 years or less. [2] 4 to 7 years. [3] More than 7 years.

End of questionnaire. Thank you for participating

*** Items removed due to analysis

Appendix 2   Information sheet for participants

Impact of University Experiences on Student-University Relationships

Purpose: This study aims to explore how the various experiences you encounter whilst studying at university has impacted your overall relationship with the university and your studies. Specifically, this research shall identify how the range of classroom and non-class room interactions you have undertaken at university impacts your relationship with the university and your studies.

Researchers: Curtin University, Western Australia is conducting this research. There are no costs attributed to you other than your time to participate in the research.

Participation: We are looking for likeminded individuals to participate in an online survey to share their experiences whilst studying at university, and the impact this has upon their demeanour towards study. The survey should take no longer that 15-20 minutes to complete.

Benefits: All data collected will help understand how the range of experiences that students have during their learning journey. The findings will be used to assist teaching and non-teaching staff at university help better understand the important aspects of student learning experiences, and provide a foundation to help improve such experiences. The research will also shape and inform future research in this important area. Therefore, we are inviting you to participate in the survey to ultimately help improve student experiences whist studying at university.

Risks: There are no known physical, psychological, economic or social risks associated with participating in this study. Your responses are confidential and anonymous and will not be linked to you directly to you or your organization. Your responses will be coded in such a way that all information provided remains strictly confidential.

Access to the information: The study follows very strict national ethics protocols and has been approved by the Curtin University Human Ethics Committee (Number HRE2017-0614).

All research in Australia involving humans is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee. The ethical aspects of this research project have been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee. This project will

be carried out according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). If you have any concerns and/or complaints about the project, the way it is being conducted or your rights as a research participant, and would like to speak to someone independent of the project, please contact the Curtin University Ethics Committee by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au.

Only the research team at Curtin University will have access to the information collected in this research. The panel company will not have access to this data. Any information we collect will be treated as confidential and used only in this project unless otherwise specified.

Storage of information: Electronic data will be password protected and hard copy data will be kept in locked storage. The information we collect in this study will be kept under secure conditions at Curtin University for seven (7) years after the research has ended and then it will be destroyed. The results of this research may be presented at conferences or published in professional journals, and potential range of media outlets. You will not be identified in any results that are published or presented.

Availability of results: A summary of key results will be made available, when the analysis is completed, upon request. You can request this information at any time by emailing the research team. Aggregated results will be published in a range of forums such as academic journals and conferences, the project website, and interested media outlets.

Research participation: Taking part in a research project is voluntary. You do not have to agree to be involved. If you do decide to take part and then change your mind prior to or even during the survey, that is okay, you can withdraw anytime. If you chose not to take part or start and then stop the study, it will not affect your relationship with Curtin University, staff or colleagues. If you chose to leave the study any incomplete data will not be used in the analysis.

Research team: If you have any inquiries about the project or like to discuss any matter further please do not hesitate to contact any of the following research team members:
Professor Piyush Sharma: Piyush.Sharma@curtin.edu.au
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