



## **DOES THE REBRANDING OF BRITISH UNIVERSITIES REDUCE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO ECONOMIC RESOURCES? A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

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**Abstract:** With less government funding, British Universities have identified international students as a critical source of financial income and are using marketing strategies to attract them to the university. This small-scale study will utilize a Critical Discourse Analysis methodological framework to examine the marketing strategies utilized in The University of Manchester International Student web-pages – and will see if this represents a reduction of the international student to a mere economic resource. The examination does highlight an identity construction of the university and the international student that considers the international student an economic resource. However, the university’s effort to offer the broadest possible ‘product’ to its ‘client’ suggests the university is struggling to put together a product that will satisfy a particularly demanding client. Thus, the construction of the international student as an economic resource cannot be considered a reduction.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, marketing strategies, web-page, international students, economic resource.

**Özet:** Devlet desteğinin azalmasıyla, İngiliz üniversiteleri uluslararası öğrencileri önemli bir gelir kaynağı olarak görmeye ve bu öğrencileri üniversitelere çekmek için pazarlama stratejileri uygulamaya başladı. Küçük ölçekli yapılan bu çalışmada Eleştirel Söylem Çözümlemesinin yöntem çerçevesi kullanılarak Manchester Üniversitesi Uluslararası Öğrenci İnternet sayfalarında uygulanan pazarlama stratejileri incelenecek ve bu stratejilerin öğrenciyi sadece ekonomik bir kaynak olduğu görüşüne indirgeyip indirgemediğine bakılacaktır. Araştırmada, üniversitenin, uluslararası öğrencilerin ekonomik bir kaynak olarak görüldüğü bir üniversite ve öğrenci kimliği oluşturduğunun altı çizilmektedir. Ancak, üniversitenin mümkün olduğunca ‘ürünü’ ‘müşteriye’ sunma çabası, talepkar müşterileri memnun edecek ürünleri biraraya getirmeye gayret ettiğini göstermektedir. Dolayısıyla, uluslararası öğrencinin ekonomik kaynak olarak adlandırılması olumsuz anlamda düşünülemez.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Eleştirel Söylem Çözümlemesi, pazarlama stratejileri, web-sayfası, uluslararası öğrenciler, ekonomik kaynak.

### **Introduction**

In 2005, European Union President Juan Manuel Barosso delivered a speech after visiting China and India. He describes the “speed and scale of the changes” (2005: 3) brought on by globalization<sup>1</sup> and the ways in which China and India are successfully adapting to these changes. Barosso states that EU member states must be more flexible and deal with the changes brought on by globalization to remain competitive with China and India. Barosso further states that “economic restructuring” to a knowledge economy” (ibid) is necessary – and cites reform of higher education as being vital. In practice, this restructuring involves less government funding and regulation, and free market principles -making higher education a service to be sold in a competitive market-place (Naidoo, 2003: 250). With less funding,

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<sup>1</sup> Although much debate surrounds the definition of ‘Globalization’, the Macmillan dictionary defines ‘Globalization’ as being “the idea that the world is developing a single economy and culture as a result of improved technology and communications and the influence of very large multinational companies”. See, <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/globalization>

universities are forced to “look for other sources of support and reconsider or redefine their reasons for being” (Askehave, 2007: 724). Universities are “spending more and more time attracting fee paying students” (ibid) in what Askehave refers to as the “marketization of higher education” (ibid: 723). As international students<sup>2</sup> pay significantly higher fees than domestic and other EU citizens<sup>3</sup>, universities are primarily targeting them (Askehave, 2007). Therefore, it is now increasingly important to thoroughly examine “income-generation and the two-way relationship between the HEI<sup>4</sup> and its customers” (ibid). Due to their convenience and information density, universities’ international student web-pages have become one of the most dominant sources for international students to gather information about prospective universities (Nguyen, 2005). Furthermore, such web-pages present universities with an opportunity to construct the identity of the university and the international student (Nguyen, 2005). This study will examine the international student web-pages of The University of Manchester. By concentrating on the linguistic and visual elements of the web-pages, this paper will focus on the marketing strategies of the university and will decipher the extent to which they reduce the international student to an economic resource -or if there are any other dynamics at play. This research will utilize a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, offering an insight into how ideology is manifested in discourse.

### Literature Review

As Glenn Morgan states, modern business is characterized by “serving the customer’s needs through the production of appropriate commodities” (1992: 136). Consequently, marketing is of central importance to modern-day business. A review of the literature shows there are two approaches to analysing marketing practices: the *Positivist approach* and the *Critical approach*. The *Positivist* approach stems from Comte’s argument that “all phenomena are subject to invariable natural laws” (1830-42, 242). *Positivists* consider people to be clear and ‘knowable’ entities – and knowledge of them leads to formulas for successful marketing (Robson & Rowe, 1997). Hunt (1990) suggests a duality between scientific and marketing truths. Influential *Positivist* marketing scholar Kotler (1985) considers marketing to be a neutral tool, used by the marketer to inform the public of what they offer thus allowing them to make an informed decision whether or not they buy the product.

The *Critical* approach rejects the notion of neutrality, seeing marketing as being “a particular way of seeing and ‘doing’ human relationships” which includes “exchange, bargaining, influence and negotiation” (Morgan, 1992: 143). Hidden behind the premise of the freedom to choose, power inequalities are produced and reproduced (Elliot, 1997). Habermas (1971) suggests peoples’ consciousness and understanding affects how they respond to marketing and stresses the importance of understanding the ways people share meanings, how meanings are created and how power is exerted in this process. Braverman *et al* (1974) adopts a Marxist perspective and argues Western economies are characterized by over-production yet must sell their products and make a profit. Consequently, they must persuade the public that they really need their products – despite their negative effects on the environment and social life. Echner & Prasad (2003) adopt a Foucauldian stance – considering the modern world to be “characterized by emerging discourses of power and knowledge” (Morgan, 1992: 151) and examine the effects marketing, as a discourse, has on the way people live and how discourses

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<sup>2</sup> Here, ‘International Student’ refers to students from countries outside the European Union. EU students are not considered ‘international students’. See - <http://www.britishcouncil.org/new/>

<sup>3</sup> For detailed statistics of fees, check -

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/students/internationalstudents/page/0,,2281001,00.html>

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Institution

of power are constructed. They look at third-world tourism marketing discourses and argue that tour companies' brochures focus on neo-colonial myths of the 'unchanged' and 'uncivilized', and consequently broader geopolitical power structures are maintained.

There is little work which pays attention to the visual analysis of marketing strategies (Hansen *et al*, 1998). This is due to a lack of 'scientific' laboratory experiments (Turner, 1990<sup>5</sup>) and the still prevalent *positivism* (Hansen *et al*, 1998). Consequently, a visual analysis remains a relatively underdeveloped methodological tool (*ibid*). Studies that do engage in visual analysis typically focus on visuals in the news media. However, analytic principles applied in such studies can also be extended to studies considering visuals in marketing strategies.

Hansen & Murdoch (1985) examine the visuals of conflict situations – stating images are invariably from behind police lines, and provide a limited point of view that contributes to a distorted perception of such situations. This study considers distortion and how “the camera can lie” (Hansen *et al*: 192). Hansen & Murdoch (1985) analyse a picture in the *Daily Mail* of a masked man in the Toxteth riots<sup>6</sup> under the title, 'The Masked Face of Violence'. They concentrate on the symbolism of images, suggesting this image reinforces the perception that the riots were large-scale outbreaks of vigilante violence. Other studies consider semiotics - “the mechanisms of meaning generation” (Hansen *et al*, 1998: 205). Numerous researchers have attempted to map out the 'grammar' of images. Berger (1991) makes a summary of his interpretations of images. For example, he suggests that a close-up shot of a person's face represents intimacy (*ibid*: 26-27).

As for literature considering the marketization of universities, in terms of behaviour, it is defined as, “the adoption of free market practices in running schools” (Kwong, 2000: 89). In 1995, Fairclough stated the relevance of marketization on discourses of university education. He examined four undergraduate prospectuses of different universities and concluded that universities have undergone a historical shift in their primary objectives. He stated that the prospectuses are primarily “designed to 'sell' the university and its courses to potential applicants in the context of a competitive market” (1995: 156). In 1998, Connell & Galasinski identify the salience of corporate terms such as 'customers', 'clients', and 'corporate identity' in the discourses of universities' discourse.

A study by Rhee & Danowitz Sagaria (2004) examines the portrayal of international students in an American academic journal and suggests that even scholars bear nationally held stereotypes and that globalization furthers social inequalities. Through imperialistic language international students are reduced to economic resources to benefit the USA. Askehave's study (2007) examines prospectuses for international students from universities in Scotland, Japan, Australia and Finland. Then it closely examines how a prospectus from Scotland's university of Stirling creates an image of the university and the prospective international student – concluding that prospectuses can be characterized as offering products (courses/university experience) to clients (international students). This move to marketization does not necessarily benefit students or university staff.

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<sup>5</sup> Cited in Hansen et al , Mass communication Research Methods, p190

<sup>6</sup> The 'Toxteth riots' refers to a civil disturbance in Liverpool in 1981 – arising from tensions between the local police and the local black community. See - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toxteth\\_riots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toxteth_riots)

Robertson's study (2007) considers European universities' response to the Lisbon Strategy – and their efforts to re-brand themselves to become more attractive to international students. It analyses discourses put out by the European commission on the Lisbon Strategy, stating that most international student's rate universities in the USA higher than European universities due to a lack of European unity on issues such as student fees. Therefore, to become more attractive to international students, Europe must become more cohesive and unified. Despite the usefulness of these studies' insights, there is a dearth of work examining the effects of marketing strategies expressed through the linguistic and visual elements of university web-pages for international students.

## Methodology

### Methodological Approach

This study will utilize a Critical Discourse Analysis (hereon CDA) methodology. This approach rejects the notion that discourses reflect 'reality', seeing discourses as being merely a reflection of the *ideology* of a certain group – although it may be in the perceived interests of a group for a discourse to appear a 'reality' (see e.g. Fairclough, 1989). CDA considers discourses to be socially constructive, backed and reinforced – thus creating and shaping 'reality' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). CDA sees language and discourse as “a form of social practice” (Fairclough, 1989: 18) and a deeper, critical understanding of this will highlight unequal social relations, which can allow for successful intervention (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). I will adopt a critical Foucauldian perspective of marketing, it being “a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men” (1979: 5). Therefore, marketing “is to be seen as an all-embracing conception of social control” (Johnson, 2001: 269). As CDA adopts this Foucauldian view of power (O'Regan, 2005: 574<sup>7</sup>), it is a suitable methodological approach to examining the construction of social relations between the university and international student.

To an extent, the linguistic and visual analysis of a text is undermined by the consideration of what surrounds the discourses – the context and author's ideology. In much CDA work, historical and contextual ambiguities are presented as clearly 'commonsense' or 'fact'. Textual and visual interpretations are too often politically not 'scientifically' motivated. Even Fairclough states that ideology cannot be directly, mechanically understood due to the unclear nature of the relationship between ideology and textual analysis (1995: 71). In interpreting discourse, the author must make a *choice* based on his/her ideology. The salience of the authors' ideology is generally considered 'unscientific' and is what Blommaert refers to as the “methodological Achilles' heel” (1997: 74) of CDA. Furthermore, CDA studies are often limited by the assumption that there is necessarily an uneven power relation expressed through discourse to be highlighted and undermined (Schegloff, 1997).

### Analytical Procedure

The analysis consists of two sections. The first section of the analysis examines the layout, images and written text of the main international student web-page of The University of Manchester. This study will consider visual signs as a tool to reinforce what the text aims to achieve – and a tool that has “a grammar of its own, akin to the grammar of music”

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<sup>7</sup> In this paper, O'Regan states “The view of power which CDA adapts from Foucault is one in which power is conceived negatively as domination, manipulation and control. This negative view of power is privileged over an alternative 'positive' view of power in which power is viewed as productive, constructive, and knowledge forming.”

(Kandinsky, 1977<sup>8</sup>) thus are worthy of examination. For the visual analysis, the insights of Kress & van Leeuwen (2004) will be utilized. Many of their insights are firmly based upon Halliday's *Metafunctional Semiotic Theory* (1985). Here, he states all communication systems simultaneously perform the following functions;

(i) *Ideational* – to create the identity of the participants

(ii) *Interpersonal* – to create the relationship between the participants and the viewer

(iii) *Textual* – to create emphasis and salience in a cohesive way

Utilizing Kress & van Leeuwen's insights and seeking to identify Halliday's three *functions* in the layout and images of the web-pages will help to decipher if the international student to an economic resource for the university. The second section of the analysis will examine the written text and image in the 'Why Manchester?' web-page of The University of Manchester. For this examination, Halliday's insights from his (1985) work *Systemic Functional Grammar* will be used to decipher the above mentioned *functions*. Halliday's work offers an in-depth analysis of the functions of lexico-grammatical features and how they are used to represent the roles and relationships of the participants of a text.

## Data Analysis

### Data Collection

This study will analyse the main international student web-page and the 'Why Manchester' web-page of The University of Manchester. These web-pages are primarily intended to be sources of information for prospective international students. The main web-page is of central importance to the marketing strategy and the identity construction of the university and international student – thus is worthy of critical examination. The 'Why Manchester?' page shows an in-depth attempt to construct 'Manchester' as a desirable destination for international students and is therefore important to be critically examined. The web-pages of this university were chosen as The University of Manchester is the largest recruiter of international students in the UK<sup>9</sup>. Their web-pages will be accessed by a significant number of prospective international students and the marketing strategies will set a significant precedent in the discursive practices of other universities seeking to attract international students (Askehave, 2007) – thus making them worthy of critical examination.

### Ethics

As the data to be analysed is public and freely available for any internet user to view, there are no major ethical issues (such as viewing permission) to consider.

### Analysis 1: The main International Student Web-page

In the top left corner of the web-page is the Corporate Visual Identity (hereon CVI) of The University of Manchester (see Appendix 1). The role of a CVI is to "present the central idea of the organisation with impact, brevity and immediacy" (Olins, 1995: 2) to achieve corporate success. The most salient part of the CVI is a purple text-box – the dark purple emits a strong authoritative quality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2004). In the text-box is the word 'Manchester' in capital lettering with all but three letters in bold white. The letters "EST" are in a golden colour and underneath is the year "1824" – informing the viewer that the university was

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<sup>8</sup> Cited in G. Kress & T. van Leeuwen, *Reading images: the grammar of visual design*, p227

<sup>9</sup> See - [http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/statistics\\_he.php](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/statistics_he.php)

established in 1824. The warm golden colour suggests that it was established in a ‘golden-age’ and it seeks to show how as an organization it has retained much of its historicity. To the bottom left of the purple text-box are the words ‘The University of Manchester’ in a light grey colour. The use of this light colour suggests it is not the main focus. However, this feature plays two important roles. First, is a literal one – it clarifies the full name of the university. Second, it works as a symbolic ‘vector’ which indicates directionality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2004). Its vertical orientation symbolises positivity, innovation and progressiveness. This CVI shows how The University of Manchester creates its identity as an authoritative, historical yet positive and forward thinking organization.



A look below the CVI shows this web-page to be a *multimodal* text (ibid) – a combination of text, text-boxes, hyper-links and images. In the centre of the web-page are four small photos. Descending from top to bottom, they are of “international leader”, “international student”, “lecturer”, and “UK map”<sup>10</sup>. These pictures form a vertical line which acts as a dividing line between two other sections. To the right of the small photos is some textual information with bold headings above one sentence of information and between one and three hyper-links. To the left of the four small photos/dividing line are three boxes. Two smaller text-boxes (‘find out more’ and ‘latest news’) are in light purple and light blue colours. Above these two text-boxes is a larger composite text-box - including text and an image. The text is in the left side of the box and is in white coloured fonts with a dark-purple background – the same shade as the dominant colour of the CVI, while the image is in the right side. Here the use of colour performs a *textual function*: the gradually deepening shade of purple draws the viewers’ attention to the key area - the composite text-box. In addition, two of the above mentioned smaller images in the centre of the web-page are of international students facing the direction of the composite text-box – further increasing its salience.

The text section of the composite text-box performs an *ideational function*. Under the bold heading “International” is the statement, “We welcome students from over 180 countries worldwide”. Here, the university is the agent (“we”) that actively performs actions that benefit (welcome) a broad range of people (students from “180 countries worldwide”). In this sentence, the participants are the university as ‘doer’ and the international student as the passive ‘beneficiary’ (Halliday, 1985: 293). The verb ‘to welcome’ suggests the university offer warm and personable support to the international student which will help them to adapt. This shows a departure from the traditional ‘act’ of a university – as there is no suggestion of any ‘act’ related to academia. It suggests the main challenge for the international student is not academic, but to adapt to a new environment.

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<sup>10</sup> When the cursor is held on the photo, these descriptions are given.

The image in the composite text-box shows the construction of the international student's identity (see Appendix 2) – performing an *ideational function*. A “group of international students”<sup>11</sup> are the main ‘participants’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2004) of this image. Here, international students represent a group of people from various ethnic backgrounds, perhaps between 18 and 30 years old. They are all smiling – suggesting they are happy and enjoying their time as an international student at this university. They are all engaging in physical contact – suggesting they are part of sociable and close-knit community perhaps with shared goals and experiences. The students are all wearing dark purple t-shirts – the same shade as the university CVI. This not only adds to the salience of the image on the web-page, but also implies an affinity between the university and international student. As at least four of the students are wearing what appear to be name-tags, it implies some form of social function in which they get to know each other. Here, the international students are constructed as being a young, multi-national, and happy group who have a close affinity with the university.

All of the students are facing in the same direction – looking directly at the viewer. Kress & van Leeuwen (2004) state that such direct contact is significant as it shows an attempt to address the viewer and directly communicate their message in a personal way. They also state significance of the length of shot. This image is a ‘medium shot’ which is taken from a distance of roughly two meters and shows around half of the body of the participants. This signifies a personal relationship being set-up (Berger, 1991) between the international students and the viewer. The relationship in this image has a strong *interpersonal* (Halliday, 1985) significance in that it communicates to the viewer the fun and enjoyment that can be had at the university. In the background of the image is a red-brick building which resembles a modern university building. This suggests they are engaging in some form of fun, sociable activity on the university grounds. This appears to represent the university as the ‘enabling’ participant – allowing the international student to engage in fun, social activities that make it possible for the student to have a fun experience. Again, the emphasis is on the social not academic benefits – with the university making this possible.

### **Analysis 2: The ‘Why Manchester?’ Web-page**

This web-page offers the prospective international student reasons why he/she should choose to go to The University of Manchester. This page is primarily concerned with constructing the identity of the university – yet this construction has implications for the international student which will be examined.

Written text dominates this web-page, yet before this is considered, the one composite text-box image in this page will be examined. In the top right corner of the page is a composite text-box with the heading “The right choice...”. This brief declarative sentence appears to be a statement of a fact – as if to state the obvious, that this university is necessarily the best option for the international student. The three full-stops suggest that there is more information to follow, a justification for this bold statement. Underneath the bold heading is an image (see Appendix 3). This is an image of the 19<sup>th</sup> century built John Owens Building<sup>12</sup>. The front of this is grand Victorian building is covered with Virginia creeper – a light green colour which ascends to a warm red. In the background the building's tall spire is visible which adds to the traditional feel. It is a very clear and blue sky which creates an idyllic tone. In the left and right side of the image's foreground are some dark green trees and some colourful flowerbeds at the bottom of the foreground. This image depicts the university as being a historical,

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<sup>11</sup> When the cursor is held on the photo, this description is given.

<sup>12</sup> This description is given when the cursor is held over the image.

grand, naturally beautiful institution – that is particularly warm and welcoming. The image has a soft focus and rather saturated colours. This, according to Kress & van Leeuwen (2004), works to lower *modality*. Modality refers to the ‘truth-value’ or ‘credibility’ of an image. Hence, in this image the university offers not ‘what is’ but ‘what might be’ (ibid: 159) to the international student. The university offers the international student access to a rather vague notion of a welcoming, grand, beautiful institution.

Underneath the image is a verbal caption with the declarative sentence; “The University of Manchester has a distinguished history and exciting agenda for the future.” The adjective “distinguished” to describe its history and “exciting” to describe its direction for the future show that, as with the CVI, the university is keen to identify itself as being a historical institution to be held in high esteem – yet is also forward-thinking and progressive – thus being ‘the right choice’ for international students.

As for the written text, there are five bold headings in a large font with text underneath suggesting reasons for choosing Manchester. The top heading is in larger font than the other headings and its details are in bullet-points – in contrast to the other headings which do not use bullet points. This serves the *textual function* of adding salience to this section. In this section, all of the seven bullet-points are declarative sentences –stating facts about ‘Manchester’. ‘Manchester’ is not the agent in any of the seven bullet-points. The first bullet point is “The UK's largest single-site university” and the second bullet-point begins “The UK's most popular university”. The third-person verb ‘is’ has been omitted – yet it is now clear that the ‘Manchester’ being referred to is The University of Manchester. In this section, the most salient aspect of the ‘product’ is not the city of Manchester or any social benefits it can facilitate – but the University itself.

There are four verbs in this section; “receiving”, “was rated”, “was placed”, and “is”. The first three verbs are in the passive voice – the university is not the agent but the passive receiver. The university ‘received’ the most applications *from* undergraduates, the university “was rated” third in the UK for “research power” *by* the 2008 “Research Assessment Exercise”, and “was placed” highly *by* “the 2008 Shanghai Jiao Tong Ranking”. The agent of the sentence with the fourth verb “is” is not the university – but the ranking increase. The use of passive verbs to inform the viewer of its merits suggests the university constructs its identity based on the actions of other sources - what Halliday refers to as *attributional processes*. These clauses contain two participants: the university and the external participants. The passive construction of these clauses serves the *ideational function* of the university being domestically and internationally recognized – thus indirectly serving the *interpersonal function* of enticing the international student to the university.

The remainder of this web-page is made up of four more sections with the bold headings - which will now be examined. The first sentence under the heading “Manchester – a unique university in a unique city” states the university is “world renowned for its academic and research excellence.” The use of the third-person singular verb “is” shows a continued use of passive verbs to describe the reputation of the university. The section continues the use of passive verbs – stating the university “was rewarded”, “our graduates” are “in demand” by the “world’s top employers”, and “The high quality education offered in the UK” is “recognized around the world”. By appealing to the acts of external participants, this section performs the *ideational function* of constructing the university based on its widespread recognition. This, by implication, makes the international student a third participant and performs the *interpersonal function* of making the viewer a potential ‘beneficiary’ – persuading them to into what the



widespread reputation brings. The next heading is “Working together” with the first sentence using another passive verb to refer to when the university “was created”. This section is the first example, in this web-page, of the university being used as the actor “We” with an active verb “are able to offer”. Here, for the first time in this web-page, the university constructs itself as the direct ‘enabler’ and the international student as the direct ‘beneficiary’. The result of the university’s action, the international student can study “a broader range of interdisciplinary research areas”. However, the *textual* placement of this section takes much of its salience away – suggesting the university primarily seeks to focus on the acts of outside participants. The penultimate heading is “Your future” representing a direct appeal to the viewer. It describes its “degree programmes” as “career-orientated”, yet validates this claim by referring to outside actors – stating the programmes were in part designed by “industry and commerce”. So due to a process between the university and “industry and commerce”, the international student can be the ‘beneficiary’ and “gain the skills needed to progress”, “broadening your experiences”, be prepared “for the world of work”, and increase “your job prospects”. Finally this section states that “Employers know” of the “high standard” of graduates of this university, and refers to an accolade the university’s Careers service received. Once again an appeal to external participants is used to perform the *ideational function* of constructing the university in a manner that will perform the *interpersonal function* of enticing the viewer to become one of its international students.

The final section lists its “World-class facilities” as being: “Observatory”, “Museum”, “Theatre”, and “Gallery”. These could be used for social and academic purposes. The final sentence shows the university as actor – “We also invest heavily” in technology and state-of-the-art equipment”. Here, the agent is the university and the process is their endeavour to improve its “facilities and cultural assets”. This performs the *ideational function* of constructing the university as a traditional yet forward-thinking institution in which social and academic thirsts can be quenched, and the *interpersonal function* of making the viewer interested in what the university can offer.

## Discussion

This study was an attempt to decipher the extent of which the rebranding of British universities reflects a reduction of international students to economic resources – via a Critical Discourse Analysis of the written text and visual elements of The University of Manchester’s international student web-pages. The first significant aspect examined was the university’s conscious decision to use its CVI – instead of its university crest (see Appendix 4). A crest typically represents medieval nobility and was traditionally the form of identification for most British universities (Melewar & Akel, 2005). At the bottom of this university’s crest is the motto in Latin: “Cognito, sapientia, humanitas”. This translates to ‘knowledge, wisdom, humanity’<sup>13</sup>. However, as Bodoh & Mighall (2002: 10) state, crests are now considered “inappropriate, slightly dishonest and just a bit naff”. The decision to use the CVI rather than crest bears striking resemblance to The University of Warwick’s decision which was because the crest “does not reflect Warwick’s modern and entrepreneurial spirit and character” (Melewar & Akel, 2005: 46). The University of Manchester’s use of a CVI suggests a need to have ‘customers’ buy their ‘product’ – thus representing itself in a way that reflects their modern identity – as a business striving to promote its product thus achieving corporate success. The ‘product’ they seek to display is entrance to an authoritative yet forward-thinking institution.

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<sup>13</sup> According to the Wikipedia entry for ‘The University of Manchester’ - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University\\_of\\_manchester](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_manchester)

This suggests the university is shifting its identity from being an institution that enlightens young minds, to a business seeking to make capital gain. This adds further weight to Askehave's suggestion that universities are primarily keen on "developing marketable 'products' while focussing less on what used to be the civic mission of higher education: the teachings of the great thinkers, human development, and the creation of non-utilitarian knowledge" (2007: 724). The findings also seem to show a demonstration of what Bonewits & Soley suggest in their study of The University of Michigan's curricula – claiming it is based more on "occupational success and pleasing student "consumers" than on furthering the liberal arts and intellectual growth" (2004: 89).

The most salient part of the main page is the composite text-box. In the text section of this box, the university constructs its identity as being the caring 'welcomer' of international students. They seek to enable the international student to settle into life in a foreign country and have the best study abroad 'experience' possible through enjoying social activities. The image of this composite text-box constructs the identity of the international student as being young, multi-national, happy, and having a close affinity to the university. This shows an emphasis on the social rather than academic benefits of being an international student – rather than increasing their academic skills, international students can make good friends and have fun at this university. A dynamic is set up in which the university is 'enabler' and the international student is the 'beneficiary'. Askehave (2007) finds a similar dynamic in his analysis of The University of Stirling's prospectus yet sees a stronger emphasis on the academic facilities the university can offer.

While the image in the 'Why Manchester?' page still emphasises its role as the 'welcomer' of international students, its identity construction is strikingly different to that of the main web-page. Here, the university constructs its identity as a historical, naturally beautiful (as well as welcoming) institution - suggesting the university is trying to offer another 'product' to the same 'client'.

The main section of this page is the textual 'Why Manchester?' section – which focuses on what the university can offer (including facilities and accommodation), successful graduates, and, in particular, its widespread reputation. Its repeated use of *attributional processes* – passive verbs to describe accolades given by external participants - indirectly makes the international student a 'beneficiary'. By introducing external participants who highly value the university's 'product', becoming an international student of this university enables them to 'buy into' this reputation thus making it a worthwhile 'investment'.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study suggest that international students are indeed considered economic resources. This complies with Fairclough's characterization of universities main objective being "to 'sell' the university and its courses to potential applicants in the context of a competitive market" (1995: 156). As with Askehave's study, this university is shown to construct its identity as the 'enabler'. The University of Manchester, however, offers several different 'products' –suggesting a struggle to create a 'product' broad enough to fulfil the needs of a demanding international student. There is a sense of desperation to dissuade the international student from other universities and to invest in this one - which implies much competition between universities. With so much choice as to the best 'product', the international student can demand what they consider to be the 'best university experience' on offer. Despite being considered an economic resource, the international student cannot be

considered to be in a position of inferiority as they have the power to choose the university offering the 'product' that best fulfils their demand.

With the highest number of international students in Britain, The University of Manchester's focus on social benefits may represent a move away from the 'capitalisation of knowledge' (Etzkowitz, 2004) and providing a new focus for other British universities to adopt. Aside from the above mentioned methodological limitations, there are also some practical limitations restricting the extent to which these findings can be generalized – namely the small-scale nature of the study. This study only considers two web-pages of one university website. A larger scale study which compares the international student web-pages to the pages intended primarily for host-national students would decipher whether only international students are considered economic resources – or if this consideration stretches to host national students. Furthermore, a study comparing international student web-pages of several universities would show variation and similarities in universities' consideration of international students – allowing for broader generalizations to be made – and institutional idiosyncrasies to be highlighted.

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The University of Manchester's International Student Web-pages:

Main web-page: <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/international/>

'Why Manchester?' web-page: <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/international/manchester/>

## Appendix 1

The University  
of Manchester

MANCHESTER  
1824

Appendix 2





### Appendix 3



Appendix 4

