CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH APPROACH

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CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH APPROACH

2.1 Introduction

Cresswell (2007) asserted the importance of illustrating the research approach as an effective strategy to increase the validity of social research. The major part of this chapter is the presentation of the research approach. The research adopted a qualitative research approach. The research design was influenced by this decision as discussed in section 2.2. According to Crotty (2007), there are four stages in social research (section 2.3): epistemology (section 2.4); theoretical perspective (section 2.5); methodology (section 2.6); methods (section 2.7). Discussion of these stages in this thesis was followed by clarifying the sampling techniques adopted in this research (section 2.8). Accessibility was crucial in this research and its importance and its influences were identified in section 2.9. A pilot study was undertaken in the case study methodology (first phase of research) and this is discussed in section 2.10. Finally, data analysis is discussed in section 2.11, validity and reliability issues in section 2.12, generalisability in section 2.13 and the chapter summary (section 2.14).

2.2 Qualitative Research Design

The differences between qualitative and quantitative research have been explained by a number of different authors (e.g. Maxwell, 1998; Thomas, 2003; Corbetta, 2003). Maxwell (1998: 70) pointed to the key criteria for qualitative research design:

*In a qualitative study, the activities of collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research*
question, and identifying and dealing with validity threats are usually going on more or less simultaneously, each influencing all of the others. In addition, the researcher may need to reconsider or modify any design decision during the study in response to new developments or to changes in some other aspect of the design.

Furthermore, he disagreed with a linear research design model. Bickman et al. (1998) supported his opinion (see Figure 2.1). Corbetta (2003) demonstrated that qualitative research is open and interactive and observation precedes theory whereas quantitative research is structured and theory precedes observation. However, Corbetta (2003) and Maxwell (1998) stated the influence of adopting a qualitative approach on all phases of research design; Crotty (1998) disagreed with them and narrowed these differences to the level of methods. Different scholars (e.g. Maxwell, 1998; Corbetta, 2003) have identified differences between qualitative and quantitative research. In conclusion, one of the key issues differentiating between qualitative and quantitative research approaches is the nature of data. In quantitative, it is hard, objective and standardized but in qualitative, it is soft, rich and deep (depth vs. superficiality) (Corbetta, 2003). Maxwell (1998) and Bickman et al. (1998) added the interactivity to these features of qualitative research. In this research, the nature of data needed was rich and deep to be able to accommodate the researcher’s aim. This richness of information was necessary to identify the current practices of hoteliers and EDCs companies which will be reflected in designing an applicable EDC management model.
In this research study, a qualitative research approach was applied. The study aimed to investigate the current issues facing hoteliers in relation to their exploitation of EDCs to develop an EDC performance evaluation toolkit for hoteliers. This aim will be achieved through the following objectives:

1- Undertake a critical review of literature on different electronic distribution channels (EDCs) applied in hotels and the issues facing hoteliers in relation to EDC exploitation and EDC evaluation.

2- Critique the hospitality distribution environment to explore the current and future distribution channels and the interaction between channels.
3- Investigate the current issues experienced by affiliated and non-affiliated hotels in Wales in their exploitation of EDCs and synthesise best practice into an EDC evaluation flowchart.

4- Discuss the EDC evaluation flowchart and the key issues experienced by the hoteliers with an expert panel comprising academics and an industry panel to produce a final EDC management model.

5- Develop the final EDC management model into an EDC performance evaluation toolkit aimed at addressing the current issues facing hoteliers in relation to their exploitation of EDCs.

Maxwell's (1998) model for ‘contextual factors influencing research design’ (figure 2.2) was used to inform the research design which was an interactive design in which the next stage of the research was fine-tuned as a result of the outcome of the previous stage.

Maxwell (1998) identified research questions at the centre of his model with four main factors emerging as spokes from the centre: purposes; methods; validity; conceptual concept. Around these elements he identified a plethora of contextual factors influencing the research design (see Figure 2.2).

Maxwell (1998) distinguished between the main factors (which he called ‘the components of the interactive model’: purpose; conceptual context; research questions; methods; validity) and environmental factors (including: ‘personal and political goals’; ‘perceived problems’; ‘personal experience’; ‘existing
Of the factors impacting on research design he identifies ‘funding’ as a significant element influencing any research methods and the ‘purpose’ of the research. This research was funded by the Egyptian government which offered a research project scholarship on certain topics. Funding also affected research methods as the researcher was not able to trial the EDC performance evaluation toolkit (which was produced at the end of phase two and fulfils objective five) with hoteliers. However, during data collection in phase two, access proved to be a major problem and it took around eight months to resolve the access issue by which time the Egyptian government funding was very close to finishing.
‘Ethical standards’ were adopted in this research through coding all participants’ names and coding the name of their hotels in the discussion chapters. It also affected the research ‘aim and objectives’ and ‘methods’, as any unethical methods or practices were avoided. ‘Personal and political goals’ were modified to be ‘personal goals’ since there are no political goals in this research. The ‘personal goals’ were to: obtain the PhD to enhance the researcher’s personal career in Egypt; gain further experience in research methods; learn more about EDC and the issues behind their relationship with hotels. The researcher is currently in an academic career and needs these qualifications to be promoted and continue his research in Egypt.
The ‘participant concerns’ were to develop a management model for enhancing EDC exploitation and effectiveness in hotels, which could be used in the future in Egypt. The researcher’s personal interest in conducting this research in the UK was the advanced level of electronic distribution applications in the UK hotel market, which can be clearly seen in the ability of non-affiliated hotels to challenge affiliated hotels (Lim and Huang, 2005). Moreover, adoption of electronic distribution has a much longer history in the UK than in the Egyptian hotel sector (especially in non-affiliated Egyptian hotels). Another reason was the presence of many head offices of EDC companies and chain hotel headquarters in the UK which were presumed to be more accessible to a UK based researcher.

‘Perceived problems’ was the main reason the Egyptian government sponsored this scholarship. Egyptian hotels have suffered exploitation by mega travel wholesalers and electronic distribution represents an opportunity to strengthen the Egyptian hotels’ position in confronting these mega wholesalers (Awad, 1998; Buhalis, 2003; O’Connor and Piccoli, 2003; Varini and Murphy, 2006). ‘Personal experience’ influenced the ‘conceptual context’. The researcher has worked previously in different hotels and has taught on various hospitality modules in Egypt. This experience enabled the researcher to identify the critical importance of having an effective management model and an evaluation toolkit to deal with EDCs.
Maxwell (1998) did not draw a link between ‘pilot’ and ‘methods’. The results of the pilot study affected the selection of methods which were ultimately used and removed other methods which had been planned to be used. The pilot results suggested that it was unnecessary to distribute self-administered questionnaires to front office and marketing staff as it was the hotel managers and marketing managers who were aware of the EDC management practices under study and in some cases were the only people responsible for dealing with EDCs in the hotel.

Maxwell’s (1998) model neglected to include ‘commercial confidentiality’ (or in other words ‘accessibility’), which became a critical issue in this research. ‘Accessibility’ influenced the selection of the methods in the beginning of the research design and affected whom to be contacted and which documents could be analysed. In the early stages of the research, the researcher intended to obtain financial documents from different hotels to include in the document analysis. This documentary analysis was soon restricted to websites as the researcher encountered universal refusal to requests to obtain documents relating to the amounts each channel gets as commission from the hotels. This was clear at CH1 hotel and HMC1 hotel.

‘Accessibility’, which is discussed by Bickman et al. (1998) in their model (figure 2.1), this proved to be a very critical matter in this research. A low response rate in the second phase obliged the researcher to enlarge the sample and slightly change the methods. The researcher developed a self-
administered survey (questionnaire) which was distributed instead of holding a series of semi-structured interviews with EDC managers; chain hotel headquarters and marketing consortia head offices. Semi-structured interviews were used with an expert panel and non-affiliated hoteliers. The expert panel was very cooperative and responded during the ENTER conference, despite their time constraints.

The applied model is presented in figure 2.3 which includes these neglected issues and illustrates the contextual factors which influenced this particular research design. Some factors mentioned in Maxwell’s (1998) model were not used or were modified in this research as it reflected a different nature of research. ‘Research questions’ was replaced with ‘aim and objectives’ since this research did not have a ‘research questions’ (see Figure 2.3). ‘Thought experiments’ have not been listed in the modified model. ‘Personal style’ was merged with ‘researcher skills’ since listing them separately could confuse the reader. ‘Researcher skills’ affected this research’s methods as the researcher was familiar with ‘interviews’ as he had used them previously in his research. Colours were used to distinguish between the modified and contributed links to Maxwell’s model and his original factors (see key symbols in fig. 3.2).
In this study the nature of data needed is rich and deep to achieve the overall aim and to identify the current picture of the main issues. For all these reasons a qualitative approach will be used to achieve the study aim.

2.3 Research Stages

One of the most difficult things about understanding research design is that scholars disagree about the name, the order and the nature of research stages. Disagreement was very clear between Crotty (2007) and Saunders et al. (2007). Saunders et al. (2007) classified research into six stages and labelled the model which presented them as ‘the research onion’ (Figure 2.4). Saunders
et al. (2007) divided the research to include: philosophies; approaches; strategies; choices; time horizons; techniques and procedures. On the other hand, Crotty (2007) narrowed them down to be: epistemology; theoretical perspective; methodology; methods.

**Figure 2.4: The Research ‘Onion’**


Another issue was obvious in Saunders et al. (2007). They mixed ‘epistemology’ and ‘theoretical perspectives’ since they classified ‘positivism’ and ‘subjectivism’ as philosophies. Crotty’s (2007) classification of research stages was clearer and distinguished between ‘epistemology’ and ‘theoretical perspective’. Crotty’s (2007) classification was more helpful in justifying any researcher’s decisions in selecting ‘epistemology’; ‘theoretical perspectives’;
‘methodology’ and methods since they are related to each other. Crotty’s classification was adopted in this research (figure 2.5).

![Figure 2.5: Research Main Stages]

Adopted from Crotty (2007).

### 2.4 Thesis Epistemology

This research adopts ‘constructionism’ as its epistemological perspective which is seen to be consistent with the research nature and its aim and objectives. This research did not just describe what is found as would be consistent with objectivism and did not create something out of nothing as would be done in subjectivism (Crotty, 2007). This research was built on a critical review of literature to develop an EDC management model through investigating current
key issues facing non-affiliated and affiliated hoteliers. The ‘constructionist’ approach was clear in these objectives.

According to ‘constructionism’ (Crotty, 2007), the meanings of these managerial issues – which were highlighted in the literature review could differ between human beings. This assumption underpins this research, thus the main issues related to EDCs in hotels could be different between non-affiliated hotels and affiliated hotels and their importance could be changed in the current hotel business world. These issues which were highlighted in the literature were interpreted and were investigated to develop an EDC management model.

2.5 Thesis Theoretical Perspective

This research aimed to investigate the current issues facing hoteliers in relation to their exploitation of EDCs to develop an EDC performance evaluation toolkit for hoteliers. The research aim included different elements which were influenced by human beings (e.g. hotel managers and managers at affiliation head offices). ‘Interpretivism’ is an appropriate theoretical perspective in this context of unpicking human knowledge (e.g. hotel managers’ knowledge). Crotty (2007:67) said of interpretivism: “it was conceived in reaction to the effort to develop a natural science of the social. Its foil was largely logical empiricist methodology and bid to apply that framework to human enquiry.”

Justification for this decision was provided by Denscombe (2002:18). In his discussion about the differences between interpretivism and positivism, he
mentioned that “social reality is something is constructed and interpreted by people rather than something that exists objectively out there.” For instance, some of the objectives of this research, were to update the ED environment picture, and to investigate current key issues facing Welsh hoteliers and their practices in a bid to design an EDC management model. This objective reflected the need to investigate the social reality of electronic distribution channels and its relationship with hotels. To achieve this objective and the main aim, an interpretivism theoretical perspective was applied to develop an EDC management model and an EDC evaluation toolkit,

2.6 Thesis Methodology

Case study (phase one of research) and phenomenological (phase two of research) approaches were used in this research (Cresswell, 2007). Yin’s (2003) model for comparative case study using multiple sources of evidence was applied (figure 2.6). Website analysis (equivalent to document analysis in the original Yin model) was used, as were semi-structured interviews (Corbetta, 2003) with hotel managers. Questionnaire survey (Oppenheim, 1992) was supposed to be distributed to hotel front office and travel agency clerks although the pilot study revealed that in some hotels (especially non-affiliated and marketing consortia hotels), the hotel manager or marketing manager (e.g. HMC2) was the person who was involved in dealing with different managerial issues related to EDCs in the hotels. This finding meant that questionnaires were inappropriate as the proposed sample was not knowledgeable about the issues that were to be investigated.
The other sources of evidence proposed in Yin’s (2003) model case study were not used. For instance, archival records were avoided since a difficulty in access was experienced. In the pilot study, hoteliers (e.g. CH1 and HMC1) refused to give any official documents. These archival records were supposed to disclose hotels’ previous years’ occupancy reports; room revenues before and after using EDCs and commissions paid to EDCs. These reports for many hotels were considered as confidential documents. The nature of this research was the reason for not using ‘observation’ in building the case study. To adopt observation in this research would have required the researcher to work in hotels in the marketing department or front office department for an extended period of time and to be closer to marketing manager or front office manager to obtain the required information. Hotel managers are busy almost all the time and it was difficult to convince them to travel long distances (from Llandudno/Snowdonia to Cardiff takes 5 hours by train) for attending a research focus group. The pilot study confirmed this assumption as it was difficult even to get an appointment with them.
A phenomenological approach shaped the second phase of this research. Cresswell (2007: 57 and 59) described such approach as: “the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.” He clarified it further and stated: “phenomenology is not only a description, but it is also seen as an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences.” Furthermore, he pointed to the basic purpose of phenomenology as the reducing of individual experiences of a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence. This purpose met with the main goal of the second phase of the research which was

Adopted from Yin (2003)
carried out to generalise the results. The first phase was undertaken in Wales. The initial management model and the main issues which were discussed and presented in the Welsh hotel case study needed to be generalised to achieve objective four to develop a final EDC management model, applicable for affiliated and non-affiliated hotels.

In the second phase of research, five key stakeholders were identified to generalise the results. These stakeholders were: experts (researchers and practitioners who had previously researched EDCs and provided consultancy advice about EDC and IT applications in tourism and hospitality); managers at chain hotel headquarters (including franchising and management contracts at hotel head offices); managers at marketing consortia head offices; managers at EDC companies; and non-affiliated hotels (Figure 2.7). Semi-structured interviews were held with the expert panel members and non-affiliated hoteliers. The other stakeholders completed a self-administered survey.

The reason behind changing the method with other stakeholder groups was once again accessibility. It was very hard to get a meaningful sample from them and it consumed a lot of time to get responses from them. The other stakeholder sample was modified and enlarged to increase the rate of response. The methods were modified from semi-structured interviews to be an e-mail self-administered survey and a self-administered survey (questionnaire) distributed personally at the World Travel Market (14 and 15 November 2007). Four sets of questions were developed. Each stakeholder had a set of
questions, except the chain and marketing consortia head offices as the issues which they disclosed were similar.

2.7 Thesis Methods

To build the comparative case study, semi-structured interviews and website analysis were used. Interviews were used as the participants were key informants who were targeted to investigate the current issues and practices related to EDC and hotels (Tharenou et al., 2007). Website analysis was used to increase the validity and reliability of the research results – through triangulation (Cresswell, 2007) - and to enrich the discussion with them during
the interview. Website analysis was undertaken on two stages: pre-interview and post-interview for each hotel.

Interview forms were designed to give necessary examples (Gillham, 2005). Show cards were used to give more information about different issues related to EDCs. The other reason was to encourage interviewees to talk and to discuss these show cards with the interviewer. Six sections formed the semi-structured interview form. These sections were: demographic and personal information; EDCs; ED and your customers; freedom of decision making; the future of electronic distribution; and effectiveness of electronic distribution channels. These sections aimed to identify hotel ownership types and the type of affiliation; location; interviewee position; main issues and problems hoteliers face with EDCs; interviewee information about EDCs; how they perceived building customer relationships through EDCs; freedom of decision making; their future expectations for the future of each EDCs and their recommendations for hoteliers and EDCs companies to enhance the role of EDCs in hospitality marketing and for better usage of EDCs. The second part of the semi-structured interview form was show cards. These show cards were used to extract more information from interviewees and to prompt their memory about EDCs and the main issues they were facing with EDCs. These show cards were modified as a result of the pilot study to include more problems.

Website analysis was undertaken before and after the interview (Figure 2.8). These results were discussed with the hotel managers if there was something
which contradicted his/her words (e.g. CH4) or if there were certain issues which it might be useful for the hotelier to know about his/her website (e.g. HMC6). Hoteliers’ valuable comments were included in chapter five. After the interview, another check was made against what each hotelier said during the interview, if certain information could be verified through website analysis (e.g. IH4 stated that her hotel did not deal with many EDCs and just focused on their hotel website and coach companies). After a period of time, the contradictions or problems which were reported by the hoteliers were checked (e.g. CH4). If the problem was still encountered or was resolved this was reported in chapter five in the analysis. It was an invaluable method to matriculate and increase the results’ validity. Only main contradictions or issues were mentioned in chapter five so as not to duplicate what was stated by hoteliers during their interviews.

### Figure 2.8: The Website Analysis Method

**Before The Interview**
1. Check the hotel’s position on the main search engines using the hotel name and the ‘destination name+hotel’.
2. Write the order of the hotel in each search engine.
3. Check the order of different EDCs in the results.
4. Check the order of the hotel name at different EDCs (which appeared in the first two pages in the search results).
5. Note the different information provided about the hotel (e.g. price; location information; accessibility; number of rooms; availability; description of hotel rooms and description of hotel services; if the EDC recommend other hotels).
6. Check the hotel website (the price, location information, accessibility, description of services and rooms).

**During The Interview**
Negotiate the outcomes with the hotel managers if there were something contradicted his/her words (e.g. CH4) or if there were a certain issues might be useful to hoteliers to know (e.g. IH2). Hoteliers’ valuable comments were included in chapter five.

**After The Interview**
1. Check against what hotelier said during the interview, if certain information could be verified through website analysis (e.g. IH4 stated, her hotel did not deal with many EDCs and just focuses on their hotel website and coach companies).
2. After a period of time, the encountered contradictions or problems which were reported to hoteliers were checked (e.g. CH4). If the problem still encountered or solved this were reported in chapter five in the analysis.
In the second phase of research (phenomenology) the semi-structured interviews were used with expert panel and non-affiliated hoteliers. Show cards were used to extract more information from them and encourage them to contribute. This method was accompanied by a self-administered survey. The self-administered survey was designed for qualitative research. Consequentially, the majority of questions were open answers.

The questions were designed in Word format to make it easy for any computer user to download and complete. It was not designed on SNAP’s Software as there was a pictorial image (i.e. The EDC evaluation flowchart) which needed to be evaluated and the SNAP software does not have this feature to include this figure and enable participants to comment on it.

It was designed to be attractive since the participant may have printed it out from his/her computer and completed it manually and sent it via mail or may have given it to his/her secretary to complete in a Word file and send to the researcher. The option of printing was the reason for sending the file in Word format and in Acrobat Reader format, thereby ensuring that no pictures were lost or the page layout changed. This way of thinking was useful as the mail survey attracted only four participants. The last method of contact was based on distributing these surveys in the World Travel Market which achieved an acceptable and representative sample.
Four sets of questions were designed for each stakeholder to ensure that the question was addressed to the right person.

### 2.8 Sampling and the Accessibility Issue

Sampling is “observing a part in order to glean information about the whole is an almost instinctive human act” (Corbetta, 2003: 210). In order to glean the information about the whole in this case, all sampling techniques were checked and the appropriate one was be chosen. Kumar (1999) demonstrated the different sampling techniques (see Figure 2.9).

![Figure 2.9: Types of Sampling](source)

Source: Kumar (1999)
Corbetta (2003) agreed with Kumar about the many types of sampling. Additionally, he clarified each type (see Table 2.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Probability Sampling</th>
<th>Simple Random Sampling</th>
<th>Systematic Sampling</th>
<th>Stratified Sampling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is obtained when all the units in the reference population have the same probability of being included in the sample.</td>
<td>A procedure that is statistically equivalent to simple random sampling. The only difference lies in the technique of picking out the subjects.</td>
<td>The accuracy of sampling estimates depends on among other things- sample size and on the degree of variability in the distribution of the phenomenon studied within the reference population. This means that if the variability of the phenomenon under investigation is very high, then the sample analysed will need to larger, in order to maintain a certain level of accuracy in the estimate. Alternatively if the phenomenon displays areas of greater homogeneity, it is possible to increase simple efficiency by adopting stratified sampling. The sample design is organized in three phase: 1- The reference population is subdivided into sub-populations (called strata) that are as homogeneity as possible to be studied 2- A sample is selected from each stratum by means of random procedure. 3- The sample drawn from each stratum are pooled in order to produce an overall sample.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Proportionate Stratified Sample</td>
<td>Happens when we decide to over represent some strata and to under represent others.</td>
<td>Optimum allocation Stratified Sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multistage sampling</td>
<td>This technique does not offer greater efficiency than simple random sampling, but it does simplify the selection procedure and reduce the cost of data-collection. Multistage sampling is the only viable option in some situations, when a complete list of the references is unavailable, or when the members of the sample produced by simple random sampling or stratified sampling would be spread over too vast an area and thus difficult to reach. In multistage sampling, the population is subdivided into hierarchical levels, which are selected successively through a process of ‘narrowing down’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cluster Sampling
This procedure is used when population can be divided into subdivided into groups.

Area Sampling
A variant of multistage sampling is area sampling. This approach is adopted when no list of the reference population exists.

Quota Sampling
This is probably the most widely used sample design, especially in market research and in opinion polls. To implement the procedure, the population must first be subdivided into a certain number of strata defined by a few variables of which the distribution is known. To implement the procedure, the population must:
1- Be subdivided into a certain number of strata defined by few variables of which the distribution is known.
2- The proportional ‘weight’ of each stratum is calculated – that is to say the overall population that belongs to each group (the sum of these weights must obviously equal 1).
3- The quotas – that is to say, the number of interviews to be conducted in each stratum – are established by multiplying these weights by the sample size.

Snowball sampling
Snowball sampling involves identifying subjects for inclusion in the sample by referral from other subjects. This sample design is particularly useful in the study of those social groups whose members tend to hide their identity for moral, legal, ideological or political reasons.

The procedures is also used to study ‘rare elements’: small groups scattered over a large area but which keep in touch with one another in some way (members of minority religions, particular groups and associations, etc.)

Judgement Sampling
In this procedure, the sampling units are not chosen in a random manner, but on the basis of some of their characteristics. This kind of sampling is used, for instance, on very small samples in order to avoid chance fluctuations that might excessively distance the sample from the characteristics of the population.

Balanced Sampling
This involves selecting the units in such a way that, with regard to certain variables, the mean of the sample is close to the mean of the population.

Adapted from: Corbetta (2003)

Shuy (2002) described the fieldwork as the most difficult part in social research and the most time consuming part of the research process. Accessibility was a real problem in this research, especially in the second phase of research. This will be discussed in detail below.
2.8.1 Case Study Sampling

A DMS (Destination Management System) is considered to be an EDC. The majority of DMSs work in one geographical area or tourist attraction destination (Gupta et al., 2004). For this reason the sample had to deal with one geographical area. Wales was selected to build on the contributions of other authors in Wales (e.g. Main, 2001; Gupta et al., 2004; Jones and Murphy, 2004) and on the relationship between hoteliers and EDC companies. According to the Wales Tourist Board Grading List (web1(1), accessed 050505), Wales’ accommodation sector includes many types of hotels. There are: non-affiliated hotels and affiliated (chain, franchising and marketing consortia) hotels; guest houses; inns; bed and breakfast hotels; bungalows; cottages; farms; farm houses; lodges; apartments; chalets; country houses; hostels; restaurant with rooms; bunk houses; country hotels; campuses and camping parks; unclassified accommodation establishments one, two, three, four and five star accommodation establishments.

Main (2001), Gupta et al. (20041) and Jones and Murphy (2004) pointed to the prevalence of small, medium and large tourism enterprises in Wales. They reported the predominance of small and medium tourism enterprises in the Welsh tourism market (especially hotels with less than 20 rooms whose share is 60%). Furthermore, Main (2001) asserted the frequency of non-affiliated (independent) hotels in Wales. She confirmed that non-affiliated hotels are in the majority in Wales (95%) and 5% are affiliated with only a few belonging to

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1) Inspected website addresses were substituted with ‘Web’ since some website addresses were very long (see appendix F for full addresses).
marketing consortia.

After checking different primary and secondary data sources (Coleman, 2000; Main, 2001; Web2, accessed 050505; Web3, accessed 070405) to obtain more detail about accommodation in Wales, the following was found: the number of bedrooms varies widely from two bedrooms to four hundreds and thirty two bedrooms. Most of the chain hotels have a large number of bedrooms, e.g. Hilton and Marriot, while most independents (non-affiliated) do not. There are some non-affiliated hotels which have a large number of rooms, e.g. The Big Sleep Hotel in Cardiff with eighty one bedrooms.

Accommodation in Wales also varies in its grading, there are unclassified accommodation establishments. It can be noted that most accommodation establishments are non-affiliated (independent), but chain hotels have larger numbers of rooms in comparison with independent ones. Large hotel operations (more than 50 rooms) are concentrated in South Wales (e.g. Cardiff, Newport, Swansea) rather than in Mid Wales, West Wales and North Wales.

Regarding the usage of EDCs in marketing Welsh hotels, until 1994 almost no bookings were made by centralised reservation systems, the internet was in its infancy and only affiliated hotels (particularly chain hotels) could take electronic booking. Even in 1995 when the Wales Tourist Board launched its website, it did not provide online booking facilities. In 2000 a redesigning process was done by involving their customers in it (Main, 2001). Main (2001), Gupta et al.,
(2004) and Jones and Murphy (2004) reported the limited use of ICTs (information and communication technologies) in small and medium hotel enterprises in Wales especially in independent hotels. This was the reason for focusing on large size hotels in Wales instead of small and medium size hotels.

After revising different sampling techniques (Corbetta, 2003) ‘judgemental sampling’ was adopted in the first phase of this study (Welsh hotel case study). This study is concerned with optimising usage of EDCs in the hotel industry. Gupta et al. (2004) and Jones and Murphy (2004) concluded that medium and small tourism enterprises in Wales did not adopt IT in their marketing properly and their view was corroborated by Main (2001). For this reason the first criterion adopted here was to study large Welsh hotels, defined as having more than 50 rooms (Coleman, 2000; Main, 2001).

Later, hotel size was modified to be more than 40 rooms because of the low rate of response (Figure 2.10), but the majority (11 out of 14) of those in the interview sample have more than 50 rooms. In this criterion, hotels’ general managers, marketing managers and front office managers were interviewed. Key factors in identifying who was to be interviewed were: their knowledge about EDCs and their willingness to be interviewed.
The second characteristic was based on hotel affiliation (Johnson, 2002; Littlejohn, 2003) to facilitate a comparison of EDCs' integration into the wider business strategies between non-affiliated (independent) and affiliated hotels (chain and marketing consortia).

Geography formed the third characteristic for representing the whole Wales (Figure 2.11). Wales was divided into Mid, South, West and North Wales (Web4, accessed 220806; Web5, accessed 220806).
Figure 2.11 represents Mid, West, South and North Wales. This geographical classification is different from that of the Wales Tourist Board. The Wales Tourist Board divides Wales into twelve regions: Anglesey; The North Wales Coastal Resorts; The North Wales Borderlands; Snowdonia Mountains and Coast; Mid Wales; Ceredigion; Pembrokeshire; Carmarthenshire; Swansea Bay, Mumbles, Gower, Afan and the Vale of Neath; Valleys of South Wales; Cardiff and Glamorgan Heritage Coast; Wye Valley and Valley of Usk (Web7, accessed 230806). These geographical areas did not have enough hotel types in each of them and some of them only have small sized hotels. For this reason the geographical classification of South, Mid, West and North Wales was applied in the sampling process.
The sampling process was modified twice (see Figure 2.12). These modifications were based on the pilot study results and the low rate of response and focused on the hotel size and typology, and geographical aspects. After the pilot study, marketing consortia hotels were added to the sample (the research was planned to include independent and chain hotels but the differences encountered between marketing consortia and chain hotels resulted in them being added to the sample).

Assessment of the type of hotels responding and their geographical location was undertaken from time-to-time to ensure a balanced sample. This assessment counted how many non-affiliated (independent), chain and marketing consortia hotels were interviewed and where. The assessments led the researcher to focus on contacting certain types of hoteliers to respond by contacting them sometimes more than three times. Furthermore, the low rate of response added another constraint to the sampling process. This constraint was bypassed by modifying the sampling criteria to be hotels of more than forty rooms instead of fifty rooms. This enlarged the selected sample to 21 and the total sample consisted of 42 hotels of more than forty rooms (32 hotels are more than fifty rooms and 10 hotels are more than forty and less than fifty). The participating sample was 14 hotels: 4 non-affiliated (independent); 6 marketing consortia hotels and 4 chain hotels.
To avoid sampling error different resources were used to form the sample frame (Lewin, 2005). These 42 hotels comprised the sample frame, which were selected from all Welsh hotel establishments identified through different resources e.g. Web1 (accessed 050505); Web2 (accessed 050505); Web3 (accessed 070405); Ramada Worldwide (2006); Best Western (2006); Wales Tourist Board (2006).
2.8.2 Phenomenology Sampling

‘Judgemental sampling’ was adopted in this methodology, combined with snowballing sampling technique. This methodology for phase two of the research faced difficulties which forced the researcher to find alternatives. These alternatives included other methods of sampling, i.e. snowballing technique. These difficulties are clarified in the following section.

Different stakeholders were identified to be included in this phase of research. These stakeholders were: experts; non-affiliated hotels; EDCs companies; chain head offices (headquarters); marketing consortia head offices. These stakeholders were classified into two main panels: an expert panel and an industry panel. The industry panel included all the stakeholders except the experts. This classification was made according to their different nature and their different experiences. In the industry panel most members had considerable experience in business but they lacked wider knowledge about activities in the other companies or hotels. The expert panel had this knowledge as they had studied the EDCs and hotels in their researches.

Selection of the expert panel participants was based on the literature review and on the ENTER conference 2006. During the literature search the key authors in this field were identified and they were met in ENTER 2006 in Switzerland. In ENTER 2007, these key authors were contacted by e-mail before the conference, using their published e-mails on their different publications and the IFITT list of members and the conference list of
participants. Twenty-four key authors and practitioners were contacted before the conference by e-mail. Only six confirmed their participation. The majority of non-respondents were contacted during the conference. Fourteen (there were fifteen but one participant – EXP6 - answers were rejected since he did not answer most of the questions and only partially participated in one question as he was very busy during the conference event) participants were interviewed over the three days (PhD workshop pre-ENTER 2007 and ENTER 2007). All the interviews were recorded on tape and notes were written during the interviews.

The creation of the industry panel sample involved different stages, the first being concerned with identifying a sample for ‘face-to-face semi-structured interviews’ as with the industry panel and non-affiliated hotels in the industry panel. The sample strata was designed to include those managers responsible for the relationship between EDCs and hotels (e.g. revenue manager, account manager) in the chain head offices (headquarters); marketing consortia head offices and EDCs’ companies. Funding issues influenced these strata criteria as those selected had to be located in the UK. They also had to have a link with one Welsh hotel. These criteria were met after scanning different EDCs and chain head offices and marketing consortia head offices and the sample included 23 EDCs companies, chain head offices and marketing consortia.

To obtain the relevant manager’s name, the targeted sample was contacted via e-mail and telephone several times. Unfortunately, after contacting them, at least three times at different intervals, only two managers’ names were known.
In addition those companies that listed the names of their managers responsible for relationships between EDCs and hotels were also contacted. No response was received.

This problem was handled by enlarging the sample to include different companies who had branches in the UK even if they did not deal with Welsh hotels. This sample also failed to achieve any response of 49 contacts. The last option was to enlarge the sample to include companies located in different countries and to change the face to face interview to be a self administered e-mail survey (Bourque and Fielder, 1995). The nature of the questions was also changed to be suitable for the new method of contact and the design were changed (e.g. show cards were removed). The sample was enlarged to 99 e-mails including several head offices of the chains and marketing consortia and EDCs companies in different countries which were contacted not less than three times on various intervals. The list of e-mails was developed by scanning several well-known companies’ websites and by getting the contact details of the industry representatives in the forums and conferences that the researcher attended (Wales Tourism Forum, 2005; ENTER 2006; eTourism Forum, 2006; ENTER 2007). Only seven e-mails were received, all declaring a refusal to participate as they were not interested in research.

As an alternative technique for contacting them, the researcher participated in three business social networks (LinkedIn, Xing, IFITT) to get more contact details and to be nearer to the targeted sample. The researcher’s membership
was upgraded to get their contact details. This also resulted in a nil response after they were contacted.

Snowballing was a useful alternative technique to be used in sampling. Different researchers and experts (including the participants of the expert panel) were contacted who had contacts with chain and marketing consortia hotels head offices and EDCs companies. They were asked to recommend helpful persons who met the previous criteria. Four participants came forward as a result of snowballing sampling and the judgemental sampling from 143 e-mails. The most useful advice was from one of the contacted experts who recommended attendance at the World Travel Market (14-15 November 2007) in London.

Meeting industry representatives in such big event was very useful: 29 self-administered surveys were distributed and 11 were returned. The first day of this event was not useful as the participants did not have time to talk and most of them preferred to take the survey form to complete or asked for it to be e-mailed to them. On the second day (the last day of the event) they were more prepared to participate as they had more time than the previous day. The summary of these stages in sampling the second phase of research is represented in figure 2.13.
2.9 Piloting

A pilot study was undertaken to: identify the key issues that affiliated and non-affiliated hoteliers face with EDCs; examine the main issues that have been mentioned in the literature review about EDCs; compare the integration of EDCs between affiliated (independent) and non-affiliated hotels. Three semi-structured interviews were held with managers in independent, marketing consortia (which were thought an independent hotel that has recently joined a hotel chain on a franchising basis) and chain hotels. These interviews
demonstrated differences exist between marketing consortia hotels, independent hotels and chain hotels. This represents an addition to the extant literature which has not investigated marketing consortia nor compared activities across these three types of hotels; indeed little research exists which compares affiliated and non-affiliated hotel’s ED strategies (Main, 2001; O’Connor and Piccoli, 2003; Lim and Huang, 2005). It should noted that some authors (e.g. Lim and Huang, 2005) consider marketing consortia hotels as independent, so to avoid this confusion the terms ‘affiliated’ and ‘non-affiliated’ have been used throughout the thesis.

It can be concluded from the pilot study that independent and marketing consortia hotels were less aware of how EDCs work than chain hotels and this may explain why the number of electronic reservations for chain hotels is over 60% whereas those for independent hotels are much lower (O’Connor and Piccoli, 2003). Neither the independent nor the marketing consortia hotels were interested in building relationships through EDCs or getting feedback about these channels from their customers. They apply a scattergun approach to broadcast information and do not use electronic media to interact with their customers. Chain hotels exploit more of the potential of Hoffman et al.’s (1995) new model, which involves feedback and building relationships with customers. These initial findings were interesting and were supplemented through the continuing series of semi-structured interviews and with analysis of hotel websites and relevant documentation.
2.10 Data analysis

In this research, the case study was built on more than one case study as the aim of the study involved investigating the current issues facing hoteliers in relation to their exploitation of EDCs to develop an EDC performance evaluation toolkit for hoteliers. According to Yin (2003), there are four formats of writing a case study. They are: single case study; multiple case version; questions and answers formats; multiple case study in which no single cases are presented. This study uses ‘multiple case studies in which no single cases are presented’ as the idea was to compare and investigate different issues related to the strategic process. Bryman and Bell (2007) also discuss multiple case studies although the only significant difference between their ideas and those of Yin (2003) are that they do not state including a brief summary of each case.

Maxwell (1998) pointed to three different main strategies in data analysis, namely: categorising strategies (such as coding and thematic analysis); contextualising strategies (such as narrative analysis and individual case studies analysis); and memos and displays. Powell and Renner (2003) listed the following steps in data analysis which were adopted in this research: get to know your data; focus the analysis; categorise information; identify patterns and connections within and between categories; interpretation or bringing it all together. Maxwell (1998) supports these categorisation strategies. In order to combine the ideas of Powell and Renner (2003) and Maxwell (1998) a form for transcription was developed here. Termed a ‘main issues/themes transcription method’, it was developed to save time and effort as getting access to data had
consumed much of the research time. This tactic was based on building a table with the main themes or issues on the left hand side and each interviewee was coded and listed in columns on the right hand side. This tactic was used in analysing phase one and phase two of research (see table 2.2).

Different qualitative data analysis software were available to be used, e.g. NUD*IST, ATLAS and NVIVO 7. NVIVO 7 was trialled and compared with manual qualitative data analysis. Manual qualitative data analysis was more useful as the researcher was more involved in it and got ‘closer’ to the data, becoming used to the participants’ words and using the analysis to build ideas and themes. Qualitative data analysis software was more time consuming as the researcher had to draw tree nodes with different themes and sub-nodes with related themes on paper then he had to put them on NVIVO7. This consumed more time than using colour codes (using highlighter pens) to link between different themes in the main issues transcription methods table. The second reason for not using qualitative data analysis software was the discrepancies between Word and NVIVO7 document pages. Some features were missing in NVIVO7 and the software sometimes suddenly shutdown after working on it for more than seven hours and that caused a loss of analysis.
Table 2.2: Main Issues Transcription Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main themes</th>
<th>Exp1</th>
<th>Exp2</th>
<th>Exp3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of hotel information</td>
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<tr>
<td>shown on EDCs</td>
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</table>

The transcribed data were analysed using discourse analysis, described by Gillen and Peterson (2007:146) as: “a term used to embrace many different methods in the investigation of human communication found across the humanities and social sciences”. Furthermore, they clarified how it should work. They stated: “The more one understands about the socio historical situation of a text, the more sensitive and insightful will be one’s interpretation.”

This method of analysis affected the selection of the methods in the comparative case study. Semi-structured interviews were accompanied with online website analysis. In analysing the Welsh hoteliers’ interviews, a check was undertaken to understand the circumstances of these hotels and their current online practices. The circumstances around the interviewees affected the validity of their answers. For example, in the IH3 interview, in one of her answers, the interviewee was in a rush and her answer to this question was
influenced by her emotional state, so that it contradicted those of all the other participants.

2.11 Validity and Reliability

Cresswell (2007) suggests eight strategies for validity which have been used by different qualitative researchers. He advises to stick with two of them at least in any given study. These strategies are: ‘prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field’; ‘triangulation’; ‘peer review or debriefing’; ‘refining hypotheses as the inquiry advances’; ‘clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study’; ‘the researcher solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations’; ‘rich and thick description’ and ‘external audits’. Most of those strategies were adopted in this research. Table 2.3 illustrates the validation strategies and how they were adopted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validation strategies</th>
<th>Adoption in the research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Triangulation’</td>
<td>Different methods were used in this research. In each phase of research more than one method was used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Peer review or debriefing’</td>
<td>This research was supervised by two professors who were keen to check it and discuss its results with the researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Refining hypotheses as the inquiry advances’</td>
<td>The results of pilot study and Welsh hotel case study refined the research objectives since this research did not use hypothesis. Especially, the sample shifted the</td>
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</table>
research from being about independent and chain to be about affiliated and non-affiliated. The reason behind this related to the differences which were experienced between chain and marketing consortia and different aspects related to their nature of business.

| "The researcher solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations"; | Expert panel views were counted. Also this research was published in different international and local conferences and PhD workshops (Wales Tourism Forum, 2005, ENTER 2006 and ENTER 2007) and CHME 2006 to get more feedback from the editors and conference audience to adjust it and to increase its credibility. |
| "Rich and thick description" | Qualitative data (e.g. interviews) were collected and presented to give as much information about the results to the reader to allow him/her to evaluate its credibility. |
| "External audits" | This research was discussed with external editors during the conferences and with Cardiff School of Management visiting professors to examine its credibility and most of their advice was accommodated in this research. These external advisors did not have any connection to the research. |

Adopted from Cresswell (2007)
Somekh and Lewin (2007: 348) defined reliability from a qualitative point of view. They pointed to the different meaning of the term reliability in qualitative and quantitative research. They term reliability as:

*The truth of the findings has been established by ensuring that they are supported by sufficient and compelling evidence. In quantitative research, it refers specifically to measurement repeatedly giving the same result (being consistent).*

Davies (2007:241) also discussed reliability in qualitative research. He stated:

*Because qualitative researchers do not normally employ any formal or precise systems of measurement, the concept of reliability is related to the rigour with which the researcher has approached the tasks of data collection and analysis and the care with which the report describes in detail the methods that have been employed —including, especially, some discussion of how critical decisions were made. Often, the term ‘reliability’ in this sense is equated with methodological ‘accuracy’.*

These scholars all point to three main aspects to achieve reliability, namely: ‘sufficient’, ‘compelling evidence’, ‘rigour of data collection and analysis’.

In this research, sufficient and compelling evidence was achieved, through undertaking different methods of research, i.e. semi-structured interviews; website analysis; self-administered questionnaires. These methods were undertaken in two different phases. Rigour was achieved in research as the first phase’s semi-structured interview schedule is presented in the appendices. The methodology of website analysis and how it was used to cross check the interviewees’ statement is clarified in this chapter. The ‘main issues transcription method’ was presented in this chapter to
exemplify the research approach to any future researcher who would like to replicate the research.

In the second phase of research, the findings of the first phase were grouped and classified according to the interests of each group of participants. This classification was reflected in designing three different sets of questions to develop the EDC management model which was composed of these findings. In some cases, the same aspects were questioned from different aspects, according to the nature of participant business. These schedules of semi-structured interviews and self-administered questionnaires are presented in the thesis’ appendices.

Analysis of semi-structured interviews and self-administered questionnaires was addressed using a ‘main issues/themes transcription method’. The main issues transcription methods facilitated comparison between different participants. This form of analysis ensured rigour in the research as all the themes and issues of the research were presented and the participants’ opinions were listed beside each other. Colour codes distinguished between similar and different opinions.

Discourse analysis was used by comparing the results of different methods of research in each phase of research and by using the historical and the social background of the participants. Furthermore, the interviews’ circumstances were listed in this form of transcription to be reflected in the
analysis. The results of web site analysis were noted and presented to the interviewees. The results were listed in the ‘main issues transcription form’ to be reflected in the discussion.

2.12 Generalisability

In qualitative research, some authors substituted ‘generalisability’ as a term for transferability (Denscombe, 2002). Saunders et al. (2007: 598) defined generalisability as: “the extent to which the findings of a research study are applicable to other settings”. Kalof et al. (2008) pointed to doubt about generalising the results from qualitative research studies. In this research the doubt was reduced using two phases of research to study more than one group and adopting different tactics to enable the generalisation of the research results beyond the geographical boundaries of the comparative case study (first phase of research). Kalof et al. (2008) named two main tactics to achieve it: ‘clear description of the sample selection criteria’ and ‘rich description of the research site’. Denscombe (2002) added another tactic which is ‘theory relevance’.

Each of these generalisation tactics was undertaken in this study since the sampling process in the first and second phases had a ‘clear description of the sample selection criteria’ which was demonstrated in details in this chapter and the samples (phase one and two) included relevant stakeholders from four continents (Australia, Europe, Asia and North America), working for international companies and familiar with the investigated issues. Secondly, a
'rich description of the research site’ was achieved in chapter three and two by presenting the existing theories; the research stages, sampling process (including the obstacles confront the research), the data analysis. Thirdly, ‘theory relevance’ was achieved in the second phase of research since the majority of participants in the second phase agreed on the major findings, reorganised or modified them. For instance, the ‘initial EDC performance evaluation flowchart’ was developed by participants’ comments to form at the end of the research the toolkit (see volume two). Despite adopting these tactics the research results had some limitations which will be discussed with future research opportunities in chapter eight.

2.13 Summary

Qualitative research approach was adopted in this research to achieve its aim and objective. This approach is reflected in the research design as different elements affected its design and its ongoing process. Maxwell’s (1998) model was adopted and modified to reflect the nature of the research undertaken since some links and factors were not included in Maxwell’s model. Crotty (2007) identifies four main stages in any research. In this research these stages were: constructionism as research epistemology; interpretivism as research theoretical prospective; comparative case study (first phase of the research) and phenomenology (the second phase of the research) as the adopted methodologies.
According to Yin (2003), multiple evidence case studies are composed of: interviews; survey; document analysis; observation; archival records. In this research semi-structured interviews and website analysis (document analysis) were used from Yin’s model. Phenomenology was used to generalise the results of the first phase (case study) and develop the initial management model which was designed according to case study results and comprised semi-structured interviews and self-administered survey. ‘Judgemental sampling’ and ‘snowballing’ techniques were used in this research (Corbetta, 2003). Snowballing technique was the alternative technique to achieve an acceptable and representative sample. A pilot study was useful as it helped to enhance the schedule of interview questions and enhanced the sample to include marketing consortia hotels. All the results were analysed manually using discourse analysis (Gillen and Peterson, 2007). The research was checked against the reliability and different validity strategies (Cresswell, 2007). Six validity strategies were applied although just two would have been enough to consider the research results valid (Cresswell, 2007). Furthermore, its results were reliable as they were supported by sufficient compelling evidence (Somekh and Lewin, 2007). Despite three tactics were adopted to generalise the results (Kalof et al., 2007) there were limitations for the study (see chapter eight). Finally, the fieldwork timeline was presented in Figure 2.14 to make the field work clearer to the reader.
## Figure 2.14: The Fieldwork Timeline

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fieldwork</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
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