Marketing within higher education institutions - A case study of two private Thai universities

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Abstract

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Title: Marketing within higher education institutions - A case study of two private Thai universities.

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Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze what marketing approaches private Thai higher education institutions (HEIs) use to attract and enroll foreign students. The study’s intention is also to provide recommendations to Bangkok University International College (BUIC) and Webster University (WU) and investigate what factors foreign students value in terms of marketing at these universities. The recommendations are based on marketing approaches that have been identified as effective in attracting and enrolling foreign students.

Research questions:

- What marketing approaches do private Thai higher education institutions use to attract and enroll foreign students?
- What factors are foreign students at private HEIs like BUIC and WU valuing highest and lowest, in terms of marketing in the recruiting process towards these universities?
- How can BUIC and WU strengthen their marketing approaches to attract and enroll foreign students?

Methodology:
The case study collected qualitative and quantitative data through an interview, survey and observation from respective university in order to answer the research questions.

Conclusion:
The study finalized that higher education institutions in Thailand uses different marketing approaches to attract and enroll foreign students. Online marketing was conducted through web pages, IT tools and physical presence at events, open houses and social activities. Foreign students at BUIC and WU valued marketing factors somewhat equally in terms of place, promotion, people, process, IT and image and reputation. The study also presented marketing approaches that strengthens these two universities attraction and enrollment process towards foreign students. BUIC should definitely work on the factor people and the interaction during the enrollment process. WU, on the other hand, needs to focus more on providing additional IT tools and improve their mismanagement regarding image and reputation.

Keywords: Higher Education, Higher Education Institution, Foreign Students, Student Attraction and Enrollment, Thailand, Bangkok University International College and Webster University.
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1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the concept of marketing within higher education institutions (HEIs) followed by the problem description, research questions and the purpose. The chapter ends with a presentation of target groups and an introduction of the authors’ cooperation with Sida by a Minor Field Study (MFS) scholarship.

1.1 Background

Located in the center of the Southeast Asia, Thailand offers a growing economy and diverse culture. The country is rich in tradition and proud of its independence. Despite this, the country has made adjustments due to international influences connected with an increased globalization. A growing tourism and stronger international connectedness has together with a friendly business approach attracted additional investors. (Thailand Today, 2011) As the nation’s economy expands globally, bonds with Europe, Africa, North- and South America, Middle East and South Asia has strengthened (Ibid, 2011b). During the 1980s and 1990s Thai private higher education institutions expanded quickly (Teixeira & Amaral, 2001) and offer today undergraduate, master and Ph. D degrees (Kitcharoen, 2004). Generally, Thai private universities hold a more student-oriented approach compared to public competitors. This factor has together with the geographical location attracted additional foreign students and international universities. (Ibid, 2004) The number of HEIs in Thailand has since the implementation of The National Education Act of 1999 continued to grow and consists as of today of 169 (79 public, 71 private and 19 community colleges) institutions (Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, 2008).

The research within higher education (HE) and internationally based marketing of universities is lacking and inconsistent. This lack of knowledge and inconsistency towards how HEIs conduct marketing provides the need of both a deeper and a broader knowledge towards how different marketing approaches are used throughout the world. (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006) In order to be successful and to attract students in the tough competitive environment, many universities incorporate different kinds of educational marketing into their strategies (James & Phillips, 1995; Oplatka, 2002), even though there is a consistent lack between educational marketing and business marketing theories. It has even been said that tough competition will increase performance of students and the quality of research and teaching will be streamlined for HEIs as an effect of educational marketing (Tooley, 2000). This growing competition and internationalization between HEIs has strengthened the need for marketing approaches that increases the probability of attracting foreign students (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003).

“In the context of increasing competition for home-based and overseas students higher educational institutions now recognise the need to market themselves in a climate of international competition.”
(Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006, p. 316)

Marketing within higher education has embarked a wider global perspective. The increased competition within this developing industry, along with the expansion of institutions and its products and services has established driving forces for HE marketization worldwide. Previous research has indicated emerging marketing activities from HEIs across the world. HEIs from a variety of regions
are now taking marketing into consideration. Besides UK and US based HEIs, Australian universities have been underlined as dominant in possessing HE marketing. The current position is derived from investments and government interventions of raising quality of HE by supporting marketing factors within this industry. (Meek & Wood, 1997; Scott, 1999) Additionally, in the African region, previous research has pinpointed current HEIs to replicate marketing factors that have been prevailing for decades. HEIs may also increase their global competitiveness, reputation and further strengthen the bonds with other foreign HEIs by conducting strategic alliances. (Altbach & Knight, 2007) Schiller and Liefner (2007) show how Thai HEIs received limited benefits of income and technology as a result of a more privatized and commercialized academic sector. HEIs that originates in developing countries have compared to western counterparts, often a lower knowledge base, lower funding and less amounts of potential investors and thereof a lower academic level (Ibid, 2007).

As HEIs demands a marketing approach that attracts foreign students, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) describe an environment where a growing number of universities use marketing methods that have been successful in the business world. Mazzarol (1998) states that since the beginning of the 1980s, services marketing (Zeithaml et al., 1985) has become more important for attracting foreign students. Helgesen (2008) states that universities need to focus their attention on creating value for students. Future HEIs need to adapt towards an environment where communication through internet and new technology changes the way communication takes place (Gomes & Murphy, 2003; Altbach, 2004). Cooperation with other universities worldwide could also assist HEIs towards attracting foreign students (Ibid, 2004; Mazzarol 1998). These specific factors could explain why certain HEIs internationalize; gather new knowledge, enhance the language base and obtain commercial advantage (Altbach & Knight, 2007). As the competition for attracting foreign students increase, HEIs needs to be aware of the importance of an efficient marketing approach. The marketing approach is connected to factors such as price levels, promotional strategies and product placement, which corresponds to HEIs ability to attract foreign students. These factors can be linked to the marketing mix (Kotler and Fox, 1995, Ivy, 2008). The marketing mix had its breakthrough during the 1960s with its four Ps - people, place, promotion and price. However, this approach was discussed by many academics to be inappropriate for services marketing. (Nicholls et al., 1995) In order to modify the marketing mix and gain better insight towards services marketing, three additional Ps was included - people, physical evidence and process, which is known as the 7Ps of educational marketing (Ivy, 2008). The combination of these seven Ps is that it enhances the possibilities for organizations, such as private institutions to meet needs and wants from customers (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011).

1.2 Problem description

Independent of geographical location, it is assumed that increased competition will force HEIs to market themselves more accurately (Fosket, 1998; James & Phillips, 1995; Oplatka, 2002). Asian HEIs fall behind compared to western competitors (Schiller & Liefner, 2007; Ng, 2012) due to increased internationalization (Altbach, 2004; Knight, 2004; Soderqvist, 2007) and competition. Schiller and Liefner (2007) stress that Thailand is lagging behind in relation to R&D expenditure compared with Malaysia, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. Other factors lagging behind and negatively affecting Asian universities are lower gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, reputation and prestige. These factors are associated with previous research which shows that western countries compared to Asian counterparts were more attractive for prospective Asian students. (Ng, 2012) Other previous
research shows correlations between students’ degree of loyalty and how universities were ranked according to image and reputation (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001). As the amount of HEIs grows internationally, institutions need to meet students’ demands by offering diversified education. In other words, HEIs are experiencing tougher competition to attract students from rivals. (Maringe, 2005) HEIs are thus almost forced to incorporate and embrace marketing ideas, being left with no other choice (Ibid, 2005; Ivy, 2008). Even though Asian countries lacks behind in accordance to knowledge and IT-related infrastructure (Ng, 2012), cooperation and activity between countries in Asia and Africa is evolving (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This cooperation could be a key driver for developing countries with the purpose of strengthen their HEI’s quality, reputation and obtain higher income as a result of a larger amounts of enrolled foreign students (Ibid, 2007). While western based HEIs have been dominant actors within the international field of HE (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003), universities from India, Singapore, Malaysia, China and Hong Kong (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Ng, 2012) now compete for foreign students.

Thai HEIs and the Thai higher educational system (HES) (Schiller & Liefner, 2007) was affected by the implementation of the domestic funding reform; The National Education Act of 1999 (UNESCO, 2012). The reform encouraged Thai HEIs to fund themselves by own assets, private investors and student fees. Thai HES was also affected by financial constraints as a result of the Asian crisis 1997 and also because of political disturbances which lead to stagnant or unchanged public funding (Schiller & Liefner, 2007). As globalization is taking HEIs towards new challenges in terms of marketing activities and competition (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003), Russell (2005) argues that foreign students are of particular importance as they provide a major stream of income aside from government funding. Thailand’s economic growth (The World Bank, 2013) and the rise in establishment of both private and public HEIs (Schiller & Liefner, 2007; Teixeira & Amaral, 2001) have together with the increased international competition within universities (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Helgesen, 2008; Knight, 2004) resulted in this study of how Thai private HEIs market themselves and attract foreign students. Specifically, this study has investigated these private Thai HEIs; Bangkok University International College (BUIC) and Webster University (WU).

1.3 Research questions

The following research questions have guided this study. Furthermore, the last research question has been added for meeting the Minor Field Study (MFS) scholarship requirement. This study has established these three questions;

- **What marketing approaches do private Thai higher education institutions use to attract and enroll foreign students?**
- **What factors are foreign students at private HEIs like BUIC and WU valuing highest and lowest, in terms of marketing in the recruiting process towards these universities?**
- **How can BUIC and WU strengthen their marketing approaches to attract and enroll foreign students?**
1.4 **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze what marketing approaches private Thai HEIs use to attract and enroll foreign students. The study’s intention is also to provide recommendations to Bangkok University International College and Webster University and investigate what factors foreign students value in terms of marketing at these universities. The recommendations are based on marketing approaches that have been identified as effective in attracting and enrolling foreign students.

1.5 **Minor field study for Sida**

The authors have been awarded with a Minor Field Study (The Swedish Council for Higher Educations, 2013) scholarship from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida (Sida, 2012). Sida is a tax financed Swedish based government agency whose mission is to decrease poverty throughout the world. This is mainly done by development in specific societies towards increased economic development, enhanced democracy and human rights, sustainable development and increased knowledge towards health and social development (Ibid, 2012). These areas of focus are conducted as of today by engagements in 33 countries, mainly in the African, Asian, European and South American region. (Ibid, 2012) The purpose of the scholarship for the student is to conduct a bachelor or master’s thesis in a developing country, which directly or indirectly positively affects the nation economically, socially or politically (The Swedish Council for Higher Educations, 2013). The aim of this study is to positively affect BUIC and WU in particular and Thailand as a nation in general. The fulfillment was based on our recommendations for how these two aforementioned HEIs can strengthen their marketing approaches to attract and enroll foreign students.

1.6 **Target groups**

Primarily, this study could interest private Thai universities including BUIC and WU, due to our purpose to provide strengthening marketing approaches towards how these institutions can attract and enroll additional foreign students. A further interested target group would be Sida, since the study’s purpose is within the context of the MFS scholarship. Furthermore, other target groups could be individuals, academic and governmental institutions or companies interested in the subject regarding HEIs capabilities of attracting and enrolling foreign students by different marketing approaches.
2 Theoretical framework

This chapter introduces the theoretical concepts. Firstly the concept of services marketing has been aligned in relation to marketing of higher educations. Secondly, an incorporation of four Ps followed by an interconnection with the factors IT, image and reputation is presented. At the end of this chapter, the conceptual framework is presented.

Within the field of education in general and HEIs in particular, services marketing (Mazzarol, 1998; Nicholls et al., 1995; Enache, 2011; Zeithaml et al., 1985) has been stressed on several occasions. Services marketing consist of four dimensions that describe the product (service) as perishable, heterogenic, inseparable and intangible. A service is perishable since it could not be saved for later use. A service is also heterogenic and therefore hard to standardize which could affect the quality. It is also inseparable, since the sender (seller) and the receiver (buyer) is involved in the production of the service. Finally, as services are intangible it could not be stored or patented and therefore difficult to communicate. (Zeithaml et al., 1985)

Taking these dimensions into consideration within HEIs, they serve different purposes. Since education is inseparable there is an importance of a mutual understanding between the HEI and the student. Linked to perishability, a seminar lecture cannot be sold for later use or stored. Heterogeneity, on the other hand makes it difficult to standardize and repeat the service. The quality of a lecture can fluctuate on daily basis, making it difficult to actually measure the quality. Furthermore, intangibility possesses differences in terms of the how the service is equipment-based or people-based. Courses within HEIs are often conducted by people, meaning that the staff is connected to the product itself. (Nicholls et al., 1995) Mazzarol (1998) states services marketing as an important theoretical part within marketing of HEIs. Universities need to conduct a marketing approach that overcomes obstacles related to the specific characteristics of a service. HEIs also need to manage problems related to over or lack of capacity. (Mazzarol, 1998) Since services marketing consists of several components, the study has been delimited within the field of 7Ps of educational marketing (Enache, 2011; Ivy, 2008; Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011) in combination with previous research. The previous research has been integrated with parts from the 7Ps of educational marketing in order to construct the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework has been created in relation to academic needs and wants of a marketing approach that was more education based and linked to how HEIs attract and enroll students, in comparison to traditional business based methods (Oplatka, 2009). The theoretical framework is therefore relevant to the study’s area of marketing within higher educations.

2.1 The 7Ps of educational marketing

HE is different from marketing associated with physical products and therefore requires further adjustments in the marketing mix (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011). The classical marketing mix consists of four different Ps; product, price, place and promotion. In relation to educational service, this mix can be adapted and relevant to a certain degree. (Nicholls et al., 1995) However, speculations demonstrate that this marketing mix is inappropriate for marketing of services (Ibid, 1995). Additional Ps has been introduced and Nicholls et al., (1995) stress that the Ps people and process provide better performance in regard to services. The four Ps model is traditionally used towards physical products. However, the educational service sector requires a different approach. In
In order to outline efficient marketing of services the 7Ps approach were introduced - adding people, physical evidence and process to the traditional mix. (Ivy, 2008)

![7Ps of Educational Marketing](image)

The 7Ps approach has been recognized and associated specifically to services marketing. By including additional three Ps—people, process and physical evidence, it is believed that HEIs could make use of a more comprehensive marketing strategy. (Ivy, 2008; Enache, 2011) All components within the 7Ps approach possess different outcomes, where one component has the possibility to alter the effect on one another. (Ibid, 2011)

The study used parts of the 7Ps approach. The three Ps - price, product and physical evidence has been excluded and the four Ps - place, promotion, people and process has been focused. The reasoning for delimiting to four specific Ps and excluding the other three Ps was because of the lack of strong bonds with published research on marketing within HEIs. Several studies have added IT (Gomes & Murphy, 2003; Knight, 2004; Altbach, 2004; Kleen & Shell, 2003), image and reputation (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Mazzarol, 1998; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011) parallel with the four Ps. The factors, IT, image and reputation mention the Ps - place, promotion, people and process as important factors to consider, in regard to services marketing towards HEIs. Since these connections were interrelated, the study described and analyzed them further. Another intention was to dig deeper into HEIs and services marketing. If the 7Ps approach had been used, the outcome of the study could possibly be too restricted. By focusing on four specific Ps, a more in-depth study performance could be achieved. Since the study excluded the three Ps and focused on the remaining four Ps, it was necessary to incorporate additional components to the conceptual framework. These added components are called “Complementary marketing factors for student attraction and enrollment” and they consist of IT, image and reputation. A further description and motivation of these components will follow after the presentation of the four included Ps.

### 2.1.1 Place

The following section will discuss the four Ps incorporated in this study. Place, often called distribution channel, is used by universities in order to enable its market to meet needs, wants and expectations from students (Ivy, 2008). Today's students have the ability to get relevant information through many sources, since the development of IT has been added as an alternative educational service method, in comparison to the previous restricted geographical location of the university (Ibid, 2008; Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011). IT based instruments such as Blackboard offer students' access to material and various ranges of inputs related to education. Opportunities to get hold of university related material has been developed through other IT sources as well. Web pages, e-mail, video and telephone based conferences are just a few examples that have been recognized.
(Ivy, 2008) These innovative approaches and distance learning are tools that can be used to increase a HEI’s competitive advantage (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011).

Two perspectives prevail within place and this seeks to provide knowledge to students by considering educational service to be the product. If graduated students are considered to be the product, place should aim to develop ways to embed the student into the labor market. New technologies are considered to be important since it could transfer knowledge to students. Place channels such as radio and TV are typical examples of possible knowledge distributions by HEIs. Online information could also reduce amount of employees, since it partly deals with administrative activities. Those channels can be operated for other purposes as well, such as online lectures available to students and it can also function as a feedback pool. This enable students multiple ways of providing feedback or collecting student related material. As of the second case, a HEI’s relationship with the labor market needs to be taken more into consideration. If the educational product reflects the needs and wants of this market, place will most likely be successful. It is important for HEIs to have knowledge of the labor market’s demand, otherwise the education could be mismatched and therefore irrelevant and unnecessary for the student. Place should not be underestimated, as it provides service performance and boosts the fulfillment of exceeding expectations. (Enache, 2011) Nicholls, et al. (1995) also stresses class locations, teaching methods and styles, and IT features as examples related to place.

2.1.2 Promotion

HEIs could inform the market of its offerings based on a multiple sets of channels (Enache, 2011; Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011; Ivy, 2008). These channels could consist of advertising, public relations, publicity, promotional based sales efforts (Ibid, 2008) and personal sales contacts (Nicholls et al., 1995). The personal sales contact between the HEI and the student has shown to be of importance, as previous research shows that students outlined the need for personal advice when they examined different enrollment alternatives (Ibid, 1995). The university needs to address and inform prospective students in such a manner that the educational product is understood. One important channel for transferring information to students is through a web site. (Enache, 2011) However, Ivy (2008) states that to solely rely on the internet as a channel for communication is unlikely to be effective. After the student’s first contact with the university, a web site could inform the potential candidate, and thereof be a useful tool for an efficient enrolling process. A website should also inform the student of general information and the university’s opportunities as well as demands. The demands and opportunities are associated with the particular education. (Enache, 2011) Besides a website that informs prospective students, Ivy (2008) states open days and exhibitions to be important channels for HEIs. E-mail and advertising could also function as efficient tools for universities in order to inform and stimulate potential students for enrollment. (Ibid, 2008) Former students could aid the university in providing constructive experience towards prospective students. They could thereby inform and encourage potential students to enroll, based on previous successes as a graduate from that particular HEI. (Enache, 2011)

Enache (2011) outlines students as the most important recipients for HEIs. HEIs promotional channels are based on the target market, students and their requirements and expectations of the service (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011). Advertising and public relations are important channels according to Ivy (2008) and Enache (2011). Promotion is also important since it could play a central
role for HEIs to market themselves (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011). Advertising towards the public and potential funders is often used in order to inform about the university and its related benefits for society. Since students could be informed by multiple sets of channels, marketing towards the public and potential funders needs to be based on a more direct approach. The university could focus on building up a positive public opinion of its operations, which is managed from a public relations office and thus work as an efficient tool in order to improve the promotional strategies. Since the promotional strategy influences the image, HEIs needs to be aware of the message they distribute as it is connected with reputation. As it is difficult to improve a damaged or depraved reputation, HEIs need to manage and hold on to a desired reputation. Thus, reputation needs to be taken into consideration as it has been identified as an important key driver within HEIs. (Enache, 2011) Promotion is an important marketing activity for HEIs which is used to inform and enroll students (Ibid, 2011, Ivy, 2008, Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011). However, some universities do not engage in marketing activities (Nicholls et al., 1995). This could be due to cultural factors, as marketing could express negative values not connected with the organizational culture (Ibid, 1995). Besides the importance of image and reputation (Enache, 2011), HEIs need to develop a promotional strategy that identifies the student as their primary customer (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011).

2.1.3 People

The third concept people includes HEI based staff members that interact with prospective students before, during and after the enrollment (Ivy, 2008; Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011). The staff therefore represents an important factor for students’ satisfaction. People are related to process and promotion, thus becoming an important factor to consider. (Enache, 2011) Staff members are an important part of education, as high-contact service operation is based on personal contacts, communication and interactions between people (Nicholls et al., 1995). These interactions are based on personal contact with supportive, administrative and academic staff. Staff’s image could be linked to student’s perception and potential enrollment. Hence, students may be influenced by the number of employed PhD’s or professors. (Ivy, 2008) Other people that could influence a student's enrollment are public and well known profiles working at the university, such as experts that frequently appear in television or other media (Ibid, 2008; Enache, 2011). Administrative staff has an important role due to their service towards prospective students. Interactions between academic staff and students could therefore affect the reputation of the HEI. The perceived service, both at the front line (lecturers) and the back line (administrative), is of importance due to the students’ valuation of the service quality. (Ivy, 2008) HEIs could obtain student and society satisfaction, an enriched image and improved educational service if they promoted and encouraged well known and respected professors. The right people at the right place are a key step in order to develop a fruitful education, which is linked to the staff’s ability to deliver in a correct manner. (Enache, 2011) Besides current staff, former students are important for HEIs. Former students could inform prospective students of their experiences regarding the education and other university related matters. (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011) Even though the supportive functions of a lecturer may influence students’ perception, the management of a single phone call by administrative staff could impact students will to enroll (Ivy, 2008). Administrative staff are connected with the enrollment process as they deal with prospective students and their requests. The way administrative staff answer these requests could influence students’ first impressions. Even after enrollment, administrative and teaching staff plays an important role. Thus, staff is a key factor for the universities marketing mix. (Enache, 2011)
Another factor that could influence student’s enrollment is publications and research records of a well-known professor (Ivy, 2008). When students seek information, the first impression could be of significant importance. Students’ impressions could be based on the initial contact with people of the particular university. (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011) Hence, if HEIs employ well suited personnel the institution could improve their marketing mix. Finally, Enache (2011) and Pratminingsih and Soedijati (2011) state people as the single most influencing and important supplementary factor within services marketing.

2.1.4 Process

Process is related to the logistics of the service delivery (Nicholls et al., 1995). The service delivery contains the administrative and formal functions of the university. This is related to the enrollment process including requests for registration, course examination and evaluation, besides giving out examination results and graduation (Ivy, 2008). Social events and entertainment activities are said to be included within the process (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011). Educational service could be connected with a lot of administration and bureaucracy for students. However, a well-functioning process could reduce the frustration for both students and HEIs (Enache, 2011). The university has to confirm that students understand the process of obtaining a service (education), since the customer (students) is involved in the production process. As the service involves interaction in order to create the product, cooperation with staff is important. (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011) Face-to-face interaction with staff is important since HE requires payment preceding the consumption that often takes place over long time periods. During the enrollment phase, HEIs needs to manage students’ registration on the right course, accurately calculated grades and that a correct degree is awarded. Student satisfaction could also be ensured by supporting accommodation, course schedules and access to the library. (Ivy, 2008)

The enrollment phase is important as it transforms prospective students to registered students. If process is combined with people, the university could improve image and reputation which could attract additional students. If the enrollment phase is successful, students could benefit from knowledge transferred from the HEI. A smooth enrollment phase could also affect the educational quality and the HEI in a positive manner, which could lead to a lower dropout rate and more matched integration with the labor market. (Enache, 2011)

2.2 Complementary marketing factors for student attraction and enrollment

To complement the four Ps, three additional factors have been incorporated. These factors are motivated by their connections within the field of educational marketing and HEIs. Thus IT, image and reputation have been identified as interrelated towards place, promotion, people and process. Previous research (Gomes & Murphy, 2003; Knight, 2004; Altbach, 2004; Kleen & Shell, 2003; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Mazzarol, 1998; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011) regarding these factors has student recruitment within HEIs as focal point. Hence, a bond was identified and the combination between these four Ps and complementary factors was topical. Place and promotion was linked with IT, which deals with universities’ recruitment and communication purposes. The same connection was found between image and reputation towards promotion, people and process in regard to
higher education. These connections were considered to be highly relevant towards the study’s purpose and research questions.

2.2.1 IT

IT is an influencing factor for development within HEIs and the transformation towards the growth of higher education worldwide (Knight, 2004). Connected to IT, the component E-commerce has been identified within public and private institutions. HEIs use this component as a driving factor towards attraction and enrollment of foreign students (Kleen & Shell, 2003). The increased competition within higher education has given institutions challenging tasks in their recruitment and online customer service process towards foreign students. It has also stimulated new marketing approaches towards students. Communication from institutions has enhanced the service available to foreign students. One communication factor for student attraction and enrollment, underlined by Gomes and Murphy (2003), is the role of the internet. It has two roles in educational purposes; first, students’ decision making and utilization of information through internet and secondly HEIs’ implementations and e-business activities possessed by IT. (Ibid, 2003)

Changes are taking place within higher education and the increased flow of IT-based information is told to be one contributing factor. IT has also been affecting the way HEIs generate knowledge. As a result, different universities now have the ability to offer websites and databases for foreign students. (Altbach, 2004) Universities’ e-mail responses and websites shall aim to provide relevant information for potential students. Further, since education within HEIs is intangible, it becomes challenging for prospective students to actually verify the content. Courses that are offered within higher education are often time-consuming and complex, which make it difficult to get a perception of the education. In order to minimize this obstacle, reliable and independent individuals turn out to be identified as a problem solving factor. Educational agents are one example that HEIs could use in order to support and present constructive answers to prospective students. (Gomes & Murphy, 2003) Continuing, Gomes and Murphy (2003) states that HEIs, no matter whether public or private, should strengthen their brand by using online activities. This should be done through utilizing name and e-mail addresses to stimulate the satisfaction for online prospective students. As a whole, previous research concludes that HEIs gains successful outcomes in the recruitment process through deeper insight into e-business strategies and online customer service. (Ibid, 2003) As the factor IT has been stressed as important for student attraction and enrollment, the following section focuses on the other complementary marketing factors image and reputation.

2.2.2 Image & reputation

Image consists of the beliefs, impressions and attitudes that a group or a person has of an object. The object may be a product, brand, place or person. The impression could be perceived as imagined, real, true or false. (Barisch & Kotler, 1991) Herbig and Milewicz (1993, p. 18) state that “Reputation is the estimation of the consistency over time of an attribute of an entity. “ The estimation is formed to be the element of an object that is repeated towards the receiver. The attributes are parts of the object, exemplified as quality, price and marketing related skills. (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993)

Image and reputation is of importance for universities who seeks to enhance student attraction and enrollment combined with high student retention figures. (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001) Mazzarol (1998)
concludes a positive correlation between universities marketing performance internationally and the factor image. It is therefore believed that image could strengthen universities’ attraction process towards foreign students (Ibid, 1998). Wilkins and Huisman (2011) mention reputation as an important and influencing factor for students’ destination choice. HEIs need to enhance their knowledge towards the importance of image and reputation. This knowledge could help the university in conducting a communication strategy suitable for the particular market. Even though the role of image and reputation is important, HEIs often struggles to manage these two factors due to its abstract and intangible nature. Previous research shows that students’ degree of loyalty had a positive correlation towards their perceived image and reputation. Besides the connection between image and reputation towards loyalty, students’ choice of retention was also identified as positively correlated with the perceived degree of loyalty. (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001) Hence, image (Mazzarol, 1998; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001) and reputation (Ibid, 2001; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011) could be important inputs for HEIs which strive to attract and enroll students.

2.3 Conceptual framework

This section presents the conceptual framework, which has been motivated by the connection between the selected four Ps and the three factors IT (Gomes & Murphy, 2003; Knight, 2004; Altbach, 2004; Kleen & Shell, 2003), image and reputation (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Mazzarol, 1998; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011).

![Conceptual framework guiding this study](own creation)

The reasoning for incorporating the IT factor into the conceptual framework is to emphasize the similar connection to both promotion and place. Promotion talks about different channels that are important to take into consideration whereas it later mentions the importance of websites (Enache, 2011). Promotion is also an important tool for HEIs in the enrollment and information process (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011). Nicholls et al., (1995) adds up by stating that HEIs lack marketing in regard to educational service. Both statements end up being relevant with the factor IT since it
creates a more widespread promotion towards the enrollment and information process for HEIs. It can also aid HEIs to realize the importance of educational marketing. This is believed to be relevant with previous research above since it also deals with online activities and its contributions towards improved performance for HEIs in regard to student attraction and enrollment. (Gomes & Murphy, 2003) Another reflection towards promotion is stated by Knight (2004), where IT is a key driver for HEIs towards an improved educational service. Place talks about having different channels of providing knowledge and student related material, whereas Blackboard is one example (Ivy, 2008). Other IT instruments described are websites, e-mail and e-commerce services. These instruments reflect upon what Gomes and Murphy (2003), Altbach (2004) and Kleen and Shell (2003) concludes in their previous research; that foreign students use internet and HEIs shall engage in activities related to IT. Gomes and Murphy (2003) and Ivy (2008) also describe place to be one marketing channel for HEIs to meet the student’s needs, wants and expectations. Gomes and Murphy’s (2003) previous research becomes compatible since IT is discussed to provide constructive information towards student recruitment in combination with place.

With reference to previous research by Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001), Mazzarol (1998) and Wilkins & Huisman (2011), the factors image and reputation have been incorporated within the conceptual framework. Image and reputation is interrelated to people, process and promotion. The connection between image and people is motivated by HEIs staff and their role to interact, inform and manage prospective students during the enrollment process (Ivy, 2008; Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011; Nicholls et al., 1995). HEIs could also strengthen their image through promotion and encouragement of well-thought-of professors (Enache, 2011). The interaction between staff and students could thus affect the perceived image (Ivy, 2008) and therefore be linked to people. Image and process are also interrelated, due to HEIs management of a smooth enrollment phase. This management can improve a higher educational service quality for the university and since the service quality experienced by students could affect the image, this is an important factor for HEIs. (Enache, 2011)

Image is also connected to promotion. HEIs use of promotion and its portrayed message can influence the image perceived by its receivers (Enache, 2011). Universities use different marketing channels to inform these receivers, which could be students, potential funders and the general public (Ibid, 2011; Ivy, 2008). The message can be distributed through different promotional channels and is therefore associated with the HEI’s image. Reputation is also important for universities in order to attract students. As it is difficult to improve an already damaged reputation, promotional activities are important for HEIs. (Enache, 2011) People is interrelated with reputation, due to the interactions between HEIs staff and students (Ivy, 2008). Reputation is also connected towards process since it deals with the enrollment, retention and graduation phase. The enrollment phase plays an important role for HEIs as it informs students about knowledge regarding educational services. This knowledge can be fruitful during the retention stage as well as the graduation phase since it can provide improved reputation for HEIs. (Enache, 2011) The combination of the four Ps together with the factors IT, image and reputation into the conceptual framework will facilitate HEIs to attract and enroll foreign students. In this way, HEIs can achieve constructive performances in terms of attracting and enrolling foreign students.
3 Methodology

This chapter introduces the study’s research methods and design combined with data collection through interviews, surveys and observations. This is followed by a presentation of the study’s validity, reliability and limitations.

Due to the interest of conducting a study within the field of marketing of HEIs and how such institutions attract and enroll foreign students, the study was delimited towards private universities in Thailand. This became possible through the MFS scholarship’s purpose of affecting the country positively. This suited the study’s purpose as recommendations from strengthening marketing approaches have been constructed towards how BUIC and WU could attract and enroll foreign students. The introduction described the conditions that are taking place in the industry of HEIs, in combination with problems that Thailand is facing towards competition within this industry. This was an influencing factor for the chosen topic since the recommendations presented constructive outputs not only for these two universities, but also for further studies within HEIs and higher education in southeast Asia. The higher education industry in Thailand has recently received a lot of attention due to increased competition and enhanced establishment of HEIs. (Schiller & Liefner, 2007; Teixeira & Amaral, 2001; Kitcharoen, 2004; Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, 2008). Since this study area is not that elaborated (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006) it also influenced the choice of topic.

3.1 Research methods and design

In order to conduct the study, a case study approach including interviews combined with surveys and observations has been used. A case study often investigates a social phenomenon or a general perspective of a specific subject (Yin, 2009; Christensen et al., 2010). Schramm (1971) defines a case study as “...centrally concerned both with time and with description. It seeks to record why a given decision was taken, how it was worked out, and what happened as a result.” Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) discuss research design and describe it to be a general plan for authors implementing empirical research with a research problem. The research design can thus operate as a guide for the study as it could enhance and streamline the study’s data collection and analysis (Ibid, 2004).

As this study’s research questions is based on “how” and “what”, a description underneath presents the basis of such an construction. A research question which corresponds to a case study and include “how”, often relates to an exploratory or a descriptive design (Yin, 2009). When a research question includes dimensions as “what”, the study often relates to an explorative design (Christensen et al., 2010). Due to this study’s purpose of describe and analyze strengthening marketing approaches for BUIC and WU, certain recommendations have been presented. In order to answer the study’s third question, the first and second question includes a “what” dimension. This was due to the second questions connection with the purpose to give recommendations. More than one question had to be used, since the study had to get general data concerning HE marketing. The second question was also topical since it aided the recommendations. Since the study strived for a broader understanding and deeper knowledge of marketing within HEIs; interviews, surveys and observations were used. As this case study holds both qualitative and quantitative data, the study’s design is identified as a mixed method research. This design is motivated when the use of complementary data is identified as relevant towards the study’s purpose. (Yin, 2009) Bryman and Bell (2011) also state that the use
of mixed methods research could include both qualitative and quantitative data, that combined could enhance the study’s results.

3.2 Construction of theoretical framework

In order to construct the theoretical framework, both unsystematic and systematic methods were used (Christensen et al., 2010). The theoretical framework is derived from books and scientific journals and collected from these following databases; ProQuest/ ABI Inform (ProQuest, 2013), Discovery (Mälardalen University, 2013), Google (Google, 2013), Google Scholar (Google Scholar, 2013) and Emerald (Emerald, 2013). This theoretical framework has influenced the study’s data collection presented below.

3.3 Data collection

The study is based upon the collection of qualitative and quantitative data and literature material. The collection of these data types was identified as suitable for the study’s design as to strengthen the validity and reliability. The use of quantitative data could be motivated when the researcher tries to investigate and explain certain outcomes of the study subject. (Yin, 2009) Quantitative data is often based on numbers and figures and connected to the researchers need to generalize, replicate and outline different causalities within the findings and the area of study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The researcher could collect better results if both qualitative and quantitative data is used (Yin, 2009). Qualitative data consists primarily of actions, words, symbols and text that deal with a holistic perspective and relationships within the area of study (Christensen et al., 2010). To explain, describe and explore the investigated event on a deeper level, the researcher can use quantitative data as a complement (Yin, 2009). As a mixed methods research design was conducted, the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data was believed to be sufficient as it served the study’s purpose to outline recommendations. Since only qualitative data would provide the universities perspective, it was important to implement a survey towards foreign students. The survey would then collect data from the students and outline their point of view together with own IT observations. Hence, the recommendations have been based on how BUIC and WU uses services marketing to attract and enroll foreign students combined with data regarding the students’ perspectives and own IT observations.

As the study’s interviews are of a qualitative nature, the findings are dependent on the respondents’ personal experiences and opinions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A qualitative interview could also improve the collecting of valid and reliable data due to the respondents’ particular knowledge of the subject at hand (Christensen et al., 2010). The interviews have been based upon a semi-structured technique. Such technique allows the interviewer to collect information from the respondent in a more flexible manner compared to a structured technique, often used in surveys. The interviewer could thereof combine prepared questions, with suitable and relevant questions that arise during the interview. An important aspect of the semi-structured interview technique is that it allows the respondent to elaborate and present data connected with their personal knowledge concerning the subject. The qualitative data would therefore be linked to the interviewee’s capacities to provide information within the area of study. (Bryman & Bell, 2011) Quantitative data was collected through surveys that followed a structured approach. The surveys have been used to investigate and measure key figures. (Bryman & Bell, 2011) In line with the study’s purpose as to describe and
analyze how foreign students at BUIC and WU valued marketing related factors (key figures) - surveys was relevant. Due to a survey’s focus on contemporary events (Yin, 2009), this method was suitable towards the study’s purpose.

3.3.1 Interviews

An interview takes place when a researcher interacts with one or more respondent. The process of an interview could be streamlined if the relationship with the respondent, in terms of values and expectations improves. (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005) The personal interviews were conducted with one respective respondent from BUIC and WU. The respondents were selectively chosen (Christensen et al., 2010). Delimitation towards potential interviewees was made in order to fit specific criteria. The criteria’s has been based upon working title and position, area of responsibility and knowledge regarding marketing within higher education. The chosen individuals matched these criteria’s and were therefore compatible towards the study’s purpose. A brief description of respective respondent follows underneath.

The first interview took place in BUIC’s facilities in Bangkok, 19th of April 2013. The respondent - Kawin Rungsimuntakul is a Strategy and Communications Manager at the university. He studied Entrepreneurship at Babson College in U.S and been employed at BUIC since 2011. With his academic background and knowledge within marketing, expertise in English and friendly approach he was an appropriate interviewee. The second interview was conducted with Naw Wai Wai Lynn Thway at WU’s campus in Bangkok, 26 of April 2013. Wai Wai is a Recruitment Manager specialized within the Asian region. She manages the recruitment process towards both domestic and foreign students. She has been employed at WU for three years and her country of origin is Burma. Before employment at WU, Wai Wai finished studies at an international university in Burma. Besides these studies she also worked as an administrator at an international school in Burma. Wai Wai was more than suitable for meeting the requirements for the criteria. Regarding the ethical perspective and privacy (Bryman & Bell, 2011), the respondents were asked whether their names could be used in the study and they granted us their permission. To minimize potential misinterpretations and biases a voice recorder was used. The eight first questions distributed in the interview are based on this study’s framework with the four Ps and the remaining three questions surrounds complementary marketing factors for student attraction and enrollment. For additional information concerning the questions used in the interviews, see Appendix 1 – Interview form; BUIC and WU.

Ghauri and Cateora (2010) talk about cultural differences when going abroad. They specifically mention culture as an important factor to consider if correctly targeting an international market. One important element within cultural differences is language. This component stresses the importance of communication and natural interpretation that by definition is “…interpretations according to the characteristics of a particular language” (Ghauri & Cateora, 2010, p. 91). It has been very helpful for us in overcoming the language barrier. First of all, the flow of communication that took place is important for the findings of this study. If the respective respondents had less expertise in English, that could have influenced the perception and interpretation of distributed questions. Such problems could therefore lead to less valid findings. This argument can also be transferred to the long-term experience of the respondents. Since they had been working with these two private institutions, giving them experience concerning marketing within higher educations, the findings were sufficient. One important factor to take into consideration was the cultural differences. To
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overcome this obstacle, previously mentioned criteria was constructed. Wai Wai originates from Burma, has studied at an international school and speaks fluent English. In BUIC’s case, we had to struggle and locate the right respondent. Through contacts with the university, Kawin was identified as suitable. He had been studying in US and lived there for a couple of years, which reduced the barriers of cultural differences. Thus, as the respondents has an international experience and speaks fluent English, this was beneficial for the collection of data from interviews.

3.3.2 Surveys

When the researcher measures the concept towards a quantitative research method, survey, this could provide possible explanations of the study subject (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The surveys was conducted towards foreign students at BUIC and WU in order to gather data that was connected to the purpose of this study and the second research question, which focuses on the students’ valuation of certain marketing factors. The sample’s characteristics and the survey’s distribution, collection and design are presented underneath.

A sample, which is a component of a survey deals with segmentation of a population that has been selected for certain purposes. This method may be used based upon two approaches, probability or non-probability (Christensen et al., 2010). In a probability sample you randomly select units from the population, which gives the whole population the chance to participate. A non-probability sample deals with the opposite, which means that particular units in the population are more prioritized than others. (Bryman & Bell, 2011) Segmentation towards a specific population was the first approach. A non-probability sample method was chosen, whereas foreign students were the targeted sample group. However, since a non-probability method to segment foreign students was used, the second approach has been based upon a probability method. This means that foreign students were randomly selected. The sample was limited to 50 respondents for both BUIC and WU - carrying 25 from respective university. A sample of 50 units has been sought to be a relevant amount of a study (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010).

Since random foreign students were selected, it was difficult to interpret the data to be generalized for all the students within that university. The majority of the respondents could also originate from the same geographical location worldwide, which made it even harder to generalize the data. In other words, whether these respondents shared culture or other similar preferences can be questioned. However, the respondents can still have different opinions and preferences towards the services marketing BUIC and WU embark, making their contributions valuable and important for the study. The surveys were physically distributed during the 18th of April at the universities. This was made when Thailand was embarking Songkran, which is their new year. This could have decreased the chances of respondents’ participation due to this occurrence. The authors made sure to be physically present and distribute the surveys face-to-face. Thus, confusions regarding the questions were believed to be minimized as the respondents were assisted during the distribution and collection. For additional information concerning the questions used in the surveys, see Appendix 2 – Survey; foreign students at BUIC and Appendix 3 – Survey; foreign students at WU.

The survey had a simple design, consisted of six questions and was based on a Likert scale (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The questions were based on the conceptual framework, with the four Ps - people, place, promotion and process in combination with the factors - IT, image and reputation. Since the
conceptual framework includes seven components interrelated, one component covered one question. Nevertheless, image and reputation was combined into one question. This was appropriate since previous research demonstrated strong bonds between image and reputation. As foreign students were targeted, the surveys language was English. When using surveys a sampling error could be obtained when a small amount of respondents are generalized. There are also other errors associated with the usage of surveys. Factors included here are – poorly expressed questions, bad observing techniques and deficiencies. (Bryman & Bell, 2011)

3.3.3 Observations
Observation of IT factors connected with the universities was also used in order to complement the interviews and the surveys. The purpose of these observations was to carry out a within-case (Yin, 2009) analysis based on multiple forms of data from respective university. This enabled a more in-depth analysis, in comparison to only using a data from the staff interviews and student surveys. The following factors were taken into consideration when conducting the observations; sources of language, understandability of general information, programs and courses, campus and student activities, content on Facebook, YouTube or other web pages and finally customer services and promotional activities. The observations were conducted the 1st of May 2013.

3.4 Validity & Reliability
Yin (2009) presents four different test methods related to a study’s quality, research design and validity. Independent of research method used in case studies, these four measures are frequently applied; construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. The overall purpose is to evaluate the study’s quality. Construct validity recognizes appropriate measures where multiple sources of data and an establishment of interrelated evidence should be conducted. It means that qualitative and quantitative data could strengthen a study’s construct validity. Internal validity establishes unplanned relationships where the researcher could enhance the study’s quality through pattern matching, explanation building and reasoning. External validity outlines the ability to generalize the findings, thus, can the researcher strengthen this validity through usage of relevant theories that describes findings and concepts associated with the study's empirical data. As opposed to the other three measures, reliability focuses on the study’s operationalization. It focuses on whether the data collection process could be repetitive. In order to strengthen the reliability, the researcher can store relevant data and information using a case study protocol and a database. (Yin, 2009)

Due to the study’s research method and data collection, barriers associated with the four test methods was taken into consideration. Linked to construct validity, multiple data sources based on qualitative and quantitative empirical data were used. Since external validity is connected with a survey that consists of statistical generalization besides interviews and observations with analytical generalization (Yin, 2009), the study’s validity was improved. The study conducted, gathered and analyzed findings which were based upon both analytical and statistical dimensions. A barrier when conducting the case study was the capability to generalize based on findings gathered from only two HEIs. However, related to external validity literature based upon theories and previous research was used. The previous research was identified as relevant since it surrounded services marketing and marketing within higher education institutions.
Two main objectives with reliability are to minimize miscalculations and biases. The researcher should conduct the study in such a way that a succeeding investigator is able to repeat the study in the same manner. The reliability could be strengthened if all the procedures are documented. The documentation should be available for later researchers and functioning in the sense that the methods are available for future practice. (Yin, 2009) With these descriptions as a base, the study’s reliability has been strengthening by adopting a constructive approach. The reliability is therefore improved due to the use of scientific articles and books. The usage of web pages consists of potential risks, as information could change over time or be erased. The primary data could also outline possible risks, as if the respondents do not answer honestly or share their answers in a way that is inconsistent and incomplete. Such errors could complicate the researcher’s interpretation process (Christensen et al., 2010). As gathered data originates from interviews, surveys and observations, this risk are recognized as one possible bias.

3.5 Limitations

The study was conducted within the two private Thai HEIs. Due to this delimitation the study has excluded state or governmental (public) HEIs. Since data are gathered from the two universities at hand, it could limit the possibility for generalization linked to HEIs in general. Bryman and Bell (2011) states that generalization of findings is only possible towards the study's respondents. Additional limitations are the selective respondents and informants from these universities. Since the purpose and research questions are related to attraction and enrollment of foreign students, the research has solely focused on this target group. Findings from the interviews could be overrepresented, since these were limited to only one representative for respective university. Continuing, the theoretical framework could also be limiting in the sense that other appropriate theories or concepts have been excluded. Since such limitations are apparent in all kinds of research, theories used in this study were relevant and suitable towards the study’s purpose. With this said, the collection and analysis of data needs to be taken into consideration concerning misrepresentative and generalized matters. Furthermore, since this study was conducted within the MFS scholarship some limitations existed. The study had to enable direct or indirect positive affects towards Thailand and thus was the third research question influenced by the MFS’s requirements. This influence was based on providing recommendations towards the two universities at hand. This means that the MFS scholarship have impacted the study’s outcome since the authors were restricted to some degree.
4 Empirical data

The following chapter will introduce the empirical findings collected from observations, surveys and interviews from respective university. The chapter also provides a short description of each university. The empirical findings will be divided in two parts, one focusing on Bangkok University International College and the other on Webster University.

4.1 Bangkok University International College

The university is one of the oldest and largest in relation to enrolled students in Thailand (Education, 2013). The university was founded in 1962 is a nonprofit institution and consists of approximately 27,000 students besides 1,200 staff and faculty members. BUIC has relationships with universities in a multiple sets of countries, such as US, Japan, Australia, Finland, France, Sweden, Norway and Germany. (BUIC, 2013a) The university offers internationally and English based programs with bachelor degrees in Technology, Business Administration, Arts, Tourism Management and Hotel & Restaurant Management (BUIC, 2013b).

Figure 3 Campus at Bangkok University International College (Own photo)
4.1.1 BUIC’s online presence

When entering BUIC’s homepage the language is solely in English. Major programs that can be found are diverse, whereas there are mostly undergraduate levels on the education provided towards foreign students. The homepage has highlights of product information and advertisement of their position as being “The first and largest private Thai university” and “think creative”. However, the homepage does not have personal sales contacts, nor does it have information of public relations. By clicking yourself towards “Contacts us”, you can comments or ask questions that were not answered in the website towards Academic Advisors, Admissions and Exchange program and Student Service departments. It is also possible to mail, call or fax questions and comments. BUIC uses a web based database called University Register Systems Access (URSA). Figure 4 underneath are based upon web pages that BUIC uses. The largest picture exemplifies the homepage, the second to the left covers the online application and the third to the right illustrates URSA.

Figure 4 BUIC’s homepage, online application and URSA web page (1st of May, 2013)

The URSA database provides course information, personal data, grade reports, grade calculations, class schedules and examination schedules. The website includes a lot of advertisement and is mostly covered by the Thai language. URSA goes under the name “Online for bachelor degree
students” and thus it also has English language incorporated. URSA does not have any direct links to Facebook, Instagram, YouTube or other IT sources. The homepage only has a direct link to Facebook and it takes a while to find it, as it is under “Contact us” in the middle of the page. Neither of these web pages has campus activities except the homepage that has a “campus life” section with accommodation recommendations and interactions with graduated and ongoing students. Lastly, the university has an online application function were prospective students can submit and finish their application without any personal interactions with staff members.

4.1.2 BUIC’s marketing

The Strategy and Communications Manager described that BUIC uses channels such as e-mail, Facebook and Twitter. He also states that BUIC uses e-mail as a service towards handing out general information. However, this function is not well possessed by the university, which makes it difficult according to him to assess the amount of foreign students that receives this service. In other words, the main channels BUIC uses was said to be online based with the homepage as one important channel. The respondent could not distinguish the most utilized channels, even though BUIC have all of these channels under operation. The interviewer explains the university has strengths and weaknesses in the information provided towards foreign students. The first approach was to visit all students and inform them about BUIC’s educational services. This approach was however not as effective towards the foreign students as it was towards the domestic ones. The contributing factor to this occurrence was the lack of resources to inform foreign students. Furthermore the information provided was both online and offline based. Online factors are the university’s different web pages and formal considerations were said to be hard copy material.

The manager further explains that BUIC utilizes both quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to locate focus groups. These focus groups consist of students and enable the university to gather relevant information considering their needs and wants. BUIC also establishes open houses and guiding counselors. However, he stressed word of mouth to be another superior factor. The university relied heavily on former students to inform prospective ones. He continues by explaining that the personal sales contacts are lagging behind and that it needs to be improved. One solution to this desire is to incorporate educational agents, which could aid BUIC by promoting their educations. The respondent gave examples on promotional channels that he believed important for the university. These channels were; trade shows, educational expos, face-to-face interaction, partnership with foreign HEIs, former students and a government based guide composed of university related information. He believed these instruments as important factors to attract and enroll foreign students. The university has some future desires of promotional instruments that they wanted to engage, such as a career guide and sales and admission personnel.

The interaction between the staff and the students was underdeveloped and poor from the universities perspective. BUIC manages phone call services towards their foreign students, but none of the employees at those departments handling foreign students speaks fluent English. To overcome this problem, the university decided to hire a student with good language skills. He argues that a single person is responsible for the collection of e-mail. Additionally, the university uses face-to-face interactions together with after-market service. The university’s after-market service including registered students was said to be well managed. The respondent explained lack of resources within the supportive, administrative and academic staff. Firstly he argued that no
supportive and administrative personnel speak English, nor does personnel situated at the student service or registration office. Foreign students are also forced to fill out forms provided in the local language, Thai. Secondly, looking closer upon the academic staff, the respondent stated that this workforce is hired depending on their personal experiences and merits. Meaning that the skilled professors are more expensive, and this is a problem for BUIC. This problem do not only occurs due to the financial aspect, it is also linked to the individuals responsible for recruiting the academic staff. Apparently, according to the respondent, there is a hierarchy following with President and the Vice-President at the top. These people have the power to neglect and refuse proposals from personnel lower down in the chain that might find some academic staff suitable for a position. Connected to process, the respondent argued that BUIC managed the enrollment phase concerning foreign students all at once. BUIC uses classrooms during one day to inform all the foreign students. BUIC also informs about visa application, accommodation and other practical matters. He stated that BUIC possess a bad quality control. The quality is associated with the satisfaction and understandability of educational services from the foreign student’s perspective. The respondent argued that even though the government has requirements of ratings and quality on courses, BUIC still possess a low quality control. Feedback, which is excluded in BUIC’s case, is told to be influenced from the faculties’ side. He also states the culture as one possible affecting factor to this occurrence. Additionally, forms are filled out by foreign students in hard copies during the enrollment process.

When asked about BUIC’s use of IT, the manager mentioned Facebook was one formal information and communication provider. BUIC has several sites on Facebook including one formal site and additional sites focused on informal activities. The university uses a web based database called URSA, which provides information concerning course schedules, grades and other university related information. This web page was believed to be “out of date” and it could be improved. He concluded that no information is distributed to foreign students through e-mail. However, BUIC values multiple IT factors as important. The respondent proposed several IT factors to deliver successful outcomes towards attracting and enrolling foreign students. The main established IT related factors are YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, online banners, online activation (work shop), event participation and direct e-mail. Besides these channels, BUIC uses surveys targeting students distributed online through newspapers and the homepage. The online magazine Imagine and web based PR blogs are also IT related factors identified as important for BUIC. The interviewee stressed that BUIC did not have any centralized e-mail database. Finally, BUIC found it important to manage the image and reputation factors compatible with their educational offerings. Investments in modern and design rich facilities were prioritized, in contrary to events and fundraisers.

“BUIC does not need music stars, thus we do not teach music. BUIC is about being creative and famous, thus we constitute famous TV celebrities.” (Strategy and Communications Manager at BUIC)

The respondent stated that BUIC’s strategy in only focusing on facilities has been questioned, claiming them to employ poor marketing. He replies by stressing the university’s ongoing marketing approaches towards appropriate target groups, deriving in the need of further actions as unnecessary. Furthermore, BUIC does conduct minor research linked to the educational service (programs, courses and focus areas) offered at the university. The university’s findings will be followed by the students’ findings.
4.1.3  BUIC’s marketing from the students’ perspective

Considering foreign students at BUIC and their view towards place and its importance of availability of class locations, teaching styles and methods and the IT features, 76 % answered Important and Very Important. 24 % of the respondents replied Less Important. People and more specifically the staff members interactions and its helpfulness related to the enrollment process showed the following result; 80 % thought it was Helpful and Very Helpful followed by 12 % that replied Not Helpful and 8 % Less Helpful. The respondents valued promotion and its factors of advertising, public relation, publicity, promotional based sales efforts and personal sales contacts in the following manner; 52 % believed it was Helpful, 32 % thought it was Less Helpful, followed by Very Helpful and Not Helpful that received 8 % each. Connected with process and the enrollment phase, the students valued its interaction with staff members, requests for registration, information of accommodation and social events. 68 % said it was Very Important and Important, 32 % thought it was Less Important while none of the respondents answered Not Important. The students also valued the helpfulness of these IT factors; web-pages, customer service and e-mail. 72 % replied Very Helpful and Helpful, whereas Less Helpful accounted for 24 % and 4 % though it was Not helpful. Finally, the respondents answered in accordance to the enrollment phase and if image and reputation influenced their choice of studies at BUIC. 60 % answered Yes, while the remaining 40 % answered No.
4.2 Webster University

St. Louis, Missouri, USA, was the birthplace of Webster University back in the beginning of 20th century. Webster campuses can be found in Europe, Asia and North America and it is the only American based nonprofit and private university in Thailand. The academic institution offers a diverse program assortment where Business, Communication and Art & Sciences are few examples. (WU, 2013a) Enrolled students originate from over 148 countries and its operations in Thailand, Bangkok and Hua Hin has more than 57 nationalities (Kamakahi, 2013). The Bangkok and Hua Hin campuses are the most attractive destination for Webster students who seek studies abroad (WU, 2013b). Additionally, there are approximately 500 enrolled students at the university at present (Ibid).

![Campus at Webster University in Bangkok](Own photo)
4.2.1 WU’s online presence

The homepage offered languages in Thai, Chinese, Russian, and English. The English version of the homepage presented deeper and wider information compared to the other three. General information was easily accessible. Facts were also available of the campuses in Bangkok and Hua Hin together with student social events. Information of degrees, programs and courses were thoroughly presented and divided by the Graduate (Master level) and Undergraduate (Bachelor level) section. There was extensive information of Bachelor programs, Master programs and courses. Information regarding the university’s academic calendar and application were also accessible. Students could download documents regarding the application process and send in inquiries and requests through an e-mail function. However, the homepage did not have any live chat functions, even though contact information to Recruitment Managers was available. Figure 12 below illustrates two web pages used by WU. The blue based picture at the left is the first page to encounter when entering the homepage and the one to the right covers the section Student Life and Services.

Figure 12 Webster University web pages (1st of May, 2013)
It was hard to find any information of upcoming seminars, fairs and open-houses on the homepage. On the other hand, such information was easily accessible on WU’s Facebook page. The homepage had a section named “Student Life and Services”, that provided recommended accommodations. This section also informed about student activities. The homepage had links to YouTube where former and present students talked about their experiences abroad. There were also links to the university’s official Facebook and Instagram page that informed about Hua Hin and Bangkok campus.

All in all, the homepage presented and informed the viewer by sections focuses on general or educationally based information. It also provided deeper and specific information regarding student services and practical matters regarding enrolled students.

4.2.2 WU’s marketing

The Recruitment Manager at WU stressed online marketing to be the most dominant channel for informing foreign students about their institution, whereas Facebook, Instagram and Google Adword was exemplified. WU engaged in open-houses, both in Thailand and abroad, in order to provide information for prospective students. The respondent stated online marketing as the dominant channel in regard to educational services. An e-mail database for enrolled students and Passports, which is a course information database are online marketing channels used by WU. Other prioritized channels are direct marketing, career fairs and seminars. Within these engagements, WU put a lot of effort on; face-to-face interactions, agents (because of the distance), communication with parents, advertisement of seminars through newspapers and usage of professors during the recruitments process. Sales contacts, connected to face-to-face interactions are integrated within information provided towards WU’s educational services. The workforce consists of marketing and recruitment teams and Recruitment Managers that visiting prospective student abroad with aid of billboard and newspaper advertisement and TV commercials.

The respondent states again WU's engagement in billboards, newspapers and TV advertisement besides the usage of recruitment and marketing teams and Recruitment Managers. The interviewee stresses these engagements as examples of promotional channels. The respondent states that public relations are undeveloped at WU in regard to promotion. One action related to promotion and public relation is exemplified as published success-stories about students in their country of origin. The respondent believed this promotional channel as beneficial for the university. Another promotional action is the distribution of scholarship to students with good academic results. The respondent explains the most important channel to be dependent on the region. Europe and US is dominated by online advertisement and e-mail activities, in contrary to the Asian market where physical presence was the most important promotional instrument. Physical presence and face-to-face contact in Asia was argued to be more important because parent involvement was superior within this market. The African continent was also told to be online marketing based according to the Recruitment Manager.

“Physical presence is most important, but we cannot be everywhere.” (Recruitment Manager at WU)

The respondent described that the staff is important and pinpoints their interaction towards foreign students to be responsible for e-mails and phone calls. WU uses a step-by-step model where the initial contact between staff and students often takes place through e-mail, phone calls, seminars and fairs. The initial contact is followed by the next step of interaction when students will get more
in-depth information through a recruiter who often recommends a visit to the university’s campus. During the enrollment phase WU uses sales contacts, named Recruitment Managers that inform and interact with prospective students at seminars, fairs, open houses and other student recruitment and informative forums. WU also uses academic staff like professors that attend different forums. Even though the professors are not focused on recruitment they are used in the enrollment process to interact and inform students on educational matters and their research at WU. The Recruitment Manager continued by elaborating upon the enrollment phase. WU manages the majority of the communication, such as application, acceptance and confirmation through IT based tools. During the first phase, the university informs the student of possible programs, courses and fields of study. If the prospective student is interested, the enrollment phase moves on to an admission process, where documents, such as grades and recommendation letters are submitted. Finally, the student received an e-mail acceptance. After confirmation, the student pays the tuition fee and receives an admission packages. The package contains general information of accommodation and other practical matters. In the final phase, WU manages the majority of the communication, such as application, acceptance and confirmation through IT based tools. During the first phase, the university informs the student of possible programs, courses and fields of study. If the prospective student is interested, the enrollment phase moves on to an admission process, where documents, such as grades and recommendation letters are submitted. Finally, the student received an e-mail acceptance. After confirmation, the student pays the tuition fee and receives an admission packages. The package contains general information of accommodation and other practical matters. In the final phase, WU uses a tool called Student services and Student housing, where the university informs about recommended accommodations and assists the student towards matching their personal budget and preferences. After enrollment and arrival in Bangkok, the student receives free airport pickup, which the respondent states as an extra service. After the enrollment phase each student receives a Student adviser, which will orientate the foreign student considering practical matters. Furthermore, WU does not inform the student of the university in general. This is due to enhanced interest and focus on interaction with the student on an individual level. WU work with counseling through interaction with students’ parents, as they are an important part to inform due to factors such as costs (tuition fees and practical costs), educational quality and content. WU collect enquiries, both through e-mail and at seminars, fairs and open houses, which later is answered and delivered back by e-mail. The respondent states that since the campus in Bangkok is small (500 students) compared with other HEI’s, the institution focuses on personal contact at the individual level with the purpose of building a personal relation with the student. Additionally, she mentioned that a majority of the students originated from US.

“We are small, that’s why we do it” (Recruitment manager at WU)

The respondent stresses again IT based online marketing as important in the information and communication process towards foreign students. Blackboard, Google, Adword and e-mail was clarified as essential and taken into consideration. The e-mail application provides information regarding the admission, including activities that are taking place on the campus. She further pinpoints a software program, called Recruiter software, to be one established IT tool. The software distributes e-mails to registered users from seminars, open-houses and fairs, and it has the ability to filter registered students (receivers) in a way suitable for WU’s educational purposes. The respondent at WU explains the features of the software, as it can locate and identify students that have applied online. Even though WU rely on online activities to a large extent, no live chat or online customer service have been implemented. The respondent argues personal and individual interaction as dominant and the website to be used as the first initial contact and information source. Additionally, e-mail was the most important IT related factor. In average, around 25-30 e-mails operated from the first interaction to application between the prospective student and the university. She also stated these IT factors as important; Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube and these factors are coped by one person.
To uphold a good *image* and *reputation*, WU keeps the admission, academic results, and educational quality as high. This is due to the intention to strengthen the university’s reputation. High grades are linked to the purpose of attracting well talented students which focuses on receiving a high quality education. Since WU is the only American based HEI in Thailand, the university uses this factor to offer American accredited degrees. The university cooperates with the US Embassy, the US Ambassador and the princess of Bhutan through different activities with the purpose of improving the university’s image and reputation. By incorporating the princess of Bhutan, WU engage with a project called Brand Asia, where the princess is used as she is a former student. Other connections are with the Thai prime minister by which the institution provides scholarship to ten Thai top students per year. The university also uses public relation tools, such as one former student that is a famous racing driver. Finally, the Recruitment Manager states that WU’s professors’ conduct and publish research as it is a big part of the educational service, quality and enhancement of the university’s image and reputation. The section underneath presents the students’ findings.

4.2.3 WU’s marketing from the students’ perspective

![Figure 13 Place - WU](image)

![Figure 14 People - WU](image)

![Figure 15 Promotion - WU](image)

![Figure 16 Process- WU](image)

![Figure 17 IT - WU](image)

![Figure 18 Image & reputation - WU](image)

Foreign student at WU answered according to *place* by valuing the summarized importance of the following factors; availability of class locations, the teaching styles and methods and the IT features.
96 % thought it was Very Important and Important, 4 % believed it to be Not Important and none said Less Important. Considering people, the staff’s helpfulness during their enrollment phase at WU was valued as such; 56 % said Very Helpful and 44 % Helpful, which concludes that none of the respondents answered Less Helpful or Not Helpful. Linked to promotion, the students were asked whether these marketing channels influenced their choice of studies as WU; advertising, public relation, publicity, promotional based sales efforts and personal sales contacts. 52 % thought these channels were Helpful, 28 % valued it as Less Helpful followed by Not Helpful and Very Helpful that received 12 and 8 % respectively. Related to process and the enrollment phase, the respondents valued the importance of these factors: interaction with staff members, requests for registration, information of accommodation and social events. 80 % believed it as Important and Very Important, whereas 12 % valued it as Less Important followed by 8 % that said Not Important. The respondents valued the helpfulness of these IT factors; web-pages, customer service and e-mail. 80 % believed the factors as Very Helpful and Helpful, though 12 % said Less Helpful and 8 % thought Not Helpful. Lastly, the respondents valued image and reputation in accordance to its influence towards studies at WU. 68 % of the respondents said Yes, while the remaining, 32 % replied No.
5 Analysis

This chapter covers the study’s analysis which has been performed through a comparison of the theoretical framework and the empirical findings. The chapter is divided by a single, within and a cross-case analysis.

The single and the within-case analysis focused on Bangkok University International College (BUIC) and Webster University (WU) separately. The single-case analysis discusses findings collected from interviews and surveys. The within-case analysis included findings collected through the observations besides findings from the interviews and surveys. Finally, the cross-case analysis combined respective university findings from all data collections.

5.1 Single case analysis - BUIC

This part discusses the university’s and the students’ perspective, collected from the interview and the survey.

5.1.1 The university’s perspective

Regarding place, the Strategy and Communications Manager stated BUIC’s use of Facebook, Twitter and e-mail as prioritized channels. The e-mail channel is apparently not well-managed and BUIC do not know if this channel is used by their foreign students. The foreign students are in comparison to domestic ones, un-prioritized in the distribution of information due to lack of resources. Place is one component that universities utilize for achieving students satisfaction in terms of needs, wants and expectations (Ivy, 2008; Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011; Enache, 2011). Both Ivy (2008) and Pratminingsih & Soedijati (2011) underline the need of providing relevant students information through these IT based channels; e-mail, web pages and other features. Even though BUIC address the importance of IT, the university lacks behind due to bad control and mismanage of e-mail and lower information distribution towards foreign students. This factor needs to be taken into consideration if they want to align satisfaction towards prospective students.

The respondent stated face-to-face interaction, former students, partnership with foreign HEIs and trade shows as important promotional channels. Since BUIC has partnership with foreign HEIs, this occurrence could in a way touch upon the surface of public relations and publicity. Exemplified channels within promotion are personal sales contacts (Nicholls et al., 1995) public relations, publicity and promotional based sales efforts (Ivy, 2008). Nicholls et al., (1995) pinpoints personal sales contacts as important in regard to information of the educational product. In comparison to BUIC, the use of sales contacts lacked behind. The respondent also stated sales, admission and career guide personnel as under-prioritized. Enache (2011) state web sites and former students as important channels in providing information to prospective students. The respondent said that word of mouth was superior in BUIC’s case, as the university relied on former students to inform prospective ones. Thus the use of former students as a promotional channel covers the statements from Enache (2011). Ivy (2008) gives recommendations of open houses, e-mail and advertising as efficient tools for attracting and enrolling foreign students and these can be found at BUIC. The university also gathers student related information through surveys. The collected data is then used in order to outline promotional messages that are based on students’ needs and wants. BUIC uses promotion through various channels, even though the use of personal sales contacts, e-mail and
public relations lagged behind. Since word of mouth was stated as important for the university, you could expect some contributions towards their marketing approach in order to attract and enroll foreign students. However, as the respondent explained, BUIC are not successful in promotional or place considerations. As these factors definitely affect the word of mouth this show that the university seeks something at the same time as they work against it.

Connected to the framework’s factors people, the respondent stated the university’s staff interactions with foreign students as poor and underdeveloped. BUIC does not have any staff within their departments - responsible for foreign students that speak fluent English. Consequently, BUIC hired an English speaking student to handle phone calls and other task related to this matter and this employee managed all incoming e-mails. None of BUIC’s supportive or administrative staff speaks English, nor does personnel situated at the student service or registration office. This is correlated to lack of resources according to the respondent. Since BUIC’s academic staff is hired on personal experiences and merits, the cost variable is important. There is also a hierarchical problem to attract and employ talented staff. The respondent indicated that top managers exploited their power and position of hiring academic staff that personnel lower down in the chain might find suitable. Staff members are of importance for HEIs due to personal contacts, communication and interactions (Ivy, 2008; Nicholls et al, 1995). Since these interactions often are based on personal contacts with support, administrative and academic staff (Ivy, 2008), this element is highly influential towards students perceptions (Enache, 2011). Prospective students could be influenced by the number of employed PhD’s, professors or well-known profiles working at the university (Ivy, 2008). In BUIC’s case there was low correlations between engagement in supportive and administrative staff. BUIC incorporates academics staff that is considered appropriate from the hierarchical top. Despite this, the university still has poor performance towards their prospective foreign students, since none of the support or administrative staff speaks fluent English. The personnel are supposed to interact with foreign students and due to the language barrier, adjustments need to be made. The university should take this seriously as it does not reflect upon the recommendations from Ivy (2008) and Enache (2011), which in return could damage their attraction and enrollment process.

Considering process, the respondent specified that BUIC’s enrollment phase are performed at the university’s campus as a one-day activity. At this stage, foreign students obtain information of visa application, accommodation and other practical matters. Foreign students also need to fill in all related forms by hard copies. The respondent stated that BUIC exposed a bad quality control related to foreign student’s satisfaction and understandability of the educational service, since feedback and valuation by students was neglected. He also stated that the bad quality control was due to possible faculty and culture related factors. Enache (2011) argue that a well-functioning enrollment phase could lead to lower frustration by students and thereof positively affect the HEI. This procedure includes requests for registration, course examination and evaluation, handing out examination results and graduation (Ivy, 2008). HEIs also need to inform of accommodations, access to the library, course schedules (Ivy, 2008), social events and entertainment activities (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011). Pratminingsih and Soedijati (2011) stress the need for HEIs to confirm that students understand the process of obtaining a service. BUIC lacks behind as no information or focus on social events or other entertainment activities is performed. Neither does BUIC conduct feedback or evaluations related surveys, which is proven to be of importance as it strengthens HEIs abilities for quality control. However, BUIC did inform of visa, accommodation and other student related matters
which is in line with Ivy’s statement (2008). In order to improve their education and its chances of attracting and enrolling foreign students, the university really needs to establish feedback and focus on activities in order to meet students’ needs, wants and expectations. If BUIC do not respond to feedback, how can the attraction and enrollment process be improved by sticking to the same strategy without listening to the students? They need to ask themselves questions like this in order to make changes that correspond to Ivy’s (2008) arguments.

Linked to IT, the respondent stated that BUIC engaged in several IT channels. Facebook was the first underlined factor besides YouTube, Instagram, direct e-mails and surveys. This has beneficial outcomes for HEIs in their approach towards better services marketing towards prospective foreign students and BUIC overwhelms this category. IT enables HEIs to widen their abilities through features such as websites, databases and e-mail in delivering information towards foreign students. (Altbach, 2004) The respondent indicated IT as an important communication tool. However, he described e-mail to be non-existing towards foreign students with no centralized database - which do not align Altbach’s (2004) statement. Additionally, since courses within HEIs are complex and time-consuming, the usage of IT could make it easier for students (Gomes & Murphy, 2003). The respondent specified that BUIC used the database URSA, which enables student to get an overview of courses, grades and other university related information. The IT-feature URSA can be a driving factor towards minimizing obstacles for students. The use of educational agents is linked to promotion, and it is again brought into consideration under the student related factor IT. The same goes for online magazines and web based public relation blogs used by BUIC, which also are linked to the university’s promotional activities.

BUIC considered image and reputation as important towards attracting and enrolling foreign students. Even though BUIC invests in modern and design rich facilities he stressed the respondent stressed need for new investments in events and fundraisers, which believed could strengthen the university’s image and reputation. The respondent also indicated that even though BUIC’s marketing strategy has been questioned, the university still conducts minor research. The university’s focus lies towards developing creative and famous people (students) with purpose of enhancing the image and reputation. The factors image and reputation could influence students’ retention decisions (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). Mazzarol (1998) also concludes image as positively correlated towards attracting and enrolling foreign students. To construct and maintain image and reputation, HEIs could focus on managing a smooth enrollment phase (Enache, 2011) where staff members interact, inform and manage prospective students (Ivy, 2008; Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011; Nicholls et al., 1995). HEIs could also enhance their image and reputation by present publications and research records (Ivy, 2008) from well-thought-of professors (Enache, 2011). Even though BUIC uses different promotional channels with purpose of strengthening the image and reputation, the university lags behind in relation to research, as this element is not prioritized. Famous people are told to be important, but the university still neglects the use of well-thought-of professors that could promote and publish research. These individuals could be used as experts and attend different media channels and their presence could then strengthen BUIC’s image and reputation as a university that encourages and develop bright ideas.
5.1.2 The students’ perspective

Connected to place, according to these factors; availability of class locations, the teaching styles and methods and the IT features 76% answered more towards the positive side, whereas 24% thought it was less important. Ivy (2008) describes place to be utilized by universities to meet wants, needs and expectations from students, where the availability of IT, class locations and teaching methods could enable student satisfaction (Nicholls, et al., 1995). The findings demonstrate that foreign students valued these place channels as high since a majority of 76% answered positively. People showed the following result; 80% of the students thought it was Helpful and Very Helpful followed by 20% that replied Not Helpful and Less Helpful. As education is based on personal contact, communication and interaction between people, the staff members are important (Ivy, 2008; Nicholls et al, 1995). The findings show strong connections with what Ivy (2008) and Nicholls et al (1995) talks about, concerning the importance of staff interaction for HEIs abilities to attract and enroll foreign students. The respondents valued promotion and its factors; advertising, public relation, publicity, promotional based sales efforts and personal sales contacts in the following manner; 52% believed it was Helpful, 32% thought it was Less Helpful, followed by Very Helpful and Not Helpful that received 8% each. HEIs could inform the market by a numerous sets of promotional channels (Ivy, 2008; Enache, 2011; Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011), such as publicity, public relations, personal sales contacts and promotional based sales efforts (Nicholls et al., 1995; Ivy, 2008). The finding was abstract and the respondents had different views. It was therefore difficult to distinguish students’ preferences in terms of high and low valuation of promotion. Connected to process and the enrollment phase, a majority, 68% thought it was Very Important and Important, while the remaining 32% of the respondents thought it was Less Important. A well-functioning enrollment phase could reduce the frustration for both the student and the HEI, and thereof positively lead to a lower dropout rate and matched integration with the labor market (Enache, 2011). As 68% answered positively, there was strong connection with Enache’s (2011) recommendations. However, since 32% of the respondents replied Less Important, this serves as contradicting data considering the students’ perceived importance of a smooth enrollment phase.

72% of the respondents valued IT Very Helpful and Helpful, in contrary to the remaining 28% that valued it as low. The IT tools customer service, websites and e-mail is important in the student recruitment process for HEIs (Gomes & Murphy, 2003; Altbach, 2004). Since a majority valued IT high, the analysis shows a positive correlation with Gomes and Murphy (2003) and Altbach (2004). Finally, the respondents answered if image and reputation influenced their choice of studies at BUIC. 60% answered Yes, while the remaining 40% answered No. Besides that Wilkins and Huisman (2011) states reputation as an important and influencing factor for students’ destination choice, Mazzarol (1998) and Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) stress image as important for HEIs attraction process towards foreign students. Even though the factors image and reputation influenced (60%) the students’ enrollment choice, 40% answered No. The findings show therefore a slightly positive, even not convincing evidence of the influential aspect considering image and reputation. Since image and reputation can influence other Ps, why not strengthening this factor even further? 40% found it to be poor and that should be a warning alarm for the university.
5.2 Single case analysis - WU

This section will discuss the university’s perspective and the student’s view through findings gathered from the interview and the survey.

5.2.1 The university’s perspective

Online marketing is the most dominant channel for informing foreign students at the university. WU uses e-mail and Passport, which is a database distributing information in regard to the education. The respondent also explains other events in relation to place. The university engages in open-houses, seminars, fairs and direct marketing, both in Thailand and abroad, to inform foreign students about the university. During these activities WU engaged in face-to-face interactions and agent involvements with purpose to attract and enroll foreign students. The respondent also mentions the usage of professors during the recruitment process. These activities are believed to enhance the communication towards parents of prospective students’ and aid advertisement of seminars through newspapers, TV and billboards. WU’s sales contacts consist of recruitment teams and Recruitment Managers that focuses on physical presence abroad in order to interact with prospective students. TV is one example of possible knowledge distributions by HEI that Enache (2011) discusses and this factor is derived to reflect WU’ approach in this matter. Ivy (2008), Pratminingsih and Soedijati (2011) and Enache (2011) especially pinpoints IT as student satisfying and WU apparently according to the interviewee embark this suggestion. However, WU do also differ in the sense that the university has physical interactions with foreign students abroad. Events, seminars and agent involvement is activities that is told to be focused, thus it can be questioned whether they really are that online dominant as they claim.

Regarding promotion the respondent stated billboards, newspapers and TV advertisement as encouraged channels. These channels are used by recruitment teams and Recruitment Managers similar to place which demonstrates the promotional based sales efforts that Ivy (2008) underlines. Nevertheless, this workforce is still not optimized in promotional matters stated by the respondent. Public relations are undeveloped in regard to promotion and this is not in line with recommendations offered by Ivy (2008) Enache (2001) and Pratminingsih & Soedijati (2011) which pinpoints public relations as vital. On the other hand, the university conducted some actions towards public relations, exemplified as success-stories about students in their country of origin. What to take into consideration is that all though public relations are underdeveloped and neglected at WU, it is considered, but is it enough? Public relations were not within WU’s interest, as it was already explicitly utilized by Thai private HEIs. However, to attract foreign students, the university maybe should change this behavior and adapt to public relations that Ivy (2008) talks about. The respondent further explains promotion to be dependent on geographical location. The US and European market was more online dominated and thus, online advertisement and e-mail activities were focused. This segmentation reflects upon Enache (2011) who talks about one important channel for transferring relevant information through a web site. Ivy’s (2008) recommendations contradicts Enache (2011) which states that solely rely on internet as a promotional channel are inefficient in attracting and enrolling foreign students. WU’s way of meeting the basis of these theories is through diverse promotional channels. Apart from the European and US market, the university conducts different promotion towards the Asian region. Physical presence was the key in Asia, since parent interaction is superior within this market in regard to HEIs choice for foreign
students (Nicholls et al., 1995). Since WU focuses on two approaches, the university does again reflect upon Enache’s (2011) statement of providing information in a manner that the educational product is understood. It is a clever move because of the different behaviors that exists between these markets.

The respondent stressed *people* as very important and exemplified the staff and its interactions towards foreign students through e-mails, phone calls, seminars, fairs, open houses and other student recruitment and informative forums. The initial IT or face-to-face based interaction towards foreign students is often general and specific. The general part is information regarding the university and the specific part deals with courses, programs and student matters. By assessing fairs, seminars and open houses, prospective students meet sales contacts, Recruitment Managers, which assists and guides students towards meeting their aspirations. Public and well known profiles working at the university, such as experts, PhD’s or professors that frequently appear in media, could influence students’ enrollment (Enache, 2011; Ivy, 2008) Besides the current staff, former students could play a crucial role for HEIs, as they inform prospective students of their educational experiences and other university related matters (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011). WU uses academic staff, professors, which attend recruitment and informative forums. The professors’ interact and inform prospective students regarding the educational service and their research. WU’s staff and its interactions with foreign students have proven to be partly in line with Ivy’s (2008), Enache’s (2011) and Nicholls’s et al., statements. (1995). Even though WU uses sales contacts combined with other people based elements, the university lacks behind by not considering former students (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011) or public and well known profiles (Enache, 2011; Ivy, 2008) during the enrollment phase. People according to previous research do have an impact on student attraction and enrollment and this factor could further be improved in WU’s case.

Connected to *process*, WU manages communication during the enrollment phase through IT based tools. During the first phase, WU informs the student of educational services, such as programs, courses and fields of study. The second phase handles the admission process, where documents, such as grades and recommendation letters are submitted. Finally, the student receives an e-mail acceptance, which after confirmation and paid tuition fee, general information of accommodation through the tools Student services and Student housing is received. After enrollment and arrival in Bangkok, WU offers free airport pickup and a Student adviser is granted, which will orientate the foreign student. WU’s management of the enrollment process show strong correlations towards Enache (2011), Ivy (2008) and Pratminingsih and Soedijati (2011) considering the need for a smooth enrollment phase. Pratminingsih and Soedijati (2011) stress the need for HEIs to confirm that students understand the process of obtaining a service. WU focuses on interaction with students on an individual level, by collecting enquiries linked to the educational service at seminars, fairs and open houses. This corresponds to the need for understandability of the educational service (Ibid, 2011). WU tries to develop strong bonds with foreign students before application in order to lower uncertainty. All of these factors contribute to a smoother and more improved enrollment process for WU. These phases are aiding WU to a large extent in the enrollment and attraction process. This approach is quite scarce in the Thai sector, which the Recruitment manager founds as beneficial towards other Thai HEIs. The respondent emphasized once again online marketing as one important instrument for the information and communication process towards foreign students. *IT* is also underlined by Gomes and Murphy (2003) as stimulating for student attraction and enrollment. WU
values Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube as important. The respondent mentions e-mail as utilized on daily basis in the attraction and enrollment process. This reflects upon Altbach (2004) and Gomes and Murphy (2003) which states e-mail as an important IT tool for HEIs. The respondent pinpointed e-mail as superior, since it provides relevant information of admission and activities that are taking place on the campus. In average, 25-30 e-mails are used from the first interaction to application between the prospective student and the university. Connected to websites (Altbach 2004), the respondent stated that WU utilizes a software program called Recruiter Software. This software distributes e-mails to registered users from open-houses, seminars and fairs. The ability of this IT-factor enables WU to filter registered users and match their educational programs towards prospective students. The Recruitment Manager explains personnel and individual interactions to be dominant and the utilization of websites to be the initial information source. As a consequence, WU does not incorporate or possess neither live nor online based customer service. As a result, their only customer service is achieved through e-mail. HEIs that want to gain successful outcomes in the recruitment process should dig deeper into e-business strategies and online customer service (Gomes & Murphy, 2003). The respondent believed that only sticking to one kind of online customer service does affect WU in a way that they delimit themselves. It is clear that the main online target group is Europeans and Americans, and one can argue that these students are more adapted to IT in comparison to Asian students. But what to take into consideration is that this narrowed customer service might not be preferable in the western countries. Foreign students might still seek other alternatives like live chats and Facebook. Therefore, the over commitment to e-mail can be questioned in the future for WU and other possible ways in order to optimize the educational service should be explored.

WU uses high admissions, academic results, and educational quality to strengthen their image and reputation. The interviewee stated that high grades are linked to the will of attracting well talented students which focuses on receiving a high quality educational service. WU tries to enhance its image and reputation by interacting with the US Embassy, US Ambassador, princess of Burma and the Thai prime minister combined with one former student, now a famous racing driver. Such interactions show positive correlations with the recommendations from Ivy (2008) and Enache (2011) concerning important factors for a strengthened image and reputation. Even though the need for a smooth enrollment phase (Enache, 2011) has been portrayed, WU focused on activities with governmental bodies, one former student and research. It is interesting that the university embarks activities like this, since they are an American based HEI. However, by keeping up with the increased competition that is taking place in Thailand, it feels like the university is stimulated to maintain interactions with former students and famous individuals. The US Embassy and US Ambassador might not be comparable with celebrities or well-known individuals. However, this might be the case for American students that seek higher education in Thailand. As a whole, WU’s enrollment phase is considered partly in line with what Enache (2011) and Ivy (2008) talks about, but the university might consider to change this behavior and be less dependent of American influences, since foreign students does not only consist of Americans, but also other nationalities worldwide with other cultures, norms and wants.
5.2.2 The students’ perspective

Students’ valued place as high. Availability of class location, teaching method and styles and IT features are all factors that enable student satisfaction according to Nicholls, et al., (1995). The result demonstrated that 96 % of the respondents valued place as Important and Very Important. The result corresponds to the recommendations from Ivy (2008) considering meeting needs, wants and expectations from students. The respondents’ replies regarding people showed strong connections with Ivy (2008) and Nicholls et al., (1995), concerning the importance of staff interaction for attraction and enrollment of foreign students. The students valued interaction with staff as important, as 100 % answered positively. The data show therefore a superior connection and linkage to the importance of staff members’ interactions during the enrollment phase (Ivy, 2008; Nicholls et al, 1995; Enache, 2011). The question regarding promotion demonstrated different standpoints. A majority of the respondents, 60 %, positioned themselves to find the factor as Helpful and Very Helpful. On the other hand, 40 % believed promotion to be Less Helpful and Not helpful. The findings indicates a two sided context regarding the promotional channels (Ivy, 2008; Enache, 2011; Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011; Nicholls et al., 1995), meaning that this factor is somewhere in between a high and low valuation from students’ perspective. Considering process, 80 % of the respondents answered Very Important and Important, which demonstrated a strong connection considering the importance of a well-managed enrollment phase (Ivy, 2008; Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011; Enache, 2011). Even though 20 % of the respondents stress a contradicting opinion, the findings demonstrate the importance of a smooth and well-functioning service delivery.

80 % of the respondents stated IT to be Very Helpful and Helpful. The remaining 20 % answered negatively. As a whole, since 80 % of the respondents answered positively, the IT factor can be identified as highly valuable. The findings correlate to Gomes and Murphy (2003) and Altbach (2004) considering the importance of IT. The students valued image and reputation as influential towards their enrollment choice, since 68 % replied positively. Even though 32 % of the respondents answered No, the picture reveal a positive, however not convincing correlation between the role of image and reputation. Thus, since image and reputation (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Mazzarol, 1998; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011) is positively correlated with attracting and enrolling foreign students, WU should take these numbers seriously.

5.3 Within-case analysis

This section will combine the survey, interview and observation from respective university. This combination will discuss how compatible and non-compatible the findings was.

5.3.1 BUIC

Promotion outlines how important personal contacts are towards prospective students, but in BUIC’s case the homepage did not reflect this. The respondent argued that the homepage was out of date and not efficient enough, but still more than 60 % of the students found promotion to be Very Helpful and Helpful. This is interesting since the observations and the interview contradicts the survey’s findings. This question received the lowest negative score in the survey (40 %) besides image and reputation. The homepage thoroughly demonstrated no information about individual contacts. Instead, you are directed to departments which are very confusing. If the university on the other hand would have personnel information under “contact us” to respective program or course,
foreign students would most likely be motivated to ask a question (Ivy, 2008; Nicholls et al., 1995). These student and staff interactions could be anything related to the university and by this stage, the students are already halfway through the enrollment process.

The Strategy and Communications Manager argued that the university’s staff (people) was underdeveloped as one student together had the responsibility to handle foreign students’ questions and requests. Besides the interviewer’s statements, the observations also showed departments’ information and other alternatives, such as fax and phone numbers. The interesting question is how one student, that might not even be qualified, manages interactions with foreign students? However, the appealing finding was the foreign students’ perception. 80% of the students believed the communication and interaction with the staff members as Very Helpful and Helpful. The respondent stated one person to be partly responsible with foreign students, which is contradicting towards the students’ perspective. The Not helpful score in this question received one of the highest numbers (12%) compared to the other questions. Although this number is low, BUIC should keep in mind that there exist very dissatisfied students. If BUIC uses the same strategy by having poor personal contacts information on the homepage, the university’s chances of attracting foreign students will diminish. BUIC should immediately employ personnel responsible for recruitment questions and personal contacts. Another factor to consider if BUIC want to keep students employed is to raise the capacity to meet the demand from foreign students. Instead of having one person, they could have a team of students. As Ivy (2008), Nicholls et al., (1995) and Enache (2011) pinpoints the importance of people within HEIs, BUIC has to improve the factor people in regard to attracting foreign students.

The IT factor URSA was demonstrated as undeveloped with a lot of advertisement on the Thai language. English can be found on the page, but it only covers the most relevant features and it is definitely delimited. The respondent mentioned URSA, and expressed concerns about the web page. The concerns assessed similar perception like the observations. Students did however, seem rather pleased with the web page given that the survey showed that 72% thought IT was Helpful and Very Helpful. One can ask whether URSA is important, and the answer to that question is yes. First of all, the respondent argued that BUIC utilized many promotional channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and others to inform foreign students. However, the observations showed that the URSA does not have any connections between these channels nor does the university have any e-mail addresses to academic staff (Ivy, 2008; Enache, 2011). The students answered very positively towards IT, in contrary to the respondent - which is an interesting notion. On the other hand, since 28% answered negatively this indicates something. Prospective students might seek to visit BUIC’s homepage in order to get hold of courses, events, social activities and much more, but this information may also be provided by Facebook or other channels. This could derive to stimulate foreign students to apply to the university and it shows how important it is to consider several IT factors. This incorporates process into the discussion, which is connected to image and reputation. BUIC should definitely increase the availability of these sources, not only at their homepage, but also amongst others such as URSA. Secondly, the homepage does not have connections between promotional channels. Only by clicking yourself towards “contact us” you find a link to Facebook, and that’s it. Another comparison that explicitly assesses URSA to be important is connected to word of mouth. The respondent underlined word of mouth to be utilized in attracting foreign students. If URSA continues to be undeveloped and hard to cope, this could affect foreign students. At the home page anyone can get in touch with ongoing and graduated students, and if
these individuals associate the web page as poor, this can have a negative impact of the image and reputation. Hence, BUIC needs to consider specific web pages as URSA and alter and modify them, in order to streamline the attraction and enrollment process. Another controversy factor was the online application. The observation shows that an individual is able to apply online without any personal contact. Again, there is a match with what the respondent said about the inefficient e-mail and discussion above about not having the right people dealing with students’ questions and concerns. Students that have not been to Thailand before might want to have personal contact with an oriented person before deciding to enroll. However, the observations showed that information from ongoing and graduated students are available at the home page. Nevertheless, the question is, can BUIC rely solely on former and ongoing students on serving the prospective ones and is it clever making these individuals responsible? Would it not be better to have they as a complementary factor towards student attraction and enrollment and combine them with professional personnel? The student’s point of view in this discussion shows a 28 % disagreement with IT. This is interesting as more students answered positively than negatively. But it is hard to really pinpoint whether they correspond to the online application or IT in general. Place is also integrated with IT according to the findings. The observation and interviewee had negative perceptions of place. It is therefore quite shocking that the survey showed so positive answers (76 %). However, one possible explanation could be influenced from the survey participants. Some of the participants originated from developing countries and might not have encountered the IT features that BUIC provides. That experience could thus have influenced the positive answers.

Regarding image and reputation, the respondent mentioned that BUIC had gotten a lot of criticism and he replied that the university did not need that strong image and reputation to attract and enroll anybody. BUIC already has a target group. The observation also demonstrated, through the design and phrases on the homepage, what type of image and reputation they seek to position. However, the survey indicates that 40 % of the student excluded image and reputation in their choice of BUIC, which is very interesting. This mismatch shows that BUIC struggle since students have not been sufficient influenced. BUIC might withhold domestic students that align with being “creative” and “entrepreneurial”, in comparison to foreign students that may have different perceptions. For them, being famous might not be the number one priority for enrollment. Their motive can be more specific towards people and process and thus, BUIC should aim to improve these in order to optimize image and reputation into the attraction and enrollment process.

5.3.2 WU

96 % of WU’s foreign students valued place, i.e. the location and the university’s availability as high. This is apparent together with the university’s perspective, since online presence together with physical interactions abroad was highlighted as very important. The homepage showed similarities with the students’ perceptions and the respondent’s view, as information was easily accessible and understandable. Additional information on their homepage of upcoming open-houses, fairs and seminars could be useful for foreign students. Even though such information was available on Facebook it should be improved and combined with direct marketing as to inform overseas students. WU’s way of marketing themselves is therefore strongly connected with place (Ivy, 2008; Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011; Enache, 2008; Nicholls, et al., 1995) regarding the importance of both physical and online presence.
Regarding promotion, WU lagged behind according to public relations (Ivy, 2008; Enache, 2011; Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011; Nicholls et al., 1995) and online based information on Thai, Chinese and Russian. However, the university stressed online marketing besides TV, billboards and newspapers as an important promotional channel. This relationship is connected with the students’ mixed standpoint, since 60% answered positively and 40% negatively. As WU’s segmentation towards US, Europe, Asia and Africa were based on online and physical presence, the image becomes clearer. WU’s web based channels was badly developed in other languages besides English, which could be connected to their market segmentation. The differentiation of the market segmentation is controversy. By only delimiting themselves towards physical presence in Asia, WU could lose potential students. As parents are involved when Asian students seek studies abroad, information online in their native language could enhance WU’s abilities to attract and enroll foreign students. The parents’ involvement should not either hinder WU to use online application, thus this should be more considered to the Asian market as well. This follows the recommendations offered by Ivy (2008) since HEIs should not only rely on online channels. Nevertheless, WU could attract and enroll foreign students if more in-depth information online were presented in other languages besides English.

WU’s commitment in people as an important tool for interactions with foreign student was convincing. This can especially be seen through the similarities of the finding from the survey (100% positive students, i.e. a total agreement), the interview and the observation, that shows how well possessed the people factor are in WU’s case. Apart from the strong findings from people, WU to a large extent focused on face-to-face interaction on an individual level in order to build strong bonds with foreign students. It was therefore not surprising that 80% in the survey valued process as important. However, online information was not fully developed in other languages besides English. This is interesting as the use of IT was believed to be important during the enrollment process according to the respondent. As the homepage presented widespread information of degrees, programs, courses, academic calendar and admission documents you could assume that foreign students understands the educational service (Pratminingsih & Soedijati, 2011). WU did manage the enrollment process pretty well but needs to streamline it further. The university could for instance develop live chat functions besides online interaction through Facebook, since students far from Thailand need easy access whenever questions arise. WU has several times outlined IT as one of the most important factors and since 80% in the survey answered positively there is no doubt that this is an important factor for the university. WU relied heavily on the web based channels (Altbach, 2004) Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and e-mail (Gomes & Murphy, 2003) to complement seminar, fairs and open houses. Besides these, WU could also use web conferences as a complement. The web conferences could inform and promote programs and courses and answer questions from foreign students and parents worldwide.

There is a mixed picture regarding the university's management of image and reputation and the students’ view. Besides that 68% replied positively, WU engaged in numerous activities, such as interactions with high ranked governmental bodies from US, Thailand and Burma. Other activities by WU were research publications (Enache, 2011; Ivy, 2008) and engagements with a former student, now a famous racing driver. Since WU put a lot of effort towards image and reputation, why did the survey not provide more positive answers? One possible explanation could be that the foreign students do not find the activities as satisfying as the university predicts them to be. Another
potential factor is that WU does not publish or promote these activities as much as they should. Additionally, these high-class activities were hard to find, both on the university’s homepage and Facebook. Thus, WU could strengthen the image and reputation by presenting these activities more clearly through their IT based tools.

5.4 Cross-case analysis

The following section discusses a comparison between BUIC and WU in order to find similarities and differences that would strengthen the study’s conclusions.

IT is connected to place and promotion and it is an interesting subject to discuss. BUIC only engaged in online and campus presence. WU focused on personal contact overseas in combination with an extensive use of online features. This circumstance is in line with findings from the observations and the interviews. It is also linked to students’ view of respective university, since BUIC was valued lower than WU. Therefore, it is a clear connection between BUIC’s lower commitment to IT and place in comparison to WU’s. The interviewee at BUIC pinpointed that e-mail and customer service lagged behind. The survey showed that 28 % of the students correlated to what the interviewee said. In WU’s case, IT was way more developed and efficiently handled. The university had in average 25-30 e-mail contacts with foreign students during the enrollment process. For instance, WU aided students during the application phases on a daily basis. However, at BUIC, individuals were left to apply online with minimal assistance. At the departments, a scare workforce really coped English and email was not managed efficiently. Due to this difference, one can expect WU to possess higher positive answers in the IT question – since it is related to web-pages, customer service and e-mail. But interestingly, WU’s students only differed with 8 % compared with BUIC’s. Why were not WU’s foreign students more positive in comparison to BUIC? That is another interesting question. BUIC’s students valued promotion slightly more positive compared to WU’s students and as promotion is interrelated with IT, it could be an influencing factor towards this circumstance. This finding is also connected with previous research regarding IT and promotion as highly interrelated.

Regarding people and process, an interesting relationship occurs when discussing size (number of foreign students), resources and the universities engagement in personal contacts and interaction. Since BUIC is larger in comparison to WU it could be assumed that more resources would be spent on recruitment personnel and other staff. However, at BUIC the opposite was spotted as no recruitment teams or sales personnel were used. WU on the other hand is more developed in this matter as they possessed recruitment teams that go abroad and encourage both foreign students and their parents. This notion is even more interesting since the enrollment process were valued as high both by BUIC and WU students. By addressing WU’s superior engagement in personal contacts the picture becomes clearer as 100 % of the students valued the staff interactions as essential. By comparing this finding with BUIC’s students, where 32 % stated the staff interaction as somewhat negative, this could be associated with the university’s low commitment to staff. In comparison with WU, BUIC mismanaged and underestimated one of the most important factors for student attraction and enrollment, namely people (i.e. staff). This occurrence could be due to one factor. For instance, WU is an American based university that expanded to Thailand compared to BUIC that has been within the Thai academic sector since the 1960’s. This could possibly be connected to different agendas and strategies regarding their engagement towards attracting foreign students. Thus, since WU expanded to Thailand, the university is probably more foreign oriented and Americanized
compared with BUIC and therefore more focused on both face-to-face interaction and an extensive online presence to encourage foreign students to enroll.

In BUIC's case, image and reputation was told to be connected to people and process to a large extent. On the other hand, WU had better performances and efforts towards these two factors. However, the image and reputation considering the surveys showed similar percentage, which is very strange. If BUIC should improve the people and process in order to gain better image and reputation, why do not the students at WU value those two factors much higher? WU's way of interacting with foreign students is superior to BUIC, but still the students valued the factor somewhat equally. In WU's case, this can be connected to several factors. As a majority of the students originate from US, image and reputation might not be the most important factor to consider. Education and personal contact might be more prioritized. However, those factors are also connected to image and reputation. Thus, it is believed that WU's mismanagement is the main issue - which also has been discussed in the within-case analysis. This means that BUIC contributes less to process and people and gain similar dividend (60 %), in contrary to WU that puts more effort on the same factors. As a result, WU gains lower dividend since only 68 % of the students answered positively.
6 Conclusion

This chapter will present the conclusions made by this study. The conclusions will answer the research questions in accordance to the purpose.

The study has demonstrated that higher education institutions in Thailand market themselves differently. The study also showed that foreign students valued marketing factors differently in regard to the recruitment process at Bangkok University International College and Webster University. The findings and analysis has also provided recommendations to strengthen the two universities marketing approaches, which is in line with the study’s purpose and cooperation with Sida’s Minor Field Study. The study’s research questions are presented underneath.

- What marketing approaches do private Thai higher education institutions use to attract and enroll foreign students?

HEIs in Thailand have indicated many different marketing approaches. The study shows that place embarked IT-features such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, web pages and e-mail services. It also demonstrated how common physical activities are such as; open-houses, seminars and fairs with focus on face-to-face interactions and agents. Promotion was found to be important as it deals with personal sales contacts, public relations, partnerships with foreign HEIs, online activities and ongoing students. Other components of promotion are billboards, newspapers, TV advertisement and word of mouth. Those who are responsible for these promotional implementations are Recruitment teams and managers. The people involved in the marketing approach are different, numerous and told to be important. Universities have departments that deal with different services towards foreign students. Within these departments, staff demonstrates different English language skills. The personnel manages e-mails, phone calls, seminars, fairs, open houses and other informative and recruitment forums to interact with parents and foreign students. The individuals are often employed based upon their experience and merits and occasionally often chosen from the hierarchy top. Considering process, there is an opportunity for students to finalize application, acceptance and confirmation through IT tools, and develop closer individual relationships with the university’s staff. The final stage in the enrollment phase is usually composed during one day, where visa application, accommodation and other practical matters are completed. Another conclusion is that information in regard to social events and other entertainment activities often are neglected by HEIs and feedback or events are seldom available for students. The factor IT is used as an initial information source for later interaction phases. Besides Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, direct e-mail and surveys, HEIs use databases to inform foreign students. Many databases are undeveloped at present. Language barriers are also something that exists to a certain extent and the study found these underestimated and neglected. Universities invest in modern and design rich facilities and they do also encourage investments in events and fundraisers concerning image and reputation. It is all about attracting the right staff, thus research is dependent on the management’s ambitions. Universities also use public relations. Interactions with famous people, politicians and both international and domestic students are typical examples to enhance image and reputation.
Marketing within higher education institutions - A case study of two private Thai universities.
2013, Starck, K. & Zadeh, S.

- **What factors are foreign students at private HEIs like BUIC and WU valuing highest and lowest, in terms of marketing in the recruiting process towards these universities?**

As a whole, the study shows that foreign students tend to share similar preferences. In BUIC’s and WU’s case, staff member interaction (people) and availability of class locations, teaching styles and methods and IT features (place) was valued highest. Web-pages, customer service and e-mail (IT) was together with interaction with staff members, requests for registration, information of accommodation and social events (process) valued as the third and fourth factor. On the other hand, advertising, public relations, publicity, promotional based sales efforts and personal sales contacts (promotion) was valued low. Image and reputation was also found to be valued low as promotion. Figure 19 and 20 underneath demonstrate how foreign students at BUIC and WU valued these factors. The highest valued factor is presented at the top followed by those that received a lower valuation. (See the headers; 4.1.3 BUIC’s marketing from the student’s perspective and 4.2.3 WU’s marketing from the students’ perspective)

![Figure 19 Valuation of factors – BUIC’s foreign students (own work)](image)

![Figure 20 Valuation of factors – WU’s foreign students (own work)](image)

- **How can BUIC and WU strengthen their marketing approaches to attract and enroll foreign students?**

Important factors to consider for private HEIs is to strengthening their online presence through webpages and other IT tools (place & IT) in combination with personal interaction and face-to-face contact (people). HEIs shall also consider improving promotional activities (promotion), managing a smooth enrollment phase (process) and strengthening their image and reputation.

BUIC needs to manage place better by increasing the control and resources of e-mail services. Secondly, the university needs to combine overseas physical presence with current engagement in online and campus activities. Considering promotion, the university should enable more individual contacts between staff and foreign students especially at their homepage. BUIC utilized in accordance to people one English speaking employee to support foreign students. The university could increase the number of English speaking students, or more preferable hire professionals responsible for recruitment questions and personal contacts. Related to process the university should respond to and encourage feedback and evaluations, in combination with informing social events and other activities on daily basis. Social activities, events and courses should not only be presented at their homepage, but also at other web pages such as URSA. The first strengthening factor within IT is to enable multiple languages on their web pages following with increasing usage of promotional channels, such as Facebook and YouTube. Secondly, IT sources should be modified and
more adaptable towards foreign students in terms of advertisement and design. BUIC should also use online application with personal contacts - not leaving the student solely independent during the online application process. *Image and Reputation* needs to be strengthened by well-though professors that promote and publish research. These individuals could be used as experts in different media channels. Lastly, since domestic students are dominant at BUIC, the university should put more efforts towards an image and reputation that reflects foreign students. In other words, BUIC should use famous people representing different parts of the world to strengthen the image and reputation.

Considering *place* and *promotion*, WU have to improve their online features by adding other languages besides English combined with additional information on upcoming open-houses, fairs and seminars. The university should also use web conferences to inform foreign students and their parents of programs and courses. Even though the factor *people* were well developed by WU it could be further improved by using former students for assistance during the enrollment phase. *Process* could be strengthened by adopting live chat functions and more developed online communication through Facebook, where foreign students could interact with WU’s staff whenever questions arise. Concerning *IT*, the university needs to expand their limits and look further into e-business strategies including more online customer services. WU also needs to streamline their *image* and *reputation* further by presenting and promoting their engagements more efficiently. The homepage should inform foreign students of these engagements through links to YouTube videos and Instagram pictures. These should be combined with articles, videos, posts and other interesting information at Facebook.
References


Web sources


**Personal interviews**

Kamakahi, Lindsay; Assistant Recruitment Manager, Webster University. Personal interview 2013-04-02.

Rungsituntakul, Kavin; Strategy and Communications Manager, Bangkok University International College. Personal interview 2013-04-19.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview form; BUIC and WU

The following questions are based upon the perspective of this study’s purpose of describing and analyzing the attraction and enrollment phase of foreign students. Thus, we appreciate if you answer in accordance to this focal point.

1. Through which channels (place) does the university inform foreign students concerning the institution in general?

2. How does the university inform foreign students in regard to the educational services?

3. How does the university conduct educational marketing (promotion) towards foreign students?

4. What promotional instruments are believed to be important for the university?

5. Could you elaborate on the staff (people) interaction towards foreign students?

6. Personal contacts with support, administrative and academic staff is of importance for educational marketing. How does the university manage these entities?

7. How does the university manage the enrollment phase (process) concerning foreign students?

8. The enrollment process deals with the student’s understandability and satisfaction of obtaining an educational service. How well do the university correspond to this circumstance?

9. Which IT related factors are used in the information and communication process towards foreign students?

10. IT contributes to successful outcomes in the foreign student attraction and enrollment phase for HEIs. Which IT related factors do the university value as important?

11. Image and reputation are important factors for HEIs to attract and enroll foreign students. What activities do you implement to enhance the university’s image and reputation?
Appendix 2 – Survey; foreign students at BUIC

The following questions are based upon the perspective of this study’s purpose of describing and analyzing the attraction and enrollment phase of foreign students. Thus, we appreciate if you answer in accordance to this focal point.

1. *Place*, often called distribution channel, is one component to consider when enrolling foreign students in universities. Value the summarized importance of the following factors at BUIC; availability of class locations, the teaching styles and methods and the IT features?

   - Very Important
   - Important
   - Less Important
   - Not Important

2. What do you think of the staff member *(people)* interaction at BUIC? Have they been helpful during your enrollment process? The staff consists of the supportive, administrative and academic members.

   - Very Helpful
   - Helpful
   - Less Helpful
   - Not Helpful

3. When universities market *(promotion)* themselves, they use a multiple sets of channels. Examples of channels are advertising, public relation, publicity, promotional based sales efforts and personal sales contacts. How influencing has these example channels been in your choice of the university?

   - Very Helpful
   - Helpful
   - Less Helpful
   - Not Helpful

4. The enrollment phase deals with interaction and registration of the educational service delivery *(process)* within the university. How important were the following factors - interaction with staff members, requests for registration, and information of accommodation and social events at BUIC?

   - Very Important
   - Important
   - Less Important
   - Not Important

5. Before your choice of studying at BUIC, did you find their web-pages, customer service and e-mail *(IT)* helpful towards providing relevant information?
6. Did BUIC’s *image and reputation* work as influencing factors in accordance to your enrollment choice?

Yes ☐ No ☐
Appendix 3 – Survey; foreign students at WU

The following questions are based upon the perspective of this study’s purpose of describing and analyzing the attraction and enrollment phase of foreign students. Thus, we appreciate if you answer in accordance to this focal point.

1. *Place*, often called distribution channel, is one component to consider when enrolling foreign students in universities. Value the summarized importance of the following factors at WU; availability of class locations, the teaching styles and methods and the IT features?

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2. What do you think of the staff member (*people*) interaction at WU? Have they been helpful during your enrollment process? The staff consists of the supportive, administrative and academic members.

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3. When universities market (*promotion*) themselves, they use a multiple sets of channels. Examples of channels are advertising, public relation, publicity, promotional based sales efforts and personal sales contacts. How influencing has these example channels been in your choice of the university?

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4. The enrollment phase deals with interaction and registration of the educational service delivery (*process*) within the university. How important were the following factors - interaction with staff members, requests for registration, and information of accommodation and social events at WU?

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5. Before your choice of studying at WU, did you find their web-pages, customer service and e-mail (*IT*) helpful towards providing relevant information?
6. Did WU’s image and reputation work as influencing factors in accordance to your enrollment choice?

[ ] Yes  [ ] No
Appendix 4 – Definitions – higher educational marketing

Higher education (HE) is defined as an education that is performed at a private or a state owned university which is followed by a bachelor, master or a doctoral degree (Queensland Government, 2012). The definition of HEI which originates from the statute of the Higher Education Act of 1965, from The Senate and The House of Representatives from The United States of America Congress, states that an HEI, either private, public or non-profit, offers a two year minimum program associated with at least a bachelor’s degree (National Resource Center for Youth Development, 2013). A Thai based HEI on the other hand, is defined as a university or college, private or public, which is recognized and under jurisdiction by the Higher Education Commission and thereof “...given authority to provide education at tertiary level and grant degrees, diplomas and other credentials.” (UNESCO, 2012).

Altbach & Knight (2007, p. 290) defines globalization within the area of HE; “...as the economic, political, and societal forces pushing 21st century higher education toward greater international involvement.” When elaborating within the field of HEIs and the above mentioned definition of globalization, Altbach (2005, p. 64) defines internationalization - “...includes policies and programs adopted by governments, and by academic systems and subdivisions to cope with or exploit globalization.” Soderqvist (2007, p. 29) describes and defines HEI based internationalization as an institution that during a change process goes from a nationally based HEI to an internationally based HEI with the purpose of; “...enhance the quality of teaching and research and to achieve the desired competencies”.

Marketing is defined as “...the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” (American Marketing Association, 2013). As opposed to the definition of marketing above, Kotler and Fox (1995, p. 6) define marketing as “...the analysis planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets to achieve institutional objectives. Marketing involves designing the institution's offerings to meet the target markets' needs and desires, and using effective pricing, communication, and distribution to inform, motivate, and service these markets.”