MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES USED BY REGIONAL AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES IN THAILAND: A MIXED METHODS STUDY INVESTIGATING THEIR INFLUENCE ON THAI STUDENTS' DECISION TO ENROL

A thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the research problem of how regional Australian universities can develop marketing and recruitment strategies to influence Thai students' decision to enrol. It shifts attention from large metropolitan universities, which are the focus in the existing literature, to the perspective of regional universities with regard to examining international student recruitment. Unlike previous research that emphasises high-volume source markets like India and China, this study investigates student recruitment within an emerging source market by using Thailand as a prime example. Utilising a mixed methods, exploratory approach, the study investigated regional universities' marketing and recruitment strategies in Thailand, and then it examined how these strategies influenced enrolment decisions. The first qualitative phase involved interviews with recruitment practitioners employed by regional universities, which uncovered the strategies used by regional universities in Thailand. Predominantly, it highlighted their prioritisation of short-term recruitment outcomes, due to resource limitations and pressures from senior management. The second phase then involved the completion of a survey that was distributed to Thai students and recent alumni of regional universities, which gauged their opinion on how regional universities' strategies influenced their decision to enrol. Notably, it was discovered that respondents viewed regional universities' marketing and recruitment efforts in Thailand as sub-optimal. These findings were later analysed using factor analysis, which uncovered underlying factors of influence, such as education agent relationships, university reputation and country-specific marketing resources. By incorporating these overall findings, this thesis provides recommendations and a framework for regional universities seeking to optimise marketing and recruitment strategies in Thailand. The research enriches our understanding of student recruitment dynamics and the interplay between short-term goals and long-term sustainability within regional universities' international student recruitment operations.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I, Daniel Chin, declare that the PhD Thesis entitled *Marketing and Recruitment Strategies Used by Regional Australian Universities in Thailand: A Mixed Methods Study Investigating Their Influence on Thai Students' Decision to Enrol* is not more than 100,000 words in length, including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes.

This thesis is the work of Daniel Chin, except where otherwise acknowledged, with the majority of the contribution to the papers presented as a thesis by publication undertaken by the student. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Date: 19 October 2023

Endorsed by:

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Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION

Publications Forming Part of This Thesis

Paper 1

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The student contributed 70% of the overall paper. Collectively, Dr Luke van der Laan and Dr Jiraporn Surachartkumtonkun contributed the remainder.

Paper 2

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Submitted to the *Journal of International Education in Business* – currently out for peer review.

The student contributed 70% of the overall paper. Collectively, Dr Luke van der Laan and Dr Jiraporn Surachartkumtonkun contributed the remainder.

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Presentations Arising from Work in This Thesis

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to those who embrace the philosophy of continuous learning – or *kaizen* – with a specific focus on dedicated formal learning aimed at enhancing professional practice.

'The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.' Dr Seuss

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background

Australian universities first engaged in international student recruitment in the 1950s during the implementation of the Colombo Plan scholarship scheme. Using this system, thousands of students from the Asia-Pacific were provided with scholarships that allowed them to study degrees at Australian universities (Altbach & Knight, 2007). At this time, Australia was effectively a sponsor of international education to its neighbouring countries in the Asia-Pacific region, with soft diplomacy seen as the main benefit from this initiative (Mazzarol, 1996).

Since then, Australia and its universities have evolved to become "sellers" of international education globally. This expansion of international student recruitment in Australia has been driven by a number of factors, including the development of higher education, the increasing global demand for educational services and the government's efforts to promote international education as a key export industry (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Australian universities' growing concentration on the recruitment of international students has also been shaped by changing policies and regulations, both in Australia and in source countries.

A pivotal catalyst was the implementation of government policy changes that permitted these institutions to enrol full-fee-paying international students and utilise this investment for research, infrastructure and staffing (Megarrity, 2007). Subsequently, from 2000 to 2010, there was a 70% increase in the total number of international students enrolled globally in university-level study (Kwee, 2022). This significant increase signalled the maturation of international education into a truly commercial venture by universities as they sought out global opportunities with newly-discovered vigour (Healey, 2023). Due to this increase in Australian universities' internationalisation efforts, the source countries for foreign students have diversified, with students coming from a wide range of nations around the world (KPMG, 2020).

International education now constitutes Australia's largest services export, with international students bringing in over $40 billion in 2019 (Australian Government, 2020; Deloitte Access Economics, 2020). This generates flow-on benefits to the wider Australian economy, such as increased spending on goods and services and higher tourism expenditure (International

Education Association of Australia, 2020; John, 2020). Universities therefore prioritise effective management of their international offices for commercial and strategic outcomes, including the funding of operational and research initiatives (Greenland et al., 2021; Larkins, 2021). This is particularly pertinent for regional universities due to their significant role in sustaining local economies (Aslan, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 had a major impact on the international education industry, with border closures resulting in an estimated $9 billion loss in revenue due to the inability of international students to enter the country (Marshman & Larkins, 2020). This led to widespread cost-cutting at Australian universities, with at least 17,300 jobs being lost in 2020 (Horne, 2020; Larkins, 2021). In addition, the industry has faced other challenges, such as growing political tensions between Australia and China and increased competition from global institutions seeking to tap into key source markets (Salt, 2020). The post-pandemic financial recovery of universities has been further made challenging by the decreasing number of Australian domestic students enrolling into university degrees; instead, opting to enter directly into the workforce (Devlin et al., 2023; Jackson et al., 2023).

Consequently, Australian universities have considered a shift towards investing in alternative markets such as Southeast Asia and developing strategies to offset these market risks (Babones, 2019; van der Kley & Herscovitch, 2021). In the past few years, Australian universities have indeed invested increased time and effort into developing Southeast Asian source markets – mainly, Vietnam and the Philippines (Chin et al., 2023; Phan, 2023). Fortunately, Australia continues to stand out as a top destination for Southeast Asian students, due to apprehensions surrounding safety in the United States, ongoing conflict in Europe, and the tightening of international student quotas in Canada(Austrade, 2023; Phan, 2023).

Thailand has emerged as a key recruitment market for Australian universities in Southeast Asia, with economic development, a growing middle class and government initiatives driving demand for higher education (Austrade, 2023; Deloitte Access Economics, 2020). Thailand's economy is forecasted to experience year-on-year growth due to strong recovery in tourism and goods exports (Kongrukgreatiyos, 2024). Despite this economic recovery, political uncertainty looms, contributing to a growing number of middle-class Thais with the means and aspirations to pursue study abroad (Jatusripitak & Ricks, 2023). However, there is a lack

of research that specifically addresses the recruitment of Thai students. Similarly, there is little information about how regional Australian universities fit in within this phenomenon.

Previous research instead focused on larger metropolitan universities and their recruitment efforts in high-volume markets such as China and India, qualitative inquiry into the factors that influence students' choice of destination country and transnational education (Gong & Huybers, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Wu, 2015). Consequently, there is little empirical evidence that can be referred to when strategizing for recruitment efforts within emerging source countries.

Similarly, regional universities have not been the subject of adequate research regarding student recruitment strategies that are relevant to their specific needs. Regional Australian universities are institutions headquartered outside of the three major metropolitan cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane (Department of Home Affairs, 2020). Examples of such institutions and their respective locations include James Cook University (Cairns), the University of Southern Queensland (Toowoomba), the University of New England (Armidale), and Federation University (Ballarat) (Australian Government, 2024). Due to regional universities' relatively smaller size, lower rankings, location and budgetary limitations (Gao, 2020; Townsend & Huay, 2008), insights applicable to larger metropolitan counterparts may not necessarily hold relevance for them.

To address these gaps in the existing knowledge, this study aims to explore how regional Australian universities recruit students from Thailand and evaluate how these strategies influence their decision to enrol. By doing so, the study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for regional Australian universities to optimise their student recruitment efforts in Thailand, and potentially other emerging markets.

1.2   Research Context

The international education industry has garnered much scholarly attention in recent years. Early studies relating to this field explored the recruitment strategies of educational institutions, albeit without segmenting the research population (Mazzarol, 2002; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001). These investigations identified the marketing and communication tactics used to influence students' study destination choices, including the use of recruitment agencies, websites, advertising campaigns and word-of-mouth referral. However, the rapid adoption of social media and more sophisticated marketing techniques in recent years may

have rendered these early findings outdated (Bamberger et al., 2020; del Rocío Bonilla et al., 2020).

Research linked to international education has evolved alongside the industry's growth, leading to new insights into increasingly nuanced areas within this context. Studies have also examined the recruitment practices of universities based in the main English-speaking destination countries (MESDCs), such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017; Lertjanyakit & Bunchapattanasakda, 2015; Tarry, 2008), yet they have not specifically investigated the strategies of Australian universities in detail. There is an additional lack of focus on regional universities within this context, which should be rectified due to their location and resource limitations (Ellis et al., 2005). Understanding the specific challenges and opportunities faced by regional universities within the context of international student recruitment is crucial for these institutions to effectively compete in the global market and achieve their enrolment goals.

Certain strands of research have also examined the market orientation and strategic initiatives of universities, with some authors suggesting that older, more prestigious institutions rely on their good reputations in their recruitment efforts, while newer or mid-tier ranking institutions are more aggressive in their marketing of unique selling points (Asaad et al., 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010). Meanwhile, other investigations have focused on the push and pull factors influencing students' decisions to study abroad, including the role of personal and environmental factors and the influence of government policies and economic conditions (Chen, 2016; Lam et al., 2011; Minghui, 2020). Some studies have explored the factors that influence students' perceptions of different study destinations, including the perceived quality of education, living costs and career opportunities (Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016; Gatfield & Larmar, 2008; Wadhwa, 2016). However, there is a lack of contemporary research that specifically examines the push and pull factors influencing Thai students' decision to study abroad as well as the factors that shape their perceptions of different study destinations.

Thailand was selected as the focus of this study due to its emerging potential as a source market in Southeast Asia for Australian universities. This selection was based on indicators that suggest there will be future increases in the number of Thai students seeking out educational services in Australia. In 2022, Thailand emerged as the sixth-highest source country for students enrolling in Australian educational institutions (Austrade, 2023). Forecasts supported by macroeconomic and political analyses, including those examining the

burgeoning Thai upper middle class, further indicate a trajectory of rising demand for overseas education from Thailand (Buasuwan, 2018; Huguan et al., 2020).

The decision to focus on Thailand is also underscored by the country's adoption of the 'Thailand 4.0' strategy, a transformative initiative with the objective of progressing the nation forward into a knowledge-based economy (Jones & Pimdee, 2017). This vision of transitioning Thailand away from the middle income trap offers a compelling incentive for individuals to pursue overseas qualifications to enhance their career prospects within the framework of Thailand 4.0 (Rhein, 2017).

Thailand's prominence in this study also addresses the relative lack of research that is specific to Southeast Asian countries within the existing literature. As mentioned earlier, previous studies focused on high-volume markets (Babones, 2019), resulting in deficient insights into Thai students within this context. This study therefore has the dual advantage of offering insights that are specific to Thailand as a source market, while potentially serving as a foundational framework to understand student recruitment dynamics across the broader Southeast Asian region. This extends the potential applicability of the findings, offering the prospect of generalised insights that can be applied to other emerging markets, such as Vietnam or Cambodia.

Given the limited research on the international student recruitment strategies of regional Australian universities and the lack of insight into emerging source markets like Thailand, this investigation aims to fill these gaps in the literature by providing insights into these particular areas. By contextualising the challenges and opportunities faced by regional Australian universities in their international student recruitment efforts and scrutinising the factors influencing Thai students' decisions to study at regional universities, the findings of this study will be invaluable, not only to regional universities in Australia, but also to similar institutions in other countries that are seeking to understand the unique dynamics of the international education industry.

The study's findings have direct relevance to the researcher's professional practice, due to their position as a practitioner in the international student recruitment field, which currently involves managing the Southeast Asia region for the Queensland University of Technology. Within their operational duties, they build and maintain relationships with education agents, offshore institutions, and potential students. The researcher has been working in Southeast Asia for seven years and has a specific focus on Thailand and the Philippines. They have

previously represented regional Australian universities, such as Southern Cross University, James Cook University, and the University of Southern Queensland.

1.3   Research Problem

The main research problem that has been identified by the researcher, through both their prior professional experience and preliminary literature reviews, is that an inadequate amount of information has been gathered that specifically addresses student recruitment in Thailand from the perspective of regional Australian universities and the target market (Thai students). From a professional practice viewpoint, universities' recruitment strategies were mainly driven by anecdotal hearsay or high-level historical data. Meanwhile, the insights from academia were broad and wide-ranging, with little specificity that addressed niche markets or institutions in their findings. This led to the formulation of the following overall research question:

> *How do regional Australian universities develop their marketing and student recruitment strategies in Thailand, and what are the factors that influence Thai students to enrol at these universities?*

As indicated earlier, it is suggested that there is insufficient knowledge about this niche phenomenon due to extant literature focusing on metropolitan universities' student recruitment drives in traditional source countries (Babones, 2019). Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to discover what strategies should be adopted by regional Australian universities to increase enrolments by Thai students, with particular consideration given over to how the target market's enrolment decisions are influenced by these strategies.

Given the post-pandemic push in the industry for increased diversification of international student source countries (Deloitte Access Economics, 2020), this study presents pertinent and timely insights with practical applicability. The volatility during the pandemic, and the uncertainty following it, exposed how some universities were heavily reliant on markets such as China and India (Ferguson, 2021; IDP Connect, 2021). This highlighted the need to hedge against future market risks by increasing efforts in fostering links with newer emerging markets (ICEF Monitor, 2022; Kwee, 2022). Therefore, it is proposed that more insight into niche aspects within the international education industry is required (with lines of inquiry outside of the industry norms) to lead these diversification strategies.

Although this study is focused on a specific source market, Thailand, it is proposed that these findings may have relevance to similar emerging markets within the region. As mentioned before, China and India have been the predominant source countries addressed in the extant literature; therefore, contemporary research exploring a Southeast Asian country in this context will be of interest to institutions seeking to adopt a diversification strategy.

Additionally, this study will provide new insights into the phenomenon by considering the subject matter from the perspective of regional Australian universities. As most of the existing research focused on larger metropolitan institutions, it can be difficult for regional universities to translate these findings to their own circumstances. As will be discussed later in this paper, regional universities differ considerably from their metropolitan counterparts, making it pertinent for new insights to be uncovered that focus on the unique factors that are relevant to regional institutions.

It is also proposed that the extant literature has only focused on either the university or the target student market, meaning insufficient attention has been paid to exploring the interactions between these two stakeholders. The indicated research problem therefore expresses the need to consider both sides of the international student recruitment phenomenon in order to provide valuable insights.

Chapter 2 will reveal the findings of a scoping literature review, which was used to provide further context surrounding this phenomenon with regard to extant research. By effectively scoping out the breadth of knowledge within this niche field, the researcher could then devise a conceptual model as well as further research questions to address the overall research problem. Essentially, the scoping review allowed the researcher to evaluate the extent of the research problem and ascertain what the next steps needed to be.

The results of the scoping review were then used to devise a conceptual model that inclined the researcher to adopt a mixed methods exploratory study to explore this phenomenon. As will be seen in Chapter 2, the rarity of extant literature addressing the research problem meant that an exploratory study was first necessary to demystify the issue from a qualitative point of view, before these findings could then be extrapolated across a wider population of stakeholders.

As will be elaborated on in the scoping review, the research problem exists because the literature regarding the international student recruitment industry has been too broad with

regard to niche markets in Asia and different types of universities. The next section will now explain why exploration at this level of specificity is required.

1.4   Purpose of/Justification for the Research

The purpose of this study was to identify strategies that could be adopted by regional Australian universities to increase enrolments from Thailand. There is a limited amount of recent research on the student recruitment strategies used by universities outside of the main markets of China and India (Feng & Horta, 2021; Gao, 2020). Therefore, the study first investigated the marketing and recruitment strategies used by regional Australian universities in Thailand.

It then proceeded to investigate Thai students' opinions on the strategies that influenced their decision to enrol at a regional university. Previous investigations have identified reasons for students selecting their destination countries, but there is a lack of recent research exploring their decision to enrol at a university (Pimpa, 2003a; Rhein, 2017). By examining these insights, the study was able to generate practical recommendations and a framework that can be used by regional Australian universities that are seeking to optimise their recruitment efforts in Thailand or similar emerging markets.

It is therefore proposed that the findings of this study will make unique contributions to the researcher's professional practice (international student recruitment) and the wider community. These contributions can be outlined using the triple-dividend outcomes model of higher degree, work-based learning (original knowledge-based contributions to practice and theory and to personal development), which justifies conducting a study that relates to professional practices (Fergusson, van der Laan, & Baker, 2019).

First, as a professional seeking advancement in the international education industry, the researcher was able to incorporate reflection and research methods in their work-based learning and adopted a reflective practice ethos at both the micro and macro levels. By employing this approach, they were able to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter and garner valuable insights that could be applied to their role of recruiting students from Thailand. The researcher's learning objectives included not only obtaining a doctoral-level degree, but also becoming a more advanced practice professional, with the ability to adapt to meet work objectives, efficiently manage university resources and operate at a senior leadership level. The knowledge and learning documented in this study may equip the

researcher and other practitioners in the field to become more knowledgeable and capable professionals in the international education industry.

Second, the study's findings will contribute original insights to regional universities seeking to achieve diversification in their international student source countries (particularly those with an interest in Thailand or Southeast Asia in general). Indeed, these insights may assist in the identification of strengths and/or weaknesses in their existing Thailand recruitment strategies and lead to a re-evaluation of how to attract students from this market. While this study provides unique knowledge on optimising student recruitment from Thailand, it is anticipated that the exploratory approach could be applied to evaluating strategies in other markets where regional universities seek to increase the number of international student enrolments.

Third, the study's findings contribute new knowledge about international student recruitment to the wider higher-education industry, specifically in the context of regional Australian universities and Thailand as a source market. Furthermore, this research fulfils a need for development within the field and relevant research, and it has the potential to be of value to metropolitan universities and other educational institutions seeking to develop their Thailand strategies. Indeed, the international education industry as a whole can benefit from the study as there is only a limited amount of existing professional knowledge and academic literature that specifically examines international student recruitment in Thailand.

Additionally, this study contributes to the development of the push and pull factors of migration theory in the context of international education, specifically with regards to the push and pull factors influencing Thai students' decisions. While previous research focuses on pull factors attracting students to a destination country, this study expanded upon this by examing these factors within the context of regional universities and a specific source country. Overall, the unique insights gained from this study have the potential to inspire further nuanced research on push and pull factors and their application to other student nationalities. The identification of factors influencing international students' enrolments in Australian regional universities and the development of a typology of these, also make original theoretical contributions to the relevant field of research.

1.5   **Thesis Outline**

This thesis, which is structured according to the University of Southern Queensland's thesis-by-publication guidelines for doctoral and PhD degrees, is organised into five chapters. The structure and content of this thesis is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual and Empirical Thesis by Publication Structure (Mason & Merga, 2018)

Introduction (Chapter 1)	Article 1 (Chapter 2: Conceptual)	Article 2 (Chapter 3: Empirical)	Article 3 (Chapter 4: Empirical)	Conclusion (Chapter 5)
Context/ Background	Literature and Gap	Results and Discussion	Results and Discussion	Response to Research Questions
Problem/ Issue	Conceptual Model and Research Questions			Contributions (Reflections)
	Methodology			Limitations
				Future Research
				Conclusions

Chapter 1 has introduced the topic and offered general background information about international student recruitment, underscoring the importance of these initiatives to universities and the Australian economy. It was also made clear in this chapter that research is still developing in this field, meaning there are limited insights into the recruitment practices of regional universities and/or their interactions in emerging markets. This has led to the identification of the overall research problem. Additionally, this chapter has highlighted the importance of conducting this study as its findings will be beneficial in the current period where universities are starting to explore emerging markets with more sincerity. The scope and delimitations of the study as well as key definitions will also be outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 2 presents the first publication of the thesis in the form of a scoping literature review, which provides an overview of existing literature relating to the research problem and identifies areas in need of further investigation. Based on this, Chapter 2 concludes with a

conceptual model and research questions to guide this mixed methods exploratory study. The methodology used in the study is also outlined in this chapter.

Meanwhile, Chapter 3 presents the second publication of the thesis, which discusses the findings of the qualitative phase of the study. This phase involved interviews with student recruitment practitioners at regional universities, and the results reveal and analyse their strategic approaches in Thailand. This section will conclude with a review of the findings and how they informed the subsequent quantitative phase of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the third and final publication of the thesis, detailing the findings of the quantitative phase of the mixed methods exploratory study. This chapter analyses the results of a survey (this was informed by the findings from the preceding qualitative phase) that was conducted with a sample of Thai students and recent Thai alumni of regional universities.

Chapter 5 concludes the study by summarising the results of the mixed methods research and responding to the research questions and overall research problem. The implications for practice and research as well as the limitations and areas for future research are also discussed in this section.

1.6   Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was limited to regional Australian public universities in order to address the lack of research on their international student recruitment efforts. As defined by the Department of Home Affairs (2020), regional status was granted by the Australian government to certain areas of the country with the aim of attracting migrants to study and work in these locations. The designated regional areas that were included in this ruling are detailed in the table below under Categories 2 and 3.

Table 1: Designated Regional Areas of Australia

	Definition	Locations	Regional Incentives
Category 1	Major Cities	Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane	N/A
Category 2	Cities and Major Regional Centres	Perth, Adelaide, the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, Canberra, Newcastle/Lake Macquarie, Wollongong/Illawarra, Geelong and Hobart	• Priority processing of regional visas • Access to the Regional Occupations List – more jobs compared to non-regional lists • International graduates with a bachelor or higher qualification from a regional campus of a registered

Category 3	Regional Centres and Other Regional Areas	All other locations	• International graduates with a bachelor or higher qualification from a regional campus of a registered institution will be eligible to access an additional two years in Australia on a post-study work visa. • Priority in negotiating region-specific Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMAs)
			institution will be eligible to access additional year in Australia on a post-study work visa

Source: Department of Home Affairs (2020).

Applying the regional criteria outlined in Table 1, the focus was on universities with their main campus in Category 2 or Category 3 locations. This aligns with previous research that classified regional universities as those located outside of Australia's major east coast cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane (Allison & Eversole, 2008; Wu, 2015). As seen in Table 1, Category 2 encompasses both cities that are not as large as the major cities (Category 1), and major regional centres. Meanwhile, Category 3 includes those locations more rural, and providing the most generous post-study work visa and migration incentives (Department of Home Affairs, 2020). While possessing a main campus located in a regional centre, some universities in Category 3 locations have made efforts to establish "city campuses" in Category 1 locations (such as the University of Southern Queensland's Sydney Campus and Southern Cross University's Melbourne campus); however, for the purposes of this study, the focus will be on their international student recruitment efforts directed towards students intending to enrol at their regional-based campuses. This investigation only considered students who chose to study a university-level degree on campus in Australia. Short-term exchange students, English language students and online students were not included due to the lower levels of financial and time commitment involved in these options compared to full on-campus degrees (which can impact the level of decision-making and influence required).

It should be noted that public universities headquartered in major cities (Category 1 locations), private universities, colleges and vocational education providers also utilise international recruitment strategies. However, these institutions often have different budgets, resources, goals, and operational structures compared to regional universities (Allison & Eversole, 2008; Aslan, 2020; Townsend & Huay, 2008). Therefore, this study narrowed its scope to regional universities to allow for the discovery of nuanced insights relevant to this specific type of institution.

1.7 **Definitions**

International student: a student who is studying in a country other than their home country.

Internationalisation: the process of developing the global interconnectedness of an institution, including the recruitment of international students.

Study abroad: the act of studying in a foreign country for a period of time, typically as part of a degree program.

Education agent: a professional or organisation that helps students find and apply to educational institutions. Education agents may be independent or affiliated with specific institutions.

Student recruitment: the process of attracting and enrolling students to an institution. This may include certain initiatives, such as marketing and admissions support.

Source market: a country or region that supplies a significant number of international students to a particular institution or country.

Target market: a specific group of consumers that a business or organisation aims to attract and sell products or services to. In the context of international student recruitment, a target market refers to students based in a specific country or region that an institution is targeting for marketing and recruitment efforts.

Push factors: motivations or circumstances that drive an individual to leave their home country and move to another location. In the context of international student recruitment, push factors might include things like limited educational opportunities or a lack of job prospects in the home country.

Pull factors: attractions or incentives that draw an individual to a particular destination. In the context of international student recruitment, pull factors might include things like the reputation or quality of education at a particular institution, the availability of scholarships or the cultural/social appeal of the destination.

1.8   Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the international education industry and its significance for Australian universities. It was noted that there is a need for further investigation into the student recruitment strategies of regional universities and their influence on students in emerging markets, such as Thailand. The practical implications and significance of this study were discussed along with the mixed methods approach that was used to complete the research. The thesis' outline, its scope and relevant definitions were also provided.

The next chapter presents the findings of a scoping literature review, which offers a summary of the extant research on this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2: PAPER 1 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1　Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of a scoping literature review, which provides an overview of the extant literature related to the study. As indicated in the previous chapter, international education has established itself as one of Australia's largest services exports. However, the global landscape within this industry has experienced substantial shifts due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (ICEF Monitor, 2022). In response to these challenges, Australian universities are compelled to re-strategize and adapt to these new market conditions (Kwee, 2022). Despite the economic significance of this phenomenon, there is a notable research gap in terms of understanding its inherent dynamics.

This chapter therefore employs the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) scoping review methodology to explore the extant literature that is relevant to the marketing and recruitment strategies used by regional Australian universities in Thailand and their influence on Thai students' decision-making. The researchers opted for this kind of review over its traditional literature-based counterpart for several reasons. First, scoping reviews provide a broad, over-arching exploration of a research area, making it suitable when investigating a phenomenon with limited prior knowledge (Peters et al., 2017). Given the study's focus has not been reviewed in depth previously, it was hoped that a scoping review would produce broad analysis within this context. Second, scoping reviews facilitate the rapid mapping of concepts that are fundamental to the research area; this aids the identification of key themes, variables and literature gaps. The relative efficiency of conducting a scoping review was particularly appealing for this study, given the rapidly evolving landscape surrounding international student recruitment amidst the uncertainty of the pandemic. Therefore, given the exploratory nature of this study within a specialised field, the decision to employ a JBI scoping review was strategically made to ensure a wider examination of the phenomenon under investigation. This would lead to the mapping of key themes and concepts to guide the study. Overall, it emerged that there is a gap in understanding the interaction between push and pull factors influencing Thai students' decisions and the international recruitment strategies of universities. This reinforces the study's aim of exploration into the international student recruitment strategies employed by regional Australian universities targeting Thai students.

The primary goal of this chapter is to map existing knowledge in this domain, and subsequently identify areas for further investigation. While some aspects of the phenomenon have been covered in prior research, the scoping review reveals substantial gaps in our understanding of the aforementioned topic. Overall, the central aims of this chapter are:

- To explore the extent to which this phenomenon has been discussed in extant literature.
- To identify and confirm gaps in the literature to guide this study.
- To create a conceptual model and research questions, informed by the outcomes of the scoping literature review.
- To devise a research methodology that will address the research questions.

The findings outlined in this chapter therefore contribute towards a starting point for the subsequent qualitative and quantitative phases of this mixed methods study.

2.2   Paper One – Published Paper

This section details the scoping review methodology and findings, and it is presented as Paper One. It was peer-reviewed and published in the *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* (2022; 1–19). The paper is titled 'Marketing and recruitment strategies used by regional Australian universities in Thailand: A scoping review'.

Chin, D., Van Der Laan, L. & Surachartkumtonkun, J., (2022). Marketing and recruitment strategies used by regional Australian universities in Thailand: A scoping review. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, pp.1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2022.2149664

2.3   Links and Implications to the Study - Conceptual Model and Research Questions

The scoping literature review in the previous section identified research gaps that highlight the need for further research into this field, which justifies the course of action for this study. As was outlined in the scoping literature review, there is a gap in population (research focused on larger prestigious universities), a gap in analysis (a lack of insight incorporating both university and student perspectives), a gap in perspective (a lack of practitioner insight), and a gap in implication (a lack of implementable actions based on findings).

These identified research gaps stem from a deficiency in more targeted investigation into the phenomenon of international student recruitment, a void that this study aims to address by contributing valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge. Using these research gaps and applying key concepts of interest relating to the phenomenon, a conceptual model was adopted to guide this study. This model aims to address the research problem of understanding *how regional Australian universities develop their marketing and student recruitment strategies in Thailand and what the factors are that influence Thai students to enrol at these universities.*

To solve this main research question, the following sub-questions will be explored in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, with each one addressing at least one of the types of research gaps identified in the scoping literature review.

Research Question 1: What marketing and recruitment strategies are used by regional Australian universities to recruit students from Thailand?

This research question was developed to address the gap in population identified in the literature review, as previous studies predominantly focused on large metropolitan universities and high-volume markets. In contrast, this investigation aims to examine the strategic approach of regional Australian universities when recruiting students from Thailand.

Additionally, Research Question 1 aims to address the gap in perspective by seeking the insights of international student recruitment practitioners at regional universities. The inclusion of this practitioner perspective will provide a unique and valuable contribution to the existing literature on this topic.

Research Question 2:

2.1: What is the influence of push factors on regional Australian universities' strategies in Thailand and their recruitment of Thai students?

2.2: What is the influence of pull factors on regional Australian universities' strategies in Thailand and their recruitment of Thai students?

These questions address the perspective-related gap by seeking the insights of international student recruitment practitioners at regional universities with regard to push and pull factors. It also addresses the gap in population by specifically focusing on these practitioners' operations in Thailand. By exploring both the perspectives of practitioners and the specific context of Thailand, this research question aims to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Research Question 3*: What are the marketing and recruitment factors that influence Thai students to enrol at a regional Australian university?*

This research question aims to examine the influence of marketing and recruitment factors on student decision-making, addressing the gap in analysis identified in the literature review as previous studies have not considered the direct impact of these efforts on students. By exploring how they were influenced by the recruitment tactics of universities, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence student decisions and the role of recruitment strategies in that process.

Research Question 4*: Based on the previous answers, what practices should be undertaken by regional Australian universities to ensure that their marketing and recruitment strategies remain relevant to contemporary and future target audiences in Thailand?*

This research question aims to address the gap in implication identified in the literature review by providing practical insights and a framework for regional Australian universities to consider in their marketing and recruitment strategies. By examining the current state of the field and considering the needs of contemporary and future target audiences in Thailand, this study intends to provide implementable recommendations for practitioners and researchers.

The conceptual model depicted in Figure 2 serves to map the variables of interest and to illustrate the alignment of the research questions with the identified gaps in the literature. The following section of the study will delve into the specific methodologies employed to address the research questions and tackle the aforementioned gaps in the existing body of knowledge.

Figure 2: Conceptual Model

The figure contains the following labelled elements:

- **Universities' International Student Recruitment**

- **Research Question 1**
  What marketing and recruitment strategies are used by regional Australian universities to recruit students from Thailand?
  - Locations
  - Rankings
  - Resources
  - University vision / strategy
  - Bilateral relations

- **Research Question 2.1**
  What is the influence of push factors on regional Australian universities' strategies in Thailand and their recruitment of Thai students?

- **Research Question 2.2**
  What is the influence of pull factors on regional Australian universities' strategies in Thailand and their recruitment of Thai students?

- **Research Question 3**
  What are the marketing and recruitment factors that influence Thai students to enrol at a regional Australian university?
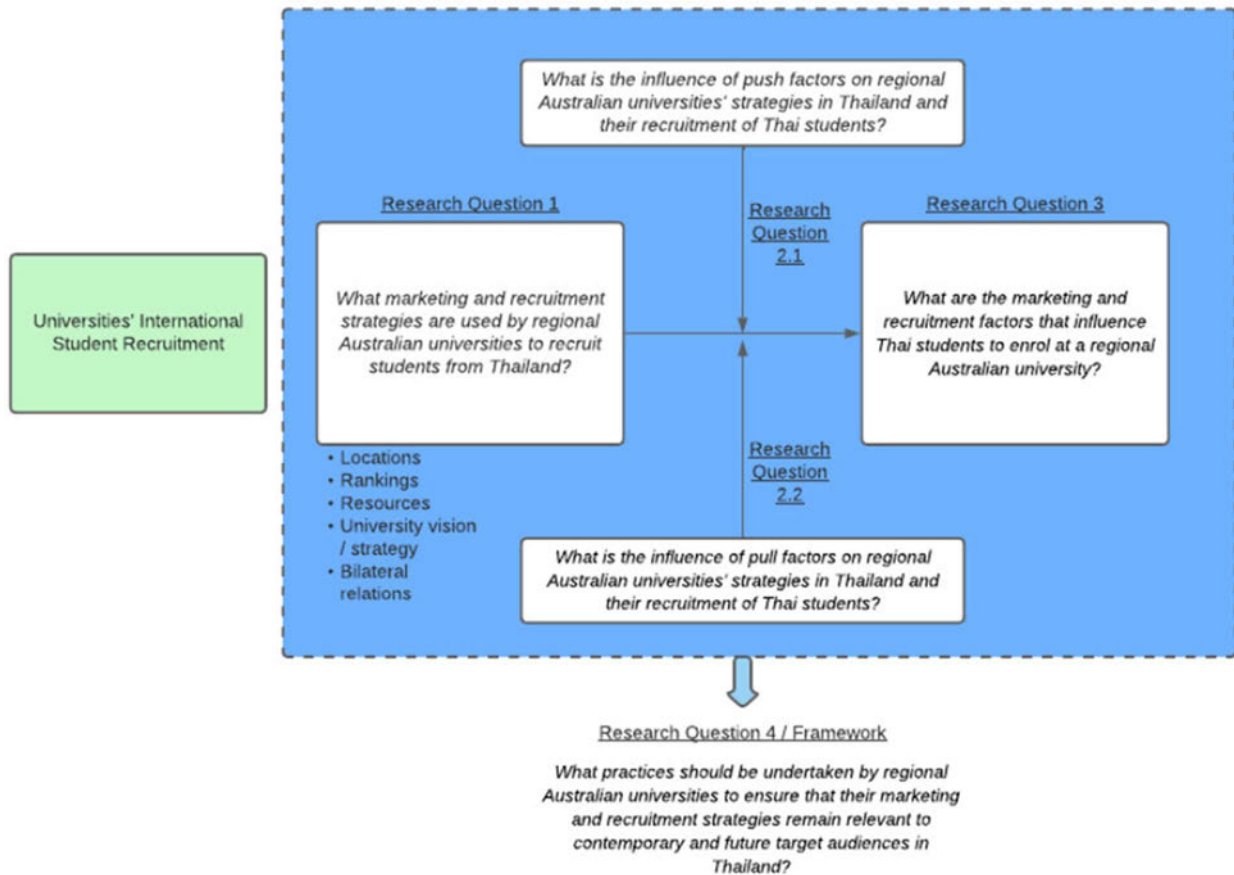
- **Research Question 4 / Framework**
  What practices should be undertaken by regional Australian universities to ensure that their marketing and recruitment strategies remain relevant to contemporary and future target audiences in Thailand?

2.4 Methodology

The research questions were investigated using a pragmatism paradigm, which prioritised the research problem and took a practical 'what works' approach to finding effective solutions. The researcher adopted an eclectic and pluralistic research design to yield the most effective results for improving student recruitment from Thailand. The methodology for this study is depicted in Figure 3, which outlines the study process from start to finish.

2.4.1 Research Paradigm

The pragmatism paradigm was chosen for this study because it aligns a practical, action-oriented approach with a desire to generate recommendations that can be implemented in the researcher's professional practice and by peer practitioners and other researchers when exploring this field. It recognises that the world is socially constructed and that the researcher

is an active participant in the phenomena being studied (Fergusson, Van Der Laan, White, et al., 2019). Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of finding practical solutions to problems and allows for flexibility in the research design in order to achieve this goal (Morgan, 2014). As such, it is well-suited to addressing the research problem and has the potential to yield valuable insights that can be applied to professional practice and in real-world situations.

Figure 3: Outline of the Study's Methodology

Research Problem: There is insufficient research that specifically addresses student recruitment in Thailand from the perspective of regional Australian universities and Thai students

Literature Review

Main Research Question: *How do regional Australian universities develop their marketing and student recruitment strategies in Thailand, and what are the factors that influence Thai students to enrol at these universities?*

Research Question 1: *What marketing and recruitment strategies are used by regional Australian universities to recruit students from Thailand?*

Research Question 2:
*2.1: What is the influence of **push** factors on regional Australian universities' strategies in Thailand and their recruitment of Thai students?*
*2.2: What is the influence of **pull** factors on regional Australian universities' strategies in Thailand and their recruitment of Thai students?*

Research Question 3: *What are the marketing and recruitment factors that influence Thai students to enrol at a regional Australian university?*

Research Question 4:*Based on the previous answers,what practices should be undertaken by regional Australian universities to ensure that their marketing and recruitment strategies remain relevant to contemporary and future target audiences in Thailand?*

Research Philosophy: Pragmatism epistemology - *evaluates theories or beliefs in terms of their practical application*

Research Paradigm: **Pragmatism**

Qualitative Research Phase: Interviews with South East Asia recruitment practitioners from regional Australian universities

Approaches: **Mixed Methods**

Analysis of Qualitative Results

Instrument Creation: Using the qualitative results to create parameters for the quantitative research phase

Research Design: **Exploratory sequential mixed-method design**

Quantitative Research Phase: Survey of Thai students currently studying at regional Australian universities and recent alumni

Analysis and Intepretation of Results

Recommendations / Framework for Optimised Student Recruitment Activity in Thailand

2.4.2 Research Design

The pragmatist paradigm prioritises the research problem and is open to the use of 'multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis in the mixed methods study' (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Krauss, 2005). Therefore, the researcher adopted an exploratory sequential mixed methods research design in order to yield the most comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. This approach combined the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative methods and allowed for a more thorough examination of the research problem.

The study began with a qualitative phase, which served as an initial exploration of the topic and provided a deeper understanding of the strategic approach of regional Australian universities in recruiting Thai students. The independent variable in this phase was the marketing and recruitment practices of regional Australian universities, which were explored in order to understand how these practices influenced Thai students' decision to enrol. The themes that emerged from this phase were then used to guide the analysis in the subsequent quantitative phase, which focused on the student perspective as the dependent variable. This mixed methods approach had the objective of providing a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

As previously mentioned, the research question was formulated to address the identified gaps in the literature, including the gap in population and the gap in perspective. By considering the perspective of international student recruitment practitioners at regional universities and focusing on the specific context of Thailand, this study aimed to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the topic.

2.4.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

First Phase of the Research (Qualitative Research)

During the first phase of this exploratory sequential mixed methods research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with recruitment practitioners at a selection of regional Australian universities. As mentioned earlier, these universities were singled out because their main campus is based in a regional location (either a Category 2 or Category 3 area, as designated by the Department of Home Affairs). At each university, a recruitment practitioner from the international office was interviewed. To participate in the study, they were required to have

direct involvement in their university's marketing and recruitment initiatives in Thailand. These participants were selected based on their job titles, which were confirmed during the discussion. The interviews were semi-structured, and key questions were used to guide the conversation, while they also allowed for flexibility and open-ended responses. The interview questions were also developed based on the findings of the scoping literature review, ensuring that the instrument accurately captured aspects relevant to the research problem.

The qualitative data collected during this phase was analysed using thematic analysis to identify emerging themes. These themes, along with key concepts from the literature, were then used to create the instrument for the subsequent quantitative phase.

Second Phase of the Research (Quantitative Research)

As mentioned earlier, this exploratory mixed methods study was be conducted in two phases, with the findings from the qualitative phase informing the development of the nature of the survey that was employed for the quantitative phase. The second phase of the research involved an online survey of current Thai students and recent Thai alumni of regional Australian universities. Participants were required to be Thai nationals who were currently studying, or those who had recently graduated from, a degree program at a regional university in Australia. This selection criterion was intended to ensure that the respondents had made a conscious decision to study at a regional university that had been actualised. The survey was distributed to potentially appropriate students with the assistance of Thai education agents, local Thai community groups, the Australian Alumni Association of Thailand and Austrade's Education Attaché in Thailand.

The survey had the objective of assessing participants' perceptions of the recruitment strategies used by regional universities. This served to triangulate the findings of the first phase of the research. The survey data was analysed using statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics, regression analysis and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in order to identify relationships between variables and evaluate the construct/internal validity as well as determine the reliability of the instrument. Principal component analysis (PCA) was also utilised to identify the underlying factors that relevant to the phenomenon.

The factor analysis also examined for correlations between items on the instrument and between potential factors, particularly in relation to the decision to enrol. Through this

sequential mixed methods approach, the study devised a subsequent framework proposed to improve universities' recruitment efforts in Thailand.

2.4.4 Limitations

A few limitations were encountered during the study. First, the investigation's commencement during 2020 meant that the ongoing pandemic and its impact on the international education industry posed potential challenges regarding sample size. The closure of Australia's borders to international students resulted in reduced enrolment at Australian universities (IDP Connect, 2021), which impacted the overall number of students eligible for the quantitative phase of the study.

Second, universities were also impacted by the loss of international fee revenue, which was caused by the border closures; as a result, many were required to make redundancies and undertake restructuring exercises (Hurley & Hildebrandt, 2021). This led to concerns regarding the availability of eligible interview participants as there was a possibility that their university would be implementing workforce changes that might lead to their redundancy before the scheduled interviews could take place. In such a scenario, their insights would have been lost, depriving the study of their perspectives.

Despite these challenges, efforts were made to mitigate their effects through the use of detailed sourcing of potential candidates for the study, including through the researcher's networks in Thailand and Australia. Overall, the research design and methods employed in this study were effective in addressing the research problem and providing actionable recommendations.

2.4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the methodology for this study involved an exploratory sequential mixed methods research design, utilising interviews with recruitment practitioners at regional Australian universities and an online survey of Thai students and alumni. The research paradigm adopted was pragmatism, which prioritised the research problem and its real-world implications. The chosen research design, data-collection methods and statistical analysis procedures were employed to scrutinise the data and identify underlying factors within this phenomenon. The findings from this methodology will be presented in the following two

chapters, which will detail the results of the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research, respectively.

CHAPTER 3: PAPER 2 - QUALITATIVE STUDY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter follows on from the findings of the previous chapter, where the scoping literature review highlighted research gaps and subsequent areas for further research to guide this study. As was mentioned previously, extant literature has often focused on larger metropolitan universities and their student recruitment in high-volume source markets. This chapter therefore investigates regional Australian universities and their marketing and recruitment strategies in Thailand.

It also presents the first phase of the exploratory mixed methods study. Methodologically, this phase of the study adopted a qualitative approach to address the research questions. In turn, this phase of the study employed semi-structured interviews to extract firsthand insights from the very architects of recruitment strategies – student recruitment practitioners. This approach allowed for a nuanced and context-rich perspective into the unique interplay between regional universities and Thailand as a source market. By commencing with the qualitative phase, the objective was to conduct an initial exploration of the recurring themes that underpin this phenomenon. These emergent themes would subsequently serve as crucial variables for the ensuing quantitative phase, which delved deeper into the intricacies of the subject matter (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Therefore, the central aims of the qualitative phase of the study were:
- To explore the strategies used by student recruitment practitioners at regional Australian universities to recruit students from Thailand.
- To identify key themes from the results of the semi-structured interviews with recruitment practitioners using thematic analysis.
- To examine the concept of strategic ambidexterity and its relevance to student recruitment practitioners in their prioritisation of emerging markets.

From this phase of the study, the researcher uncovered unique insights that have not been addressed in the extant literature. This is due to the niche parameters of this investigation. These insights will be detailed in the following sections within this chapter.

3.2   Paper Two – Published Paper

This section details the qualitative study, presented as Paper Two, which has been peer-reviewed and published in the *Journal of International Education in Business.* The paper is titled 'Thailand, the forgotten market for Australian universities? A qualitative study into student recruitment by regional universities'.

Thailand, the forgotten market for international student recruitment? A qualitative study into the strategies of regional Australian universities

Abstract

Purpose – The study explores how student recruitment practitioners at regional Australian universities strategize student recruitment efforts in Thailand. There is scarce research addressing regional universities, with prior studies focusing on metropolitan universities. Similarly, most prior studies have focused on high-volume markets, with little research exploring emerging markets such as Thailand.

Design/methodology/approach – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with student recruitment practitioners, from regional universities, that were responsible for recruiting Thai students. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes.

Findings – Regional universities lack strategic ambidexterity in their approach to recruiting international students. They viewed Thailand as requiring longer-term investment and were unwilling to dedicate their limited resources towards developing this market, at the expense of other markets that would yield enrolments to contribute towards short-term targets.

Practical implications – Implications are provided with relevance to the student recruitment practitioner, with strategic ambidexterity discussed.

Originality – The paper fills a gap in the research by exploring international student recruitment and contextualizing both regional universities and Thailand as a recruitment market. This study provides useful considerations that may be relevant to other emerging markets.

Keywords

Regional Australia, universities, Thailand, international students, recruitment, marketing, strategic ambidexterity

Word count: 8000

Introduction

Australian universities have a reputation for recruiting international students from the Asia-Pacific. Initially, universities viewed international student recruitment as a way of supplementing research funding, but over the years international education has become Australia's largest services export (Salt, 2020). Education exports contributed $32 billion to the Australian economy in 2018, with further economic benefits cited as increased consumer spending, tourism expenditure and development of regional cities (Burdett & Crossman, 2010; KPMG, 2020; Nyland et al., 2013).

However, the industry's trajectory was halted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with closed borders preventing students from arriving in Australia (IDP Connect, 2021). While online study was provided as an alternative, the majority deferred until physical attendance was possible. The subsequent $9 billion revenue loss for international education exports significantly impacted universities, and catalysed discussions around an industry rethink to manage future risk (Ferguson, 2021).

The pandemic highlighted Australian universities', including those located in regional locations, dependence on international students from China and India (IDP Connect, 2021). China and India, as two of the world's largest economies, are often mentioned as key source markets for international student recruitment (Ferguson, 2021; Ma et al., 2018; Wadhwa, 2016). With 55% of Australia's international students from these two countries, sustainability of the sector may require exploration of alternative markets to diversify risk (Deloitte Access Economics, 2020; Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2021; Ferguson, 2021).

This study opted to focus on regional Australian universities, as research covering their student recruitment practices is still in its infancy. Regional universities, which are defined as institutions of higher education located outside of major metropolitan areas such as Sydney,

Melbourne and Brisbane (Department of Home Affairs, 2020), are characterized by limited resources and smaller international student recruitment budgets compared to their larger metropolitan counterparts (Wu, 2015). Amidst the current landscape, regional universities are increasingly prioritizing international student recruitment efforts. This shift is driven by thinning local demand, as a growing number of potential local students either enter the workforce or choose to attend metropolitan universities (Corbett et al., 2023; Hong & Hardy, 2022).

While regional universities are typically lower-ranked and less prestigious than larger metropolitan universities (Forbes & Hamilton, 2004), they still maintain relative attraction to international students. This appeal stems from favourable migration prospects, personalised academic and pastoral support, and the opportunity for a quintessential "Australian" experience (Aslan, 2020; Townsend & Huay, 2008). Moreover, regional universities typically offer cost-effective tuition fees compared to larger institutions (Ellis et al., 2005; Gao, 2020; Wu, 2015).

Meanwhile, a scoping review found that extant literature mostly adopts the perspective of larger universities which can utilise rankings, prestige, and destination marketing to attract students (Chin et al., 2022). Consequently, it is difficult to generalise extant literature and make assumptions as to the homogeneity in recruitment strategies between these different types of institutions (Gao, 2020).

This paper therefore aims to address a research gap associated with regional university approaches to international student recruitment. It explores approaches utilised by regional Australian universities in recruiting students from Thailand, by obtaining perspectives from practitioners.

Thailand was selected as this study's focus due to being a key source market in Southeast Asia for Australian universities' international student recruitment efforts, with anticipated growth in the number of students seeking to study in Australia. In 2022, Thailand

was the 6th highest source country for students coming to Australia, and various macroeconomic and political factors indicate towards further growth in demand for overseas education (Austrade, 2023). Additionally, at a broader level, there has been an increase in trade relations between Australia and Thailand, potentially attributed to the Thailand-Australia Free Trade Agreement (Siddique et al., 2016). The Thai government's "Thailand 4.0" strategy, which aims to transform the nation into a knowledge-based economy (Jones & Pimdee, 2017), may also contribute towards increased demand. Given that the majority of Thai students opt for business degrees when studying in Australia (Austrade, 2023), this study holds particular relevance within the realm of international education, especially in the context of higher education institutions specialising in business programs.

The main research question to be explored is *"What marketing and recruitment strategies are used by regional Australian universities to recruit students from Thailand?"* While the study's line of enquiry investigates strategies to recruit Thai students, the findings may inform the relevant literature and practice associated with similar markets.

Literature Review

Push and Pull Factors

Push and pull factors are a key concept in the extant literature on international student recruitment as they provide insight to the decision-making of students, which consequently influences the strategies of universities in global markets (Mazzarol, 2002). This concept relates to factors which motivate individuals to make decisions; therefore, it has been used to address why a student chooses to study at their chosen destination (Chen, 2016). Given the intense competition within the industry, it can be presumed that regional universities would be aware of these factors when formulating their recruitment strategies. However, the extant literature falls short in offering comprehensive insights into whether regional universities indeed integrate such thoughtful consideration into their strategies.

Push factors are reasons a student departs their country of origin; for example, unavailability of places in their home countries, desire to learn about other countries, intention to migrate, and economic and social forces (Lam et al., 2011).

Pull factors are reasons existing in another country that entice a student to study there; for example, knowledge of the destination, advice from family/friends living there, financial reasons, physical climate and lifestyle, and geographic proximity (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).

The limited insights into Thailand identified academic quality, family and friends' influence, and the opportunity to experience a different culture as predominant push and pull factors (Lertjanyakit & Bunchapattanasakda, 2015). However, significant recent shifts in Thailand (evolving societal norms and political uncertainty) suggest these factors may have evolved (Buasuwan, 2018). Little is known regarding the push and pull factors of Thai students when deciding to study at a regional university, nor how these institutions leverage these factors into recruitment strategies. Therefore, this paper aimed to delve into this from the perspective of regional universities and their consideration of these factors.

Additionally, the extant literature has been student-focused and does not investigate from the university perspective (Chin et al., 2022). While it is valuable to comprehend push and pull factors, gaining insights into the perspective of regional universities regarding these factors, based on their experiences, would be equally beneficial. This knowledge could shed light on how regional universities leverage their understanding of these factors to influence students effectively.

International Student Recruitment Strategies

Partnering with *education agents* is often mentioned as a key recruitment strategy for Australian universities. Agents assist students in their study abroad decisions, receiving commissions from universities upon successful enrolments (Goh et al., 2017; Nikula, 2020) .

While the literature underscores the imperative of agent relationships to successful recruitment, it is essential to acknowledge that the level of engagement employed by regional universities may differ due to resource constraints and market dynamics.

The literature further states that Thai students hold agents' expertise in high regard. While family and friends are influential, students trust agents' advice on their choice of country, city, academic program and university (Pimpa, 2003b). Recent data shows 86% of potential students in Thailand seek agents' services to make decisions about pursuing their studies in Australia (Austrade, 2023). Consequently, agent relationships are paramount for successful recruitment (James & Derrick, 2021; Srikatanyoo & Gnoth, 2005; Yang & Akhtaruzzaman, 2017). However, previous studies often failed to differentiate between large metropolitan universities and regional institutions, which led to a tendency to generalize insights across all Australian universities, treating them as a homogeneous group in terms of their recruitment strategies. Therefore, an area of inquiry that remains unexplored is how regional universities collaborate with agents, particularly in Thailand where unique challenges may arise.

Building trust in the university's brand is crucial for attracting international students, given the significant tuition fees and the intangible nature of the service. A level of trust enables students to have confidence in the university's quality and can be fostered through marketing and recruitment efforts. The existing literature discusses various strategies for building trust, including print and digital mediums (Gottlieb & Beatson, 2018; Kananukul et al., 2015). However, the literature does not address how to apply trust-building strategies to recruit Thai students. It is proposed that understanding trust is important in shaping enrolment intent. With this consideration in mind, it is worthwhile to examine whether regional universities incorporate this into their recruitment efforts. Specifically, this study aims to fill a gap in understanding on how trust-building strategies are applied when targeting Thai students.

Extant literature also highlights the necessity for *country-specific marketing plans.* This refers to the formulation of marketing plans based on an understanding of what the target markets resonate with (Nghiêm-Phú & Nguyễn, 2020; Ziguras & Law, 2006). As the industry has become more competitive, universities have developed acute market awareness and adopted bespoke approaches (Gottlieb & Beatson, 2018). Wadhwa (2016) claims that general strategies consist of branding campaigns, agent networks and institutional collaborations – however, it is up to the universities to devise bespoke combinations of these strategies to suit cultural nuances. For example, some nationalities may prioritise employment opportunities when deciding where to study. Therefore, these opportunities could be integrated within campaigns and disseminated through the agent network for optimised recruitment outcomes. This is in contrast to embracing a passive stance and implementing marketing strategies driven by reactive market feedback, which is sometimes the approach taken by universities (Frølich & Stensaker, 2010).

While the literature is supportive of a bespoke approach, not much is known about the strategies used by regional universities in Thailand – as previous studies have focused on larger volume markets. Rattanaburi and Vongurai (2021) emphasise the importance of market research to inform strategies in exploratory regions, especially with the rapid evolution of social media usage (and the cultural nuances that accompany these). As mentioned earlier, cultural nuances make it difficult to accept that general strategies could be applied to all student nationalities due to the discrepancies in push and pull factors.

There is a deficiency in knowledge surrounding Australian universities' strategies in Thailand; however, "Australian universities" should not be generalised as a homogenous group. Extant literature on the internationalisation of Australian universities have focused on large metropolitan institutions, making applicability to regional universities problematic (Gao, 2020). Whereas larger universities have extensive budgets for offshore branding, regional

universities must be cost-efficient (Townsend & Huay, 2008). Therefore, strategies relevant to larger universities may not be feasible for regional universities. As such, this study investigates how regional universities leverage their lower resources and limited prestige into recruitment strategies.

Overall, the strategic importance of agent relationships, building trust and country-specific marketing plans is well-documented in the literature. Nevertheless, it remains uncertain how regional universities develop and implement these when targeting Thai students. Further, the need to adapt these strategies to suit cultural nuances is acknowledged, but the extent to which regional universities effectively address these nuances in their strategies merits exploration.

Strategic Ambidexterity

Strategic ambidexterity is a theoretical concept that refers to an organisation's ability to balance a multi-pronged approach encapsulating both short-term and long-term goals (Adler & Heckscher, 2013; Dimitrios et al., 2021; Venkatraman et al., 2007). Within this theory, organisations should have concurrent strategies that exploit short-term opportunities and explore long-term opportunities (Van der Laan & Yap, 2016).

This is particularly relevant for international new ventures (INV) seeking to achieve superior performance. Han and Celly (2008) found that INVs capable of implementing paradoxical strategies, such as few investments and many countries, and standardization and innovation, achieved superior performance compared to those lacking such capability. This highlights the importance of achieving strategic ambidexterity in the pursuit of sustainability.

The concept of strategic ambidexterity has been explored in various industries (Hamel & Prahalad, 2005), but there is a dearth of research that contextualises this theory within the international student recruitment industry. Thus, this paper aims to incorporate the theory of

strategic ambidexterity when analysing the recruitment strategies of regional universities in Thailand. The international student recruitment endeavours undertaken by Australian universities can be regarded as a global commercial enterprise, given the substantial impact they have on both the universities themselves and the broader economy. Hence, the concept of strategic ambidexterity holds particular relevance, especially when considering universities function as enterprises that must address both immediate needs and long-term sustainability (Healey, 2023).

In this context, short-term outcomes could be said to pertain to the immediate student recruitment results achievable from a particular market (e.g. for return on investment and research funding purposes). On the other hand, longer-term sustainability outcomes could be associated with the cultivation of potential markets, which may not yield immediate results but are essential for future growth. Given recent discussions on the sustainability of the sector in Australia (ICEF Monitor, 2022), it is timely to contextualise strategic ambidexterity as a key consideration for diversifying international student recruitment sources and ensuring long-term stability.

Due to regional universities having a pivotal role in sustaining local economies, strategic ambidexterity is of importance given that these institutions' recruitment practices should have longevity in mind (Corbett et al., 2023). Regional universities, with their limited resources, may be tempted to resort to an ad-hoc strategic approach that exploits immediate opportunities; however this may harm long-term prospects in emerging markets (Cunningham et al., 2022). Given the current lack of insight into how regional universities navigate this delicate balance, this study seeks to address this gap by conducting analysis of their recruitment strategies, shedding light on the approach they employ in the emerging market of Thailand.

While it can be derived from the literature that strategic ambidexterity should be deemed crucial for international student recruitment in general (as a commercially significant

venture that requires sustainability) it is essential to recognise that regional universities operate within resource constraints, which might impact their ability to balance concurrent goals effectively. This study therefore aims to uncover how regional universities navigate their resource limitations while striving for strategic ambidexterity, potentially offering insights into approaches that arise from necessity.

Conceptual Model

By addressing the research gaps proposed by Kumar (2020), a conceptual model was developed that aims to bridge the existing knowledge gaps and address the research question (Figure 1). This had the objective of providing an exploratory insight to the topic for both practical and research implications in future.

- *Gap in population:* the focus has been on larger universities, and dedicated attention needs to be given towards regional universities. Further, that most research focuses on traditionally high-yielding markets.

- *Gap in analysis:* existing studies considered perspectives from either universities or students, without considering interactivity between the two.

- *Gap in perspective*: extant literature does not thoroughly investigate the perspective of international student recruitment practitioners at regional universities.

- *Gap in implication*: past research has only gone so far as to exploring the high-yielding markets without consideration of emerging markets, future implications, or development of practice.

Building on these research gaps, our model seeks to uncover strategies used by regional universities to recruit students from Thailand. The theoretical concept of strategic ambidexterity has been integrated into the model, as it plays a pivotal role in determining strategy development in a global setting.
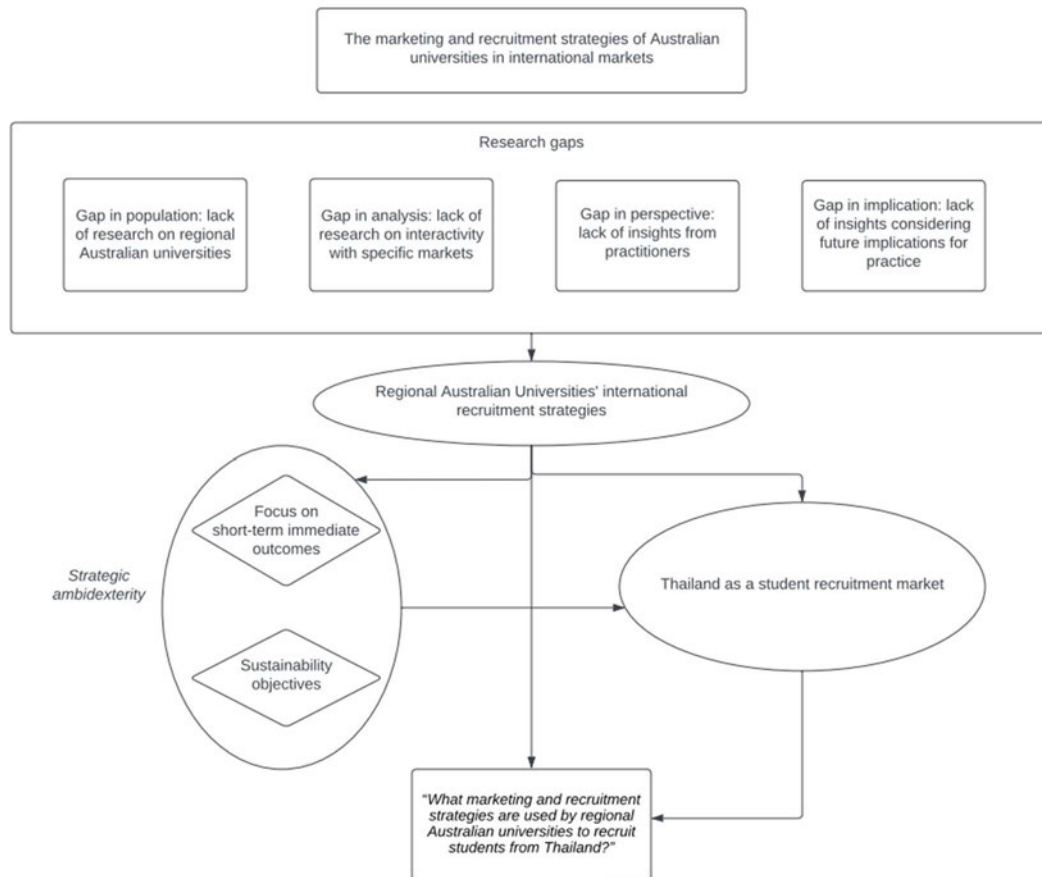

Figure 1: Conceptual Model (Source: Author's own creation)

Methodology

This study is exploratory and adopted a qualitative research design to facilitate early discovery as an appropriate line of enquiry. This design also allows for a greater depth of understanding and an initial overview of how regional universities recruit Thai students (Lune & Berg, 2017). The study is the first phase of a broader mixed methods study and its findings will inform the development of quantitative survey questions.

The study was conducted through the form of semi-structured interviews. According to Kallio et al. (2016), semi-structured interviews allow for flexible conversations that capture "real-life" experiential data giving researchers the opportunity to interpret the responses and environment that the participants exist in. As was outlined in the previous section, there exists two significant research gaps: a *gap in population* (deficient studies focusing on regional universities) and a *gap in perspective (*deficient studies from the perspective of practitioners). Therefore, participants were selected based on the following criteria:

a) Participant is working for a regional Australian university. According to the Department of Home Affairs' designated regional areas, this includes universities headquartered in either a Category 2 (e.g. Gold Coast, Woollongong) or Category 3 location (e.g. Lismore, Ballarat) (Department of Home Affairs, 2020).

b) Participant is responsible for student recruitment initiatives in Thailand. This would be ascertained through their job title (e.g. International Officer – Southeast Asia), and clarified through correspondence. It was required that participants had at least five years' industry experience, in order to add rich experiential data.

The aim was to interview seven participants, each from a different regional university, to provide a broad understanding of the phenomenon across institutions. The sample size was sufficient due to the relatively limited number of regional universities in Australia and the

fact that some regional universities do not have dedicated staff for Southeast Asia recruitment. Additionally, there is usually only one person in each institution dedicated to Southeast Asia. Therefore, the sample size was deemed sufficient to provide an explorative understanding.

Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the University of Southern Queensland Ethics committee. Potential participants were then contacted through email, with a phone call explaining the study. If participants were willing, a time was agreed upon for the interview to take place. They were required to complete a consent form, which also indicated that interviews would be recorded and stored securely. Participants were also assured of anonymity, and that responses could not be linked back to their university. This was to ensure participants would provide honest insights without potential implications. The interviews were conducted from March 2022 to May 2022. There were eight key questions to guide the semi-structured interviews (see Table 1) – with flexibility allowing the participant to express themselves.

Data analysis

Each interview was approxiamately 30 to 45 minutes in duration, and were recorded using Zoom software. The interviews were then transcribed, and summarised in an Excel spreadsheet. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis methodology was chosen due to its flexibility in identifying themes within this exploratory study, and deemed appropriate to capture the depth and context of the information provided by participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout the process of conducting the interviews, the results were progressively analysed to identify any emergent themes that warranted further exploration in the subsequent interviews. While the standard interview questions remained the same, this iterative process

enabled for more comprehensive exploration of emerging themes and contributed to the rigour of the analysis.

Due to the small sample size, it was deemed unnecessary to utilise qualitative data coding software such as NVivo. Instead, the qualitative data was manually coded by highlighting recurring themes and corroborating these across the participants' responses. Initial codes were generated by reading through the transcripts. The codes were then grouped into potential themes, as areas of relevance emerged. Further analysis refined parameters for each theme, ensuring that each presented something definitive.

In order to ensure the validity of our thematic analysis, our study employed a diverse group of participants for interviews (all fitting the aforementioned parameters), including a director, managers, senior manager, and officer. This approach was deliberate and aimed at obtaining a comprehensive perspective on the research topic from various operational levels, contributing to the richness of our data. Moreover, it is important to note that the titles and roles of individuals holding positions such as officer, director, and manager can exhibit variations across universities, contingent upon the unique organisational structures, hierarchies, and nomenclature adopted by each institution.

While our sample size comprised just seven interviews, it is essential to emphasize that thematic analysis prioritises the quality and depth of data over the quantity of interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, our study is exploratory in nature, seeking to provide initial insights rather than making broad generalisations.

Table 1: Interview Questions (Source: Author's own creation)

1	How would you describe your university's strategy to student recruitment in Thailand?
2	If student recruitment in Thailand is unsatisfactory, what course of action does your university undertake?
3	How much consideration do you give towards factors existing in Thailand that may influence a student to seek study abroad opportunities?
4	How committed is your university to building a long-term brand in Thailand?
5	How do you believe trust is developed in the Thai student recruitment market?
6	How does your university engage with Thai social media platforms for student recruitment purposes?
7	How much autonomy do you feel Thai students have in their final decision to study abroad?
8	How do you ensure your agents in Thailand are motivated and well-equipped to promote your university?

Results

The interviews uncovered five key themes relevant to regional universities' student recruitment in Thailand, which are illustrated in Table 2 with an "X" indicating their mention during the interviews. Notably, in line with the literature review and conceptual model, strategic ambidexterity (though not explicitly labelled as such) emerged as a recurring concern within these themes. Interviews predominantly revealed that Thailand was not a priority market for regional universities, due to a perception of it being a market requiring longer-term initiatives with less immediate outcomes. This section will now delve into these identified themes.

Themes:	Interviewees						
	#1 Female; manager level; 8 years' experience	#2 Female; director level; 10 years' experience	#3 Female; manager level; 7 years' experience	#4 Male; senior manager level; 12 years' experience	#5 Female; officer level; 5 years' experience	#6 Male; manager level; 6 years' experience	#7 Male; manager level; 5 years' experience
Thailand is a "passive" market	X	X		X	X	X	X
Lack of commitment to building a brand	X	X		X	X	X	X
Partnering with agents	X		X	X	X	X	X
Acknowledgement of push/pull factors	X	X	X	X		X	
Building trust	X	X	X		X	X	X
Example quotes	"We're not taking a lot of initiatives in this market simply because of the size of the market and we don't have the resources to put a lot of effort in those little markets. "	"Agents are the bread of butter of what we do. However if they do not perform, we cannot afford to maintain the partnership."	"A lot of it would come down to product and ensuring that we offer the right product for the market. If we don't have the right product, then we won't have the materials. We won't be able to drive the recruitment."	"At the moment, were not convinced the ROI's are strong enough to put more attention. Other ASEAN countries are more promising. It will really depend on budget and most unis have constraints."	"[Senior management] only observe the numbers coming in. At present, Thailand is not a high volume market, so they do not really investigate further"	"Thai students' English is not so good, so they are reliant on testimonials from previous students - word of mouth or online social media"	"Our strategy is a short to medium term strategy - not much long term. Academics do build cooperation on some courses, but it's more at a Faculty level (individual research benefits) as opposed to benefiting the whole uni."

Table 2: Results summary (Source: Author's own creation)

Thailand is a "passive" market

Throughout the interviews, it became clear Thailand was not a priority recruitment market for regional universities, highlighting a lack of strategic ambidexterity. The participants shared that due to low numbers of Thai students enrolling at their universities, they were reluctant to invest into Thailand. One participant noted their Thailand strategy was passive, and that the university was *not taking a lot of initiative in this market simply because of its smaller size and there are limited resources to put a lot of effort into markets with low enrolment numbers*. This reflects the challenge of balancing the concurrent objectives inherent to strategic ambidexterity.

Another participant concurred, adding that *Thailand is a "secondary" recruitment country, because it is a market more reliant on academic pathways due to how their academic qualifications compare to Australian university entry requirements.* With regional universities often lacking the breadth of university pathway programs available at larger universities (Forbes & Hamilton, 2004), it appears their strategies prioritise student markets that can enrol directly into their degrees.

Furthermore, there was consensus that regional universities were at a distinct disadvantage compared to their metropolitan counterparts due to the necessity for significant destination marketing. Indeed, Sydney and Melbourne are the top two destinations for Thai students in Australia, with large Thai diasporas providing an easier integration into their overseas experience (Wirojchoochut, 2019).

For this reason, participants expressed pessimism in their regions' ability to attract high volumes of Thai students: *We really need to sell the destination, but it's not easy because it's hard to change the mindset of the students away from Sydney and Melbourne.* This raises a strategic ambidexterity challenge, as participants believed destination marketing

would be a long-term project, and one they did not have time for due to semesterly enrolment targets.

Participants also expressed a desire for increased support from government study syndicates (e.g. Study Queensland, Study NSW) to promote the region. A participant mentioned *there is insufficient support from study syndicates compared to their support for capital cities. At present, there has been no presence by the study syndicate in Thailand, making it the university's role to promote the region.* It seemed that without this support, regional universities were unwilling to proactively engage in destination marketing initiatives due to the significant investment required, further underscoring the resource allocation challenge faced to achieve strategic ambidexterity.

Lack of commitment to building a brand

Participants shared a belief that significant time and resources would be required to build a brand for their university in Thailand; however, they were unwilling to commit these efforts. This again highlighted regional universities' lack of strategic ambidexterity, with participants detailing how their performance was assessed on the number of enrolments obtained from Southeast Asia in each semester, without consideration as to which country those enrolments came from. Limited international office budgets, commonly found at regional universities (Aslan, 2020), further compounded their reluctance to invest in brand building efforts in emerging markets.

Together, the focus on short-term KPIs and relatively smaller budgets have contributed to a broader culture of prioritising short-term gains over longer-term brand building. This lack of strategic ambidexterity was evident with participants often alluding to performance evaluations and senior management directives to prioritise regions with high

potential for immediate enrolments: *we are not convinced of the return on investment from Thailand. Other Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia are more fruitful. We, like all regional universities' international offices, operate on tight budgets.* This suggests any longer-term efforts to build a brand are not prioritised, as the exploitation of current opportunities takes precedence to justify invested time and resources.

Despite this, participants did not express scepticism regarding Thailand's recruitment potential. Instead, participants noted the initiatives they would implement, if afforded time and resources, to grow their university brand in Thailand. These included the appointment of Thailand-based recruitment staff, fostering cross-institutional partnerships, and working with government bodies.

While participants recognized potential long-term benefits of brand building in newer markets like Thailand, the pressure to achieve targets significantly influenced their decision not to execute such initiatives. One participant mentioned: *long-term collaboration efforts would build the university's visibility in Thailand, but there is no incentive for recruiters because we have short-term KPIs. It's a reactive approach, because we know the opportunity cost involved – instead we could be spending more in a market like the Philippines where we can get those enrolments for next semester.*

Other participants agreed, saying that if enrolments were low from Thailand the directive from senior management is usually to *reconsider the need for continued investment.* Overall, it appears that senior management directive is to prioritise regions with high potential for enrolments within the upcoming semesters, thereby revealing a lack of strategic ambidexterity to allocate resources towards emerging markets.

Partnering with agents

The interviews indicated that partnering with education agents remains a key strategy used by regional universities. According to one participant, *Thai students (and their parents) are very reliant on agents because they often do not have the English proficiency to find detailed information on the region and university.* Another participant agreed, adding *agents play a big role in students' decisions because they disseminate a lot of information, translated into Thai, about the universities on blogs and social media platforms.* Participants agreed that without agents promoting regional universities' benefits, students were likely to seek out universities based in Sydney or Melbourne due to limited knowledge of alternatives in Australia.

Participants also recognised that regional universities were not as easy to promote as metropolitan universities, which introduces an element of brand-building considerations within the strategic ambidexterity theory. Consequently participants noted the importance of providing agents with the necessary support to achieve this, with one participant emphasising the significance of *making the agent feel like a valued and trusted partner of the university, rather than just an agent.* This involved *providing excellent service to agents and responding to their enquiries in a timely manner to make their job easier.*

However, pressure to achieve short-term results, emblematic of a lack of strategic ambidexterity, was palpable among participants. They indicated that if Thai enrolment targets were not met, swift actions would be taken – including the reconsideration of agent contracts. While regional universities offered support to agents, the weight of enrolment targets influenced these relationships. This juxtaposition again underscores the imbalance between regional universities' desire for short-term results and long-term relationship cultivation in the strategic ambidexterity paradigm.

Acknowledgement of push/pull factors

Although it appears regional universities lack strategic ambidexterity, the interviews suggest they do at least consider push and pull factors that influence students' decision making, as part of their strategies.

Firstly, participants noted the inability to obtain specific courses locally as a key consideration when selecting degrees to promote in Thailand: *our focus is more on promoting postgraduate and research (PhD) due to the lack of availability of these courses and the strength / quality of Thai institutions' research capability.* Participants also expressed the need to promote niche programs to create a unique selling point: *too many smaller universities already focus on business degrees, but there are already so many available in Thailand. Instead, find a niche program that everyone can quickly associate to your brand, e.g. fashion design.*

Secondly, participants noted their marketing highlighted advantages that regional universities have with regards to post-study migration opportunities. (Currently international students who study in a regional location are entitled to additional years on their post-study work visa) (Department of Home Affairs, 2020). Due to political circumstances in Thailand, participants indicated that the lure of migration was a timely advantage. One participant noted that they focus their messaging on *students who are looking for price sensitive fees, migration driven, and looking for employment opportunities in a regional city.*

Finally, participants indicated that they do consider macroeconomic factors when strategizing. Participants agreed it was beneficial to conduct marketing in Thailand during times of economic growth.

Building trust

A key theme that emerged from the interviews highlighted the significance of building trust in the brand of regional universities in Thailand, given their generally lower rankings and less prominent branding (Wu, 2015). However, despite participants' awareness of the necessity to build trust, it appeared these long-term trust building efforts were not a priority – again, highlighting a lack of strategic ambidexterity in regional universities' international student recruitment efforts.

Participants observed that students were more comfortable during individual consultations if they were talking with someone who could speak Thai. Participants noted that this was probably due to Thai students not having confidence in their English proficiency. It could be gathered that Thai students understandably place a higher degree of trust in a university if they were consulted in Thai, as it aided their comprehension of the main benefits studying at the institution.

Therefore, participants expressed that if their university could allow longer-term initiatives, they would hire a Thai-speaking representative: *if you have a Thai-speaking person at the ground level, they will trust the person easily because they can speak their language – especially when they know that they are from the university itself, and not just an agent.* Participants also expressed how in-country representatives build further trust with agents because it indicates long-term commitment to growing the institution's brand in Thailand. This resonates with the long-term dimension of strategic ambidexterity, and indicates that regional universities could benefit from a more balanced strategy.

Participants also mentioned how the use of alumni testimonials in marketing campaigns helped establish trust with prospective students. One participant mentioned *our university alumni chapter in Thailand assists us a lot for promotion, due to their status within*

society. We have influential PhD alumni in Thailand, and students love talking to them. Other participants noted how they use alumni testimonials in campaigns to increase relatability to their Thai target audiences. Essentially, testimonials align with both short-term and long-term aspects of strategic ambidexterity. While they provide immediate credibility and influence decision-making, they also contribute to longer-term brand building by showcasing former students' experiences.

Finally, participants highlighted the importance of online Thai forums, blogs, and social media. Participants observed that Thai students sought out information on these peer-to-peer networks to aid their final decision: *even if they hear from the university's representative, they will still use a lot of their own language social media to do independent research.* However, participants noted difficulty in accessing and influencing these channels due to these being in Thai: *we do not have the Thai language expertise, so we outsource this to agents.* This was a common practice among the participants, primarily due to reluctance to make substantial investments themselves into these channels.

In summary, it was revealed that building trust in regional universities' brands in Thailand encompasses both short-term and long-term strategies. However for the most part, regional universities are reluctant to allocate resources to longer-term strategies, underscoring the need for a more strategic ambidextrous approach to achieve sustained brand development.

Discussion

An overarching theme from the interviews was that regional universities do not embrace strategic ambidexterity in their student recruitment strategies. This was evident from their reluctance to invest in the strategies needed to recruit Thai students, instead opting for markets with faster enrolment outcomes. While regional universities appeared to have an understanding of their target audience in Thailand, they were reluctant to allocate resources towards an emerging market.

Regional universities contend with significant competition from universities located in larger cities, and must highlight their unique qualities to remain competitive (Forbes & Hamilton, 2004; Gao, 2020). As such, promoting a regional university in Thailand requires a strategic ambidextrous approach to facilitate sustained country-specific initiatives and brand-building initiatives. Building on this, regional universities should utilise their recruitment practitioners' understanding of the longer-term initiatives and factors inherent to this emerging market.

However due to the short-term outlook and constraints of regional universities, practitioners are hesitant to allocate resources towards Thailand. Without investment, instilling trust in a lesser-known brand in Thailand is challenging, resulting in limited enrolments (Huguan et al., 2020). This creates a paradox where regional universities must choose between building a brand in Thailand, or focusing on existing markets for a higher short-term return on investment.

Regional universities' student recruitment strategy, although lacking in strategic ambidexterity, may satisfy senior management expectations but appears limited to the short-term. Continued neglect of diversified marketing efforts and future-oriented planning has the

potential to undermine the long-term sustainability of regional universities' student recruitment efforts, especially amidst increased competition in this space.

Therefore, this study proposes that regional universities should balance short-term gains in burgeoning markets with longer-term sustainability efforts in emerging markets, drawing from the Han and Celly (2008) study on strategic ambidexterity. Over-reliance on "hot" markets can result in significant disruptions to student inflows, as demonstrated by COVID-19 and political tensions between China and Australia (Kwee, 2022). Thus, regional universities must adopt paradoxical strategies to ensure diversified future inflows from emerging markets such as Thailand. This is especially vital for regional universities, which lack the same reputational advantages as larger universities to facilitate a quick recovery from prolonged marketing disruptions.

Promisingly, interview results suggest regional university recruitment practitioners possess requisite market knowledge to build their institution's reputation in Thailand, given a long-term approach. Their discernment highlights that practitioner expertise should be incorporated into strategy setting, rather than relying solely on senior management, leading to sustainable recruitment strategies for long-term institutional benefit.

Due to additional benefits available to students who select to study at regional universities, there is a compelling argument for these institutions to adopt a more strategic approach to promote this. As major cities become increasingly saturated, it is also likely Thai students will consider regional cities as viable alternatives due to lower living expenses and less competition for graduate employment (Forbes & Hamilton, 2004). Once more, this underscores the advantages of strategies incorporating a longer-term outlook, allowing for the incorporation of destination marketing and brand-building efforts essential for promotion of this pull factor.

Evidently, a lack of strategic ambidexterity is restricting regional universities from fully executing the initiatives required to recruit Thai students. *That is, while increased recruitment from emerging markets is an ideal goal, regional universities appear not to be investing in longer-term exploration of these opportunities but rather prioritise short-term exploitation of perceived existing opportunities.* From a professional practice perspective, the results of this study are concerning when one contemplates the long-term sustainability of the sector.

Implications on future practice and research

This study has important implications for future practice and research. In practice, it highlights the need to consider a balanced approach, considering short-term targets and emerging markets, while acknowledging budget constraints. It further underscores the importance of developing specific strategies for emerging markets like Thailand. The study also puts forward strategic ambidexterity as a key concept to be considered in future research on international student recruitment. As an exploratory study, these key takeaways should be considered to inform more extensive investigations in this field.

These implications align with the 'Australian strategy for International Education 2021-2030', which emphasises *diversifying student cohorts and source countries* (Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2021). It follows that regional universities are being encouraged to gain competitive advantages through the exploration and development of newer markets. Strategic ambidexterity in the context of international student recruitment would suggest that in addition to diversifying to new markets, high-volume markets cannot be neglected.

As evidenced from this study's interviews, participants revealed that short-term gains from exploiting high volume markets are important to the economic position of regional

universities and should remain within their strategies. However, if regional universities can successfully embrace the concept of strategic ambidexterity, it has the potential to alleviate internal demands for immediate results and allow for the exploration of markets with long-term potential. According to Van der Laan and Yap (2016), "organisations that adopt both a futures-oriented long-term view and a short-term pragmatism, will most likely exhibit the strategic ambidexterity needed in this time of complexity".

Evidently, this study revealed that regional universities are lacking in strategic ambidexterity; however, the question arises as to whether developing longer-term markets would be sufficiently beneficial for regional universities. It can be argued that larger universities are better placed to explore alternative markets and that regional universities could benefit as a result. Similarly, it can be argued that regional universities do not sufficiently benefit from what are highly competitive high-volume markets and that investment in alternative markets with less competition is necessary if they aim to increase international enrolments.

Nevertheless, the results indicate that Thailand is viewed by recruitment practitioners at regional universities as a market worth exploring with a longer-term view of securing a reliable market. However, the prioritisation of short-term targets and resource constraints have prevented the realisation of such efforts. While this study focused on practitioners who are directly involved in student recruitment, further research should interview university senior leadership and prospective students to determine a holistic understanding. This would investigate the rationale adopted by university decision makers regarding international student recruitment and the motivations of students in response to recruitment efforts. Further, quantitative research is required to determine the extent to which these findings can be generalised to a wider array of practitioners, as well as from the perspective of Thai students.

Conclusion

This study provided an understanding of how regional Australian universities strategize their marketing and student recruitment efforts in Thailand. The results revealed that regional universities understand the importance of various trust building initiatives, agent partnerships and marketing relevant to push and pull factors.

However, the results importantly showed that regional universities lack strategic ambidexterity; consequently, recruitment efforts in Thailand are often passive. It was found that with limited time and resources, regional universities will prioritise those markets generating short-term outcomes to meet recruitment targets. This comes at the expense fostering emerging markets, such as Thailand, for long-term sustainability.

Australian universities are still in recovery mode following the COVID-19 pandemic. As they strategize their return to pre-2020 recruitment levels, it would be wise to adopt a futurist outlook that considers long-term sustainability.

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3.3   Links to and Implications for the Next Study

Paper Two detailed the first phase of this exploratory mixed methods investigation, which involved a qualitative study consisting of interviews with recruitment practitioners at regional Australian universities. This served to scrutinise their marketing and recruitment strategies in Thailand. The findings provided valuable insights into the strategies and approaches used by regional universities when recruiting Thai students.

The researcher had the opportunity to present the qualitative phase results as a poster presentation at the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education (APAIE) Conference, which was held in Bangkok in March 2023. The poster presentation communicated the study's findings to a diverse audience, and attendees expressed their curiosity with regard to the distinctive approach adopted by regional universities. Conversations held during the presentations produced insightful feedback that enriched the study's trajectory.

From this phase of the study, the semi-structured interviews with practitioners revealed that they understood the importance of a country-specific strategy, agent relationships, push and pull factors relevant to Thai students and the importance of building trust in the university brand. Despite this, a key finding was that regional universities' strategic approaches were constrained by their prioritisation of markets that offer more immediate enrolment outcomes.

This chapter illuminates a paradoxical tug-of-war between short-term recruitment targets and the imperative need for long-term brand building. Budget constraints, compounded by a focus on immediate results, seem to influence regional universities' prioritisation of source markets and the subsequent marketing and recruitment strategy. According to the recruitment practitioners, Thailand demands more prolonged dedication and longer-term initiatives to establish a good reputation and cultivate trust among the target audience. Consequently, the interviews revealed that Thailand was not a priority market for regional universities due to the protracted commitment required and delayed enrolment outcomes. As such, they were reluctant to invest in the initiatives required to foster the country as a future source market.

For the purposes of the overall study, the findings from this qualitative phase required further validation through additional investigation, particularly from the perspective of the target audience – Thai students. In an exploratory mixed methods study, key themes derived from the qualitative phase can be used to inform its quantitative counterpart, specifically in the creation of an instrument to validate the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Therefore,

the subsequent quantitative phase of the study consisted of a survey administered to Thai students and recent Thai alumni of regional Australian universities. This survey aimed to discover the marketing and recruitment factors that influenced Thai students' decision to enrol at a regional university. As will be explained in the following chapter, the quantitative phase also aimed to determine whether the findings from the first phase were mirrored and/or realised from the perspective of Thai students. In other words, the researcher examined whether Thai students were cognisant of regional universities' relative lack of investment in dedicated long-term marketing and student recruitment strategies in Thailand.

CHAPTER 4: PAPER 3 - QUANTITATIVE STUDY

4.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the quantitative phase of the study. Having derived insights from the qualitative phase (Paper Two), the quantitative phase now seeks to validate these findings by incorporating them into a survey administered to Thai students and recent alumni. The survey was created by integrating the key themes and insights derived from the semi-structured interviews. This approach aimed to ascertain viewpoints from the target audience, Thai students, regarding regional universities' strategies for student recruitment in Thailand and how these strategies influenced their decision to enrol.

The survey's results were analysed using EFA and PCA to derive the underlying factors that are relevant to the phenomenon. EFA is commonly used to uncover the underlying structure of a set of variables without prior assumptions about the relationships among them. Meanwhile, PCA aims to transform a set of correlated variables into a smaller set of uncorrelated variables called principal components (Shrestha, 2021). Applying these methods to the survey results facilitated a more detailed understanding of the elements of universities' marketing and recruitment strategies that are influencing students' decision to enrol. These collective insights formed the basis for a conceptual model and framework to facilitate the development of a more targeted and effective approach for regional universities to consider in their marketing and recruitment efforts in Thailand. As these insights effectively stem from both the qualitative and quantitative findings, they provide a solid foundation for the application to practice and future research.

Overall, the quantitative phase of the study aimed to discover the underlying factors that influence Thai students' decision to enrol at a regional Australian university by employing a survey and subsequent factor analysis. The central aims of the study were:

- To discover how Thai students and alumni perceive the marketing and recruitment strategies used by regional universities in recruiting students from Thailand.

- To utilise EFA and PCA on the survey results to uncover the predominant factors influencing respondents' decision to enrol.

-   To provide recommendations, based on these findings, as to how regional universities can accordingly adjust their marketing and recruitment strategies to increase their influence on Thai students' decision to enrol.

As this was the second and final phase of this exploratory mixed methods study, this chapter is designed to triangulate the data and determine whether the findings from the qualitative phase were validated by Thai students and if it influenced their decision to enrol at a regional university. As revealed in the literature review, few studies have delved into this phenomenon from the dual perspective of regional universities and Thai students (Chin et al., 2022); therefore, this investigation offers a more holistic and nuanced viewpoint.

4.2   Paper Three – Submitted and Currently out for Peer Review

This section details the quantitative study, presented as Paper Three. It has been submitted and is currently out for peer review with *Cogent Business and Management*. The paper is titled 'A Model for International Marketing and Recruitment in Emerging Markets: Factors that Influence Thai Students' Decision to Enrol at a Regional University'.

Factors Influencing Thai Students' Decision to Enrol at a University in Regional Australia

Abstract

The imperative of revitalising international student recruitment post-COVID-19 pandemic amid geopolitical realignments has brought Australian universities to the forefront of strategic marketing considerations. Reassessment of conventional markets and strategies has become critical in sustaining and enhancing competitiveness of these institutions in the global education landscape. This study aims to investigate marketing and recruitment factors, specifically examining their influence on Thai students' decision to enrol at a regional Australian university. The research approach involved administering a survey of Thai students and recent alumni of regional Australian universities. A principal component analysis (PCA) revealed a multidimensional structure of eight factors. According to the findings, Thai students'

decision to enrol was influenced by agents, post-study migration opportunities and country-specific resources. However, due to the perceived low return on investment and delayed enrolment outcomes, regional universities are not investing sufficiently in Thailand. Implications for marketing and recruitment initiatives are discussed.

Word count: 6965

Introduction

The 2022 reopening of Australia's borders reignited the nation's valued international student recruitment industry. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, international education was Australia's largest services export, contributing up to $32 billion to the economy in 2018 (ICEF Monitor, 2022). The pandemic halted the industry's momentum and prevented students from commencing degrees in destination countries. The large enrolment decline caused significant losses for Australia's education exports (Marshman & Larkins, 2020), triggering discussions around the futureproofing of the international student recruitment industry. With 55% of Australia's international students coming from India and China, analysts urged the further development of emerging markets for risk diversification (Deloitte Access Economics, 2020).

The sustainability of regional Australian universities is significant as they play a vital role in driving economic regional growth (Gao, 2020). Regional universities –defined as institutions located outside of the major cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane (Department of Home Affairs, 2020) – are characterised by limited resources and student recruitment budgets compared to metropolitan counterparts. Regional universities also cannot rely on the same leverage points as large metropolitan universities, such as destination marketing and prestige, to attract students (Forbes & Hamilton, 2004). Therefore, an understanding of these institutions' international recruitment operations is essential.

Research covering these operations in regional Australian universities is scarce (Chin et al., 2022), with most insights limited to larger metropolitan universities (Gottlieb & Beatson, 2018; James, 2018). Similarly, the extant literature has focused on the traditional source countries of India and China rather than emerging markets. Consequently, little is known about

regional universities' recruitment efforts in emerging markets, or how these strategies influence students' decision to enrol.

This paper therefore aims to address the literature gap associated with regional universities' approach to international student recruitment in emerging markets by exploring how students from Thailand view the recruitment strategies of regional universities. Thailand was selected as the study's focus due to an anticipated increase in students coming to Australia. In 2022, Thailand was the sixth-highest source country for students coming to Australia, and various macroeconomic and political factors indicate further growth in demand for overseas education (Austrade, 2023).

From the above-mentioned background, this article's main research question is: *'What marketing and recruitment factors used by regional Australian universities are influential on Thai students' decision to enrol?'* This study proposes a framework that regional universities can use to improve their student recruitment efforts in Thailand. While focused on Thailand, the findings should apply to similar markets.

Literature Review

University approach to student recruitment

The literature broadly reveals that within the global student recruitment industry, *agent partnerships* and *country-specific marketing plans* are key strategic approaches (Chin et al., 2022). An agent provides enrolment assistance to students and receives commission from universities for successful enrolments. Thai students respect the expertise of agents (Ou-Yang et al., 2014). Families and friends play significant roles in the decision to study abroad; however, Pimpa (2003b) and Huguan et al. (2020) indicate that agents' professional advice is more trusted regarding destinations, academic programmes and university information. Therefore, the literature stresses that managing agent relationships is imperative to successful recruitment (Nikula, 2022; Pimpa, 2003b). Nonetheless, there is insufficient research exploring the student-agent relationship within the context of promoting regional universities.

The literature also highlights country-specific marketing plans as a key strategic measure. According to Yean et al. (2019) and Wadhwa (2016), universities have adopted acute market awareness that involves the development of bespoke approaches to different regional markets. Due to inherent cultural nuances, a common theme in the literature is the need for bespoke marketing and recruitment strategies (Gray et al., 2003; Wadhwa, 2016; Stein, 2018).

However, there is insufficient detailed insight into country-specific marketing plans and how they influence students from certain regions.

Contextualising regional universities

The extant literature on international student recruitment has focused on larger Australian universities in key metropolitan areas (Gottlieb & Beatson, 2018; Ross, 2009), so there are limited insights relevant to regional universities. This is due to considerable disparity in spending power between these institution types. Larger metropolitan universities can invest in extensive offshore branding, including the establishment of global offices, cross-institutional partnerships with renowned universities and comprehensive awareness campaigns. They also often have higher rankings that enhance global attractiveness (Butt et al., 2021; Forbes & Hamilton, 2004). Conversely, regional universities rarely place high in global rankings and have lesser spending power (Wu, 2015). This said, regional universities can offer international students other benefits such as better pastoral care and bespoke academic support (Townsend & Huay, 2008).

Evidently, Australian universities are not homogenous. Therefore, it is valuable to gain insight into regional universities' international student recruitment strategies and students' opinions on them.

Factors influencing Thai students to study abroad

Studies on international student recruitment have focused on this area, with previous studies utilising the concept of *push and pull factors*. *Push factors* are reasons that a student decides to depart their country, while *pull factors* are reasons in the destination country that influence them to move there (Mazzarol, 2002).

Pimpa (2003a) and Lertjanyakit and Bunchapattanasakda (2015) state that the push and pull factors influencing Thai students were the academic quality available abroad, the influence of family and friends and the opportunity to experience a different culture. Word-of-mouth was also highlighted as an influencing factor, as Thais who could afford to study overseas usually had friends and family who had studied abroad. Compared to their greater Asia counterparts, Thai students were not as influenced by institutional rankings (Chanarnupap, 2013) and instead valued insights from those who had previously studied abroad (Ou-Yang et al., 2014). With the increasing number of Thai students studying in Australia (Austrade, 2023), the

subsequently larger alumni network provides more word-of-mouth influence. Consequently, further contemporary research in this area becomes imperative.

However, macroeconomic and political developments in Thailand suggest these factors should be reconsidered (Buasuwan, 2018). Furthermore, Thailand's second global ranking for mobile phone usage and fifth for internet usage (Rattanaburi & Vongurai, 2021) suggests that new insights are needed into this medium's influence on enrolment decisions.

While the literature addresses push and pull factors of Thai students, previous insights insufficiently consider the influence of university recruitment initiatives (Asaad et al., 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Further, the literature does not differentiate between regional and metropolitan universities (Gao, 2020), raising the question of whether these distinct types of institutions might exert varying pull factors on Thai students.

Creating a strategic ambidextrous approach - building trust in newer markets

An organisation's strategic ambidexterity refers to its ability to balance short-term and long-term goals (Dimitrios et al., 2021). Ideally, organisations should not only focus on exploiting immediate commercial outcomes but also foster exploration of longer-term sustainability initiatives (Van der Laan & Yap, 2016).

While strategic ambidexterity has been considered within organisational contexts in several industries (Hamel & Prahalad, 2005), there is insufficient research contextualising this in the international student recruitment industry. Further research in this area is needed, especially considering recent discussions concerning the sector's sustainability in Australia, where many institutions are over-reliant on China and India (ICEF Monitor, 2022). During the pandemic recovery period, it is reasonable to expect that Australian universities will prioritise larger volume markets in the short term, but potentially at the expense of developing newer markets.

Additionally, research is limited on the strategic approach of regional universities in global markets and whether they balance short-term and long-term goals. This is important to consider because their level of engagement in developing new markets could affect how students view these institutions as potential study destinations. Typically, a university seen as having an ad hoc strategic approach may be perceived as predominantly exploitative, thus damaging its longer-term outlook in a particular market (Cunningham et al., 2022).

According to Chin et al. (2023), regional universities are conflicted in crafting strategic ambidextrous approaches. Although it appears regional universities expressed willingness and

know-how in gradually building brand trust in Thailand, they are reluctant to do so at the expense of short-term targets expected by senior management.

If regional universities are reluctant to invest in longer-term explorative efforts to build trust in emerging markets like Thailand, insights on the effectiveness of their recruitment strategies in terms of factors influencing students' enrolment decisions would be valuable.

Conceptual model

Based on the literature review and research gaps identified, a tentative structural conceptual model was created to guide the study's line of inquiry (Figure 1). The development of the model was informed by a preceding scoping review and an exploratory qualitative investigation by Chin et al. (2022).

The independent variable (*regional university marketing and recruitment strategy)* was proposed to be positively related to the dependent variable (*decision to enrol)*. This study aimed to identify the underlying factorial structure associated with the conceptual model to assess whether amendments were necessary or if a new model should be developed.
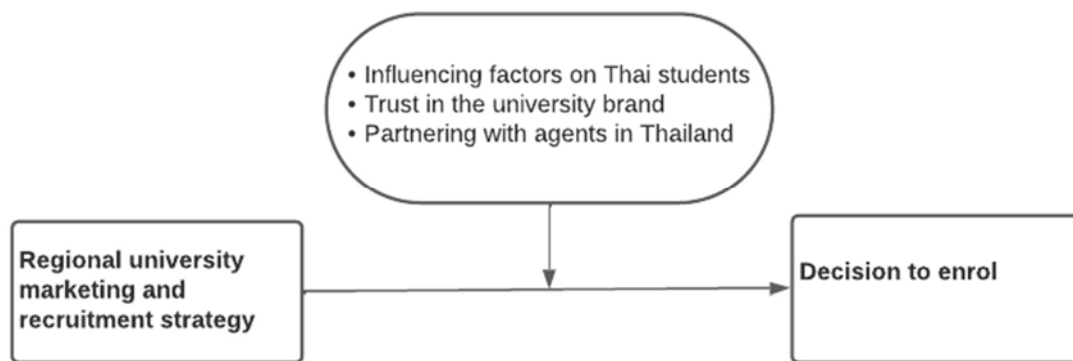

Figure 1: Conceptual Model: Factors influencing Thai students to enrol in Australian regional universities

Methodology

Research context

The study is the secondary phase of an exploratory mixed methods study of regional universities' recruitment efforts regarding Thai students. Lacking substantial knowledge about this phenomenon, employing an exploratory method enables an understanding of the relevant variables, laying the foundation for in-depth investigations (Hallingberg et al., 2018). Hair et al. (2014) outlines a structured approach to model building that includes estimating and

validating a multivariate model. They note the importance of conceptual model development for initial estimation before multivariate techniques are applied for model validation.

For the development of the conceptual model in Figure 1, initial qualitative research sought to understand regional universities' recruitment strategies when targeting Thai students. This was accomplished through semi-structured interviews with student recruitment practitioners from regional universities with Thai market expertise.

The themes identified provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing regional universities in Thai student recruitment, including an understanding of cultural nuances, push and pull factors and university brand trust.

This study's initial objective was to ensure model parsimony aligned with existing literature. Quantitative research had a dual purpose: first, to validate, reject or refine the conceptual model derived from the preceding qualitative phase. This entailed gathering data from a broader sample of Thai students who have studied, or are currently studying, at regional Australian universities. Second, to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This led to a tentatively validated multivariate model of Thai student recruitment, with the potential for future insights.

Research design and sampling

This study adopted a quantitative research design by surveying current Thai students and recent alumni of regional Australian universities. The survey sought to assess respondents' perceptions of regional universities' recruitment in Thailand and identify underlying factors influential to their enrolment decisions. In the broader study, this would determine the extent to which the themes identified by recruitment practitioners were reflected in the responses from Thai students.

This study opted for a Likert scale questionnaire because of its versatility in capturing respondent's opinions and attitudes across a range of variables related to universities' marketing and recruitment strategies. Furthermore, their structured format allows respondents to conveniently express their views on various aspects inherent to the phenomenon (Gill et al., 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The survey used a five-point Likert scale questionnaire and was administered online using QuestionPro for four months in 2022. This platform offered easy distribution to the target population. The survey was distributed with the assistance of education agents, local Thai community groups, the Australian Alumni Association of Thailand and Austrade's Education Attaché in Thailand. To ensure the study's desired demographic, participants were required to meet the following criteria:

a) Thai national; and

b) Currently studying (onshore in Australia) at a regional university; or

c) Graduated since 2015 from an Australian regional university.

The sample included 62 qualified respondents with no missing values. The data obtained was deemed sufficient for this exploratory study, as it allowed for a representative sample of the niche target population and met the multivariate analysis assumptions.

Measures

The survey was composed of questions organised to represent the variables of the conceptual model in Figure 1. The questions were formulated as statements that emerged from the literature and qualitative phase of the study. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. The questions and responses were in Thai and English.

Analysis

To ensure data parsimony, incomplete cases were deleted, resulting in a final sample size of 62 complete responses out of 137 initial respondents (around a 45% response rate). Notably, due to questions forcing a response, no missing values were detected. The data was then checked for normal distribution using skewness and kurtosis statistics as well as PP plots. The results demonstrated no significant normality deviations, thereby providing a strong basis for further analyses. From this finalised data set, frequencies were generated to provide an initial data overview.

For dimension reduction, a PCA was conducted using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity for sampling adequacy. The PCA adopted a Maximum Likelihood Estimation method with Varimax rotation and Kaiser Normalization. Varimax rotation was selected because it was anticipated that the resultant factors were uncorrelated.

Results

Profile of respondents

Of the 62 respondents, 43.5% were male, 53.2% were female and 3.2% identified as 'other'. Most of the respondents (80%) were 23 to 42 years old. Consistent with the observation that Thailand is primarily a postgraduate student recruitment market (Austrade, 2023), 50% studied a Master's degree, 29% completed a Bachelor's degree and 19.4% did a PhD or postdoctoral degree. Most students studied management and commerce (29%) followed by health (9.7%) and information technology (9.7%). A significant number indicated 'other' as their study field, which is attributed to students studying 'hybrid' (Business and Law),

specialised (e.g. cybersecurity) or research degrees that did not fit within the pre-determined responses.

29% of respondents studied in regional New South Wales, followed by the Australian Capital Territory (16.1%) and Western Australia (14.5%). The remaining respondents were linked with universities in regional Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. Regarding graduation year (and alumni or current student status), 50% of respondents completed their degree from 2015 to 2020, and 50% graduated, or were due to graduate, from 2021 to 2027.

Reliability of instrument

A reliability analysis of the survey instrument yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 exceeding the 0.70 threshold for acceptable internal consistency reliability (Taber, 2018), indicating a reliable measure of the constructs. The KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.535 (above the 0.5 threshold commonly cited as acceptable in exploratory studies) (Shrestha, 2021). Together, these findings reinforce the appropriateness of employing factor analysis with the given sample size, providing evidence supporting the reliability of the survey instrument and the suitability of the data for exploratory analysis.

Factor analysis

PCA was employed to reduce the number of dimensions of a dataset (Hair et al., 2014). The statistical analysis seeks to identify optimal groupings of questions into key components and to identify the underlying factorial data structure. This is especially helpful in validating or modifying a conceptual model.

After ten iterations, eight factors emerged from the PCA solution that explained 61.65% of the total variance. These factors were:

1. *University reputation*
2. *Trust-building sources*
3. *Migration and job opportunities*
4. *Enrolment decision*
5. *Country-specific resources*
6. *Agent/university relationship*
7. *Uniqueness and accessibility of course offerings and information*
8. *In-country presence*

Table 1 displays these eight factors and their related variables as per the PCA results and grouping.

Table 1: PCA results	Factor loadings	Communalities	Eigenvalue	Variance explained (%) *(Total variance explained = 61.65)*	Mean scores measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strong Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree)	Ranking of variables based on mean scores
Factor 1: University reputation			7.14	18.78	3.08	
1A My chosen Australian university is well-known in Thailand	0.81	0.77			2.79	38
1B Regional universities have a good presence in online Thai social media platforms.	0.74	0.74			2.84	37
1C My chosen Australian university has a strong reputation in Thailand	0.67	0.57			3.06	31
1D Student reviews and testimonials on the university could be easily found online on Thai social media sites.	0.67	0.55			3.21	27
1E There was enough information available in Thai about the university, to assist me in selecting a university.	0.55	0.57			2.85	36
1F Education agents had a good understanding of all universities in Australia, not just the large ones.	0.47	0.67			3.44	18
1G University ranking was an important factor in my selection of university.	0.46	0.58			3.27	20
1H My university appears to have a long-term strategy to grow their reputation in Thailand.	0.43	0.37			3.18	28
Factor 2: Trust-building sources			3.59	9.46	3.38	
2A My selection of university was influenced by family members.	0.72	0.62			2.94	33
2B Education agents promoted regional universities as much as those based in Sydney / Melbourne / Brisbane.	0.65	0.58			3.24	23
2C My decision to enrol was influenced by family and friends.	0.60	0.59			3.18	28
2D Education agents are trustworthy and provided information that was in my best interests.	0.59	0.64			4.05	2
2E Regional universities are well-represented by their agents in Thailand.	0.53	0.70			3.23	25
2F It was useful to meet a representative directly from the university, as they were able to provide trustworthy advice beyond what was available with the education agent.	0.50	0.65			4.03	3
2G My university adjusts their marketing strategies to suit local audiences in Thailand.	0.46	0.77			3.06	31
2H The marketing messaging of regional universities is relatable to Thai students.	0.39	0.75			3.27	20
Factor 3: Migration and job opportunities			2.91	7.66	3.62	
3A The opportunity to migrate away from Thailand was an influencing factor on my decision.	0.79	0.52			3.16	30
3B I chose my university because there were good job opportunities in the area.	0.70	0.59			3.71	12
3C I selected a regional university because of their affordability compared to larger universities.	0.65	0.51			3.50	16

	Table 1: PCA results	Factor loadings	Communalities	Eigenvalue	Variance explained (%) (Total variance explained = 61.65)	Mean scores measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strong Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree)	Ranking of variables based on mean scores
3D	Regional universities are an attractive option due to the post-study migration opportunities (e.g. longer duration for post-study work visa, extra migration points).	0.65	0.75			4.10	1
	Factor 4: Enrolment decision			2.56	6.75	3.59	
4A	Education agents were influential in my decision to enrol at the university.	0.73	0.57			3.27	20
4B	Education expos are a good way to obtain information on which university to choose.	0.64	0.64			4.00	6
4C	The location of my university was influential in my decision to enrol.	0.59	0.76			3.77	11
4D	The marketing of my university influenced my decision to enrol.	0.53	0.58			2.92	34
4E	My decision to enrol was influenced by the level of trust I had in the university.	0.43	0.53			4.00	6
	Factor 5: Country-specific resources			2.15	5.65	3.57	
5A	Alumni testimonials from other Thai students on the university were a trusted source of information during my decision-making.	0.71	0.64			4.03	3
5B	If the university representatives were able to speak Thai, it made them a more trustworthy source of information.	0.68	0.63			3.48	17
5C	Online Thai discussion forums are a valuable source of information on which university to select.	0.66	0.65			3.53	15
5D	Regional universities are doing enough to grow their brand in Thailand.	0.48	0.57			3.24	23
	Factor 6: Agent / University relationship			1.97	5.18	3.99	
6A	It seemed that education agents have a good relationship with the Australian universities they represent.	0.84	0.63			3.97	9
6B	Education agents seem to be well supported by their Australian university partners.	0.83	0.66			4.00	6
	Factor 7: Uniqueness and accessibility of course offerings and information			1.58	4.15	3.51	
7A	I chose my university because they are experts in the field of study I have selected.	0.75	0.71			3.71	12
7B	The marketing strategies of regional Australian universities are different from those used by larger universities.	0.73	0.65			3.42	19
7C	Information on my university was easy to obtain from their website.	0.60	0.51			4.02	5

Table 1: PCA results		Factor loadings	Communalities	Eigenvalue	Variance explained (%) *(Total variance explained = 61.65)*	Mean scores measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strong Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree)	Ranking of variables based on mean scores
7D	The course I selected to study is not easily found at universities in Thailand.	0.46	0.57			2.90	35
	Factor 8: In-country presence			1.53	4.04	3.62	
8A	Education agents promote the university with integrity.	0.65	0.59			3.65	14
8B	Education agents provided the necessary assistance to help me choose my university.	0.62	0.50			3.97	9
8C	It was challenging to interact with university representatives who were not able to speak Thai.	0.61	0.57			3.23	25

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

Rotation converged in 10 iterations.

Among the eight factors, factor six, pertaining to the perceived relationship between education agents and represented universities, had the greatest impact on respondents' decision-making. This is consistent with literature that indicates Thai students are more influenced by agents due to their professional expertise (Pimpa, 2003b). Meanwhile, with the preceding qualitative phase highlighting the relatively passive efforts of regional universities in Thailand to enhance their reputation (Chin et al., 2023), factor one, university reputation, had the least impact on respondents' decision-making. Examining the individual items within the eight factors, the factor loadings and means offer additional insight into the influences on students (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017) . Table 2 illustrates that respondents generally agreed with these four highest considerations:

Table 2: Highest considerations

Label	Description	Mean
3D	Regional universities are an attractive option due to post-study migration opportunities	4.10
2D	Education agents are trustworthy and provide information that is in my best interests	4.05
2F	It was useful to meet a representative directly from the university, as they were able to provide trustworthy advice beyond what was available from the education agent	4.03
5A	Alumni testimonials from other Thai students at the university were a trusted source of information during my decision-making	4.03

As seen in 2D, 2F and 5A, 'trust' is a common theme across the highest considerations. This trust dynamic extends to interactions between education agents, university representatives and other Thai students, and appears to impact decision-making. Extrapolating from this, it becomes evident that trust in the university brand is built through their agents, representatives and alumni testimonials. These sources of trust collectively contribute to the establishment and reinforcement of the university's reputation, influencing students' decision to enrol. This reinforces practitioner perspectives that successful recruitment in Thailand would be reliant on strategies that establish trust among the student audience.

However, one item (3D) deviates from the trust theme and pertains to post-study migration opportunities. This 'pull factor' highlights a unique aspect specific to regional universities, emphasising additional benefits to studying in regional locations, such as a longer

post-study work visa duration (Department of Home Affairs, 2020). This demonstrates the genuine influence of such advantages on Thai students' enrolment decisions.

Conversely, respondents expressed disagreement with the four lowest considerations:

Table 3: Lowest considerations

Label	Description	Mean
7D	The course I selected to study is not easily found at universities in Thailand	2.90
1E	There was enough information available in Thai about the university to assist me in selecting a university	2.85
1B	Regional universities have a good presence on online Thai social media platforms	2.84
1A	My chosen Australian university is well-known in Thailand	2.79

These variables indicate that marketing and recruitment efforts from regional universities had a lower influence on the decision to enrol, with the three lowest items (1A, 1B and 1E) all from factor one (university reputation).

Component inter-correlations

Factor four *(enrolment decision)* represents the determinants of the enrolment decision, prompting an examination of correlations with the other factors. This identified variables displaying positive associations with the enrolment decision, thereby revealing influential factors. The Component Transformation Matrix (Table 4) was employed to depict the relationship between the factors using PCA. This matrix provided valuable insights into the contribution of the original variables to the newly transformed components.

Table 4: Component Transformation Matrix

Component	1 - Uni reputation	2- Trust-building sources	3- Migration and job apps	4- Enrolment decision	5- Country-specific resources	6- Agent/uni relationship	7- Uniqueness & accessibility of course offerings & info	8- In-country presence
1 - Uni reputation	0.597	0.529	0.15	0.319	0.229	0.241	0.103	0.345
2- Trust-building sources	-0.458	0.155	0.696	0.189	0.214	-0.118	-0.409	0.14
3-Migration and job apps	-0.007	-0.088	0.597	-0.176	-0.32	0.378	0.573	-0.174
4- Enrolment decision	-0.155	-0.506	-0.108	0.35	0.534	0.542	0.085	0.01
5- Country-specific resources	0.195	-0.236	0.177	-0.611	0.535	-0.295	0.181	0.309
6- Agent/uni relationship	-0.538	0.562	-0.291	-0.346	0.187	0.318	0.205	0.11
7- Uniqueness & accessibility of course offerings & info	-0.282	-0.126	-0.092	0.366	-0.207	-0.338	0.479	0.613
8- In-country presence	-0.051	0.213	0.018	0.285	0.388	-0.435	0.427	-0.59

Extraction Method: PCA

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

By focusing on values with positive loadings, particularly those exceeding 0.4, correlations associated with the enrolment decision, were determined. These significant correlations are highlighted in blue in the table. The enrolment decision (4) is moderately positively related to country-specific resources (5) and the agent/university relationship (6). In other words, this indicates that when the respondents considered enrolment at a regional university, factors such as the availability of country-specific resources and the quality of agent/university relationship played a positive role. This further validates earlier findings that these initiatives should be integrated into university marketing and recruitment strategies to influence students' enrolment decisions. Trust-building sources did not score highly due to respondents' view that universities were not investing sufficiently in brand development in Thailand. This explains the lack of a positive relationship between this factor and the enrolment decision.

Other noteworthy findings revealed that:

- *University reputation* (1) and the *agent/university relationship* (6) exhibited positive relationships with *Trust-building sources* (2), suggesting that when a university has a strong reputation and maintains good relationships with agents, it tends to improve trust in the market. This further indicates that increased strategic focus on developing the university's reputation and agent relationships should be a priority.

- *Trust-building sources* (2) demonstrated a positive relationship with *Migration and job opportunities* (3). This relationship suggests that when trust-building sources are strengthened, it tends to positively influence perceptions around migration and job opportunities – possibly due to increased credibility reinforcing this factor, facilitated by trust.

- *Migration and job opportunities* (3) were positively related to the *Uniqueness and accessibility of course offerings and information* (7). This relationship implies that as migration and job opportunities increase in regional locations, universities may respond by offering more diverse courses that align with these opportunities, thereby enhancing the overall attractiveness of their offerings.

Therefore, this section represents initial exploratory steps in identifying correlations from the PCA, specifically concerning the enrolment decision.

Discussion

As per the initial conceptual model, the variables proposed to influence Thai students' decision to enrol at a regional Australian university included university marketing and recruitment strategy, trust in the university brand, partnerships with agents in Thailand and other influencing factors. However, as the PCA solution revealed, an underlying factorial solution indicates towards a more detailed model that extends the initial tentative model.

Modified conceptual model

The modified conceptual model (Figure 2) illustrates the PCA components as variables that ultimately influence the decision to enrol.
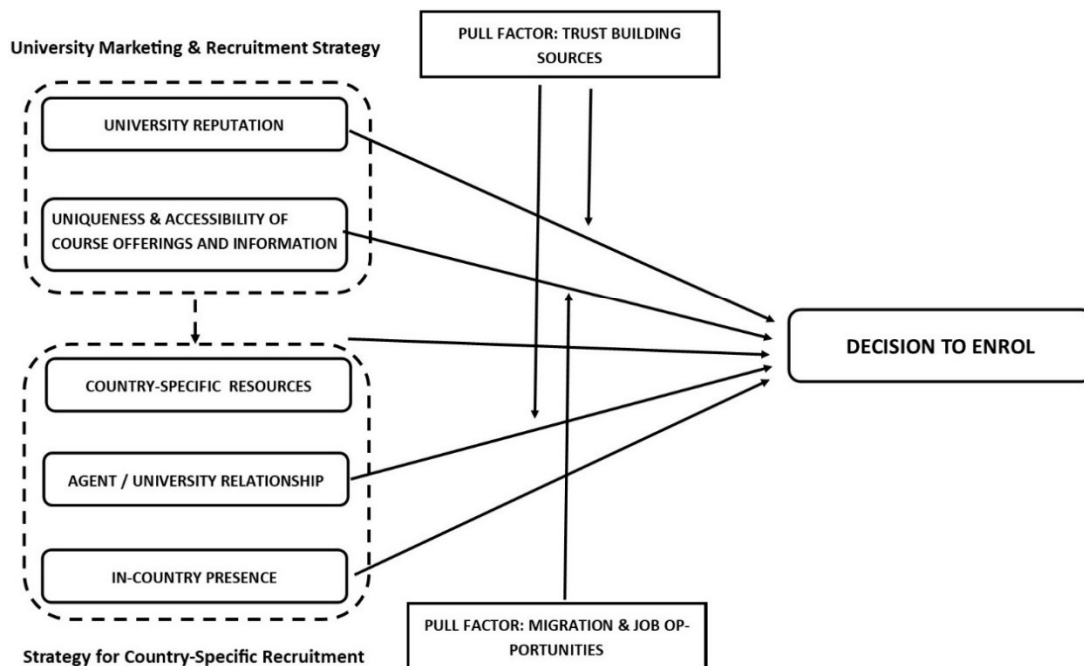
Figure 2: Modified Conceptual Model; Factors influencing international student decision to enrol

Each of the factors from the PCA solution is discussed below:

University reputation

Considering factor one, it becomes apparent that Thai students do not think regional universities have strong reputations in Thailand. This factor highlights that students perceived university marketing and recruitment strategies as weak with minimal influence on their enrolment decision. Specifically, students believed that regional universities lacked a long-term strategy in Thailand (1H). This aligns with the perspectives of recruitment practitioners, who also acknowledged their reluctance to engage in a long-term marketing and recruitment strategy in Thailand due to the delayed return on investment (Chin et al., 2023). The fact that students perceive the lack of a long-term strategy indicates that universities should be more attentive to their efforts in Thailand, as this impacts the university's reputation and ultimately students' enrolment decisions.

Similarly, students viewed regional universities' marketing and recruitment strategies as lacking Thailand-relevant campaigns and initiatives (1D and 1E), limiting the reputational strength of the university. This finding aligns with the perspective of practitioners who operate

according to short-term targets and do not consider dedicated strategic efforts in longer-term markets (Healey, 2023).

Factor one did, however, reveal that students perceived agents as having a good understanding of all universities, not just the larger ones (1F). This highlights the importance for regional universities, due to agents' role in influencing students, to prioritise agent partnerships for reputational growth.

The lack of specific strategic direction to establish a strong reputation indicates that Thailand may not be prioritised as a market for regional universities, resulting in the fulfilment of minimum requirements rather than active investment in reputation-building.

Consequently, Thai students may perceive these universities as less committed and attentive to their needs, affecting their enrolment decisions. According to Nghiêm-Phú and Nguyễn (2020) while universities have limited control over internal personal elements that might influence students' decisions, they have significant control over the university's reputation. This underscores the importance of cultivating a strong reputation in emerging markets to recruit students.

Uniqueness and accessibility of course offerings and information

The PCA analysis further indicates in factor seven that course information, particularly related to unique programmes, is readily accessible. However, it appears that course offerings as part of a marketing and recruitment strategy do not significantly influence students' enrolment decisions. Notably, the survey showed that students assign relatively low importance to selecting a course not easily found in Thai universities (7D). This aligns with existing data indicating that Thai students favour management and commerce degrees when studying in Australia, despite the widespread availability of these degrees in Thailand (Austrade, 2023).

While promoting course offerings as part of a marketing and recruitment strategy holds significance in other Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia or Singapore (Choi & Nieminen, 2013), it becomes evident that this emphasis is not as influential in Thailand, highlighting the importance of alignment with the target markets' needs.

Country-specific resources

In factor five, country-specific resources accessible to students (particularly alumni testimonials and online discussion forums – 5A and 5C) were influential to students' enrolment decisions.

Prior research identified the significance of family, friends and word-of-mouth as influential factors for Thai students (Pimpa, 2005). Essentially, this paper's findings are a contemporary manifestation of these familial influences, wherein Thai students now have access to online forums and social media platforms, allowing them to engage with alumni testimonials and view discussions to assist their enrolment decisions (Austrade, 2023). These sources predominantly employ the Thai language and often use Thailand-specific platforms, underscoring the necessity for a country-specific recruitment strategy to exert greater influence over students' enrolment decisions.

Although a higher commitment of time and resources may be required to nurture country-specific resources, these results indicate that regional universities should invest further if they seek to influence Thai students. Moreover, as many Thai students are required to complete English preparatory courses before commencing degree studies (Wirojchoochut, 2019), increasing Thai language marketing and awareness would align with the needs of the target student demographic.

Practitioners similarly acknowledged the need for country-specific resources to better influence Thai students; however, the challenges in accessing and engaging with these mediums posed utilisation barriers. Again, a reluctance to invest in longer-term initiatives prevented practitioners at regional universities from embracing this type of country-specific recruitment strategy (Chin et al., 2023).

Agent/university relationship

Factor six then highlighted the importance of agent–university relationships as part of a country-specific recruitment strategy due to agents' influence on students' decisions. Specifically, the results show that Thai students view regional universities and their agents as aligned in a symbiotic and supportive relationship (6A and 6B). Given the relatively unregulated nature of the education agent industry (Nikula, 2022), the perception that universities are collaboratively engaged with their agents likely holds significant sway for Thai students, which fosters trust in the university and instils confidence in the agent's integrity and track record of representing the institution. This factor indicates that regional universities are managing their agent relationships sufficiently and reinforces the notion that fostering these relationships remains an integral part of country-specific recruitment strategies (Pimpa, 2004).

In-country presence

The agent theme was furthered in factor eight, wherein in-country presence and support emerged as influential factors in students' enrolment decisions. Specifically, the results show that Thai students highly valued the integrity and regional enrolment guidance provided by agents (8A and 8B). This finding reinforces observations that Thai students predominantly apply through agents (Huguan et al., 2020). By acting as a reputable extension of Australian universities in Thailand, agents can exert greater influence over students' decisions to enrol (Pimpa, 2003b).

This alignment signifies the importance of an in-country presence as part of a recruitment strategy and highlights potential for increased collaboration between agents and regional universities.

Migration and job opportunities

From factor three, migration and job opportunities in regional locations were identified as influential to students' enrolment decisions.

Regional locations have favourable post-study migration opportunities for international students, as the Australian government provides longer stay opportunities and extra migration points (Forbes-Mewett et al., 2022). Although the results revealed that Thai students did not consider leaving Thailand as a major influence (3A), they still valued the option to stay in Australia if they enjoyed their experience (3D).

Additional influential benefits of studying in a regional location included affordable tuition fees (3C) and job availability (3B). However, from the practitioner's perspective, it appears that regional universities do not explicitly promote migration and job opportunities (Chin et al., 2023). This could be due to limitations placed on higher education institutions in terms of promotional content regarding these elements; consequently, universities primarily market pull factors such as academic strengths and student support (Nikula, 2022). Therefore, it may be necessary for the relevant study syndicates, such as Study Toowoomba, Study Adelaide, and others, to highlight these pull factors in conjunction with agents. Collectively, these advocates could strengthen the appeal of regional study areas.

Strategic messaging regarding this factor would give regional universities a distinctive appeal compared with larger metropolitan institutions, and it seems imperative to leverage this pull factor.

<u>Trust-building sources</u>

Factor two suggests that regional universities have not allocated sufficient resources towards the proactive fostering of trust in the university brand. While the analysis revealed that trust in the university was a prominent pull factor in students' enrolment decisions (Table 2), trust-building strategies employed by universities are not adequately robust. First, students indicated that regional university marketing and recruitment strategies are not tailored for relatability with Thai audiences (2G and 2H), indicating a deficiency in adopting tailored approaches to building trust with Thai students and forgoing the strategic utilisation of this significant pull factor. This failure to capitalise on meaningful resonance with the target audience reinforces that regional universities are reluctant to utilise country-specific strategies.

Second, there were observed deficiencies in the extent to which agents actively promoted regional universities. While the results showed that agents are trusted sources (2D), students believed that agents did not promote regional universities as extensively as large metropolitan universities (2B). Hence, students may regard larger universities with heightened trust, attributing this to the agents' more pronounced advocacy efforts.

This can be attributed to agents having numerous universities to promote and focusing on those with higher recruitment potential, thereby limiting regional universities' trust-building opportunities through this channel. Regional universities may also allocate less marketing funds and resources to Thai agents, as they might prioritise their smaller budgets on markets yielding more immediate returns (Healey, 2023).

Over time, regional universities could cultivate stronger agent advocacy by offering assurance of their long-term commitment and support. This would foster heightened trust from the students' standpoint, effectively optimising the pull factor for regional universities.

Encouragingly, two specific items regarding agent and in-country representation emerged (2D and 2F), underpinning their significance in establishing student trust before enrolment. These findings bolster industry sentiments, highlighting the value of nurturing agent partnerships and organising trust-building in-person engagements in Thailand whenever feasible (Huguan et al., 2020).

Overall, the findings revealed that trust plays a crucial role in influencing students' enrolment decisions, but regional universities need to effectively leverage these sources to fully harness this pull factor. The ability of regional universities to grasp and enhance trust-building sources hinges on their capacity for strategic ambidexterity. As a longer-term initiative, they must determine whether they can effectively balance this endeavour while faced with short-term targets and pressures from senior management.

The underlying factors identified through the PCA can be categorised into three organisational types of considerations and their interactions. The typology in Figure 3 indicates the aggregation of factors into each type of consideration and how the interaction may inform the   decision   to   enrol.
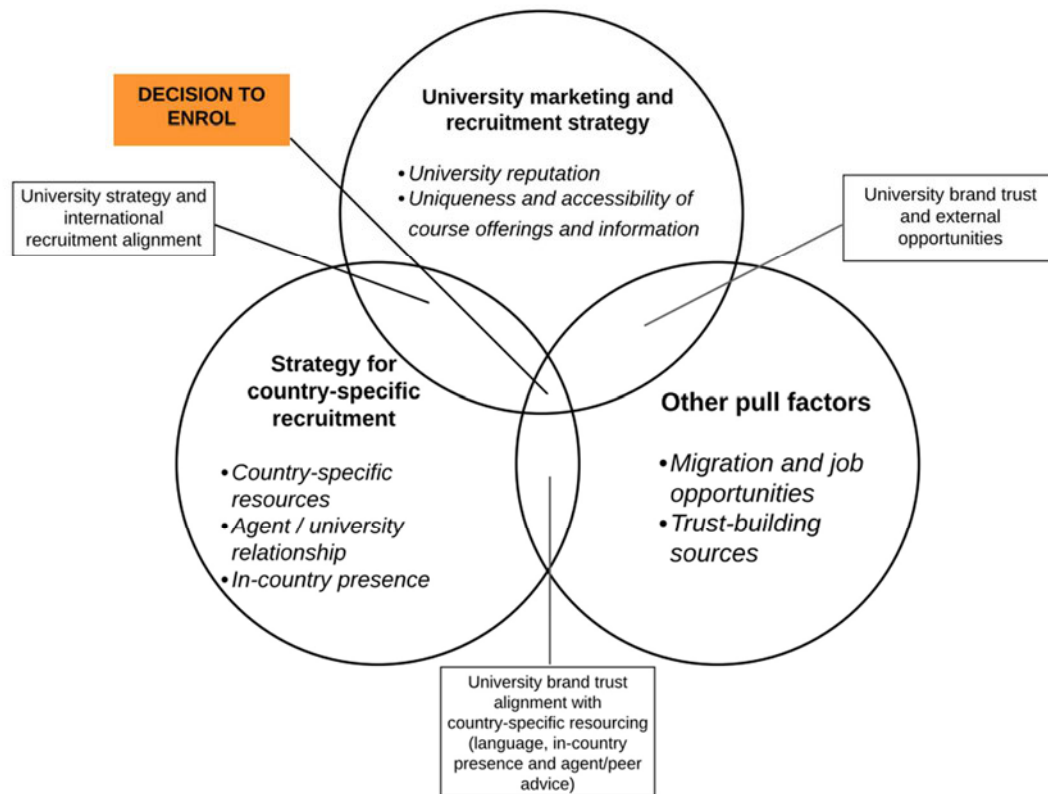

Figure 3: Typology based on the factors identified through the PCA

The typology presented in Figure 3 includes:

- University marketing and recruitment strategy: overarching strategies utilised by regional universities to recruit students.

- Strategy for country-specific recruitment: strategies utilised with more specificity towards recruiting Thai students.

- Other pull factors: additional pull factors not currently directly related to the overall or Thai-specific strategy of regional universities.

Recommendations

The findings imply that regional universities would benefit from a strategic ambidextrous approach when seeking to improve their marketing and recruitment strategies to have more influence over Thai students. In essence, regional universities that adopt strategic

ambidexterity will be more capable of executing longer-term strategies within Thailand, empowering them to establish trust with Thai students over time. While it may be commercially necessary to maintain an exploitative arm that concentrates on short-term gain markets, an exploratory approach is necessary for longer-term outcomes that uphold the sustainability of their strategic approach. The cultivation of emerging markets such as Thailand requires patience and an allocation of resources that may only result in gradual outcomes. This study revealed the potential for regional universities to enhance their reputation and foster greater trust within Thailand. Therefore, regional universities should adopt a longer-term outlook that integrates their university marketing and recruitment strategies with country-specific strategic nuances and other pull factors. This way, regional universities can gradually gain more influence over Thai students' enrolment decisions.

Building on the modified conceptual model and the typology, it is proposed that regional universities require a balanced framework for sustainable growth in recruiting Thai students:

1) Invest in relationships with education agents

The study underscored the role of agents in expanding university reputations in Thailand and cultivating trust. Therefore, agent relationships should be a priority within the Thailand strategy for regional universities. By maintaining open lines of timely and accurate communication, universities can adopt longer-term views with agents instead of pressuring them for immediate results. Establishing mutual trust will likely result in agents' willingness to advocate for regional universities.

2) Provide Thai language marketing resources

To enhance relatability with Thai students, regional universities should invest in Thai language marketing resources, including translating promotional materials, websites, and social media content into Thai. This tailored approach will increase trust while growing universities' reputations with Thai audiences.

3) Develop long-term marketing strategies for local Thai audiences

To build students' trust, regional universities should invest in comprehensive and long-term marketing strategies tailored to the Thai market, such as alumni testimonials, social media platforms and increased in-country presences. Consistent and targeted marketing efforts will help universities grow their reputation in Thailand.

4) Highlight post-study migration opportunities

Regional universities should integrate this significant pull factor into marketing strategies by partnering with study syndicates and agencies and emphasising potential career prospects

and pathways unique to regional cities. Specific initiatives could involve showcasing alumni success stories of successfully pursuing post-study migration and using agent channels to highlight relevant information about visas, work permits and employment prospects.

5) Ongoing market research

To ensure adaptability to potential changes in political, economic and societal circumstance (Cunningham et al., 2022; Hung & Yen, 2022)s, regional universities must conduct research to maintain constant market awareness. By monitoring shifts in push and pull factors, universities can proactively respond to emerging trends.

This framework would foster increased trust and elevate the reputations of regional universities in Thailand. However, it is important that such initiatives be long-term and necessitate universities to embrace exploratory approaches. In essence, to achieve success in Thailand, universities must embrace strategic ambidexterity and acknowledge that longer-term country-specific strategies are necessary for increased trust in regional universities' brands.

To effectively implement these strategies, it may be necessary to involve Thai staff or form closer partnerships with education agents who have country-specific expertise.

Limitations and future research

Although this study provides valuable insights into Thai students' regional university enrolment decisions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, students surveyed may be several years removed from the actual decision, and therefore recollections of their decision-making may be inaccurate. To address this, future research could focus on students who have recently finalised their enrolment, providing a timelier capture of their decision-making. Furthermore, with the evolution of digital marketing to engage students (Jain et al., 2022), it is worthwhile to investigate the influences that newer enrolees are exposed to.

Second, although the sample size was relatively limited, it was deemed sufficient for this exploratory study. However, future studies could aim to obtain a larger sample size to enhance statistical power (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It is worth noting that the sample size may have been impacted by the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as the survey was conducted during that period. Conducting future studies during the post-pandemic normality might yield a higher response rate.

Third, this study focused only on regional Australian universities. While the findings provide valuable insights for these institutions, it is advisable to investigate the results' applicability to other university types.

The findings are specific to Thailand but may have broader applicability for regional universities seeking expansion into emerging markets. Universities must adopt market-specific approaches to effectively engage with potential students and prioritise factors that meet the preferences of the target audience so that they can achieve success in diverse markets and establish themselves as sustainable study destinations for students worldwide.

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4.3   Links to and Implications for the Overall Study

This chapter provides an overview of the second phase of this exploratory mixed methods study, which was a quantitative investigation into the marketing and recruitment factors behind Thai students' decision to enrol at a regional university. The factor analysis techniques used have provided further insight into the way Thai students view regional institutions' marketing and recruitment strategies as sub-optimal. Essentially, the results indicate that these universities could improve their strategies to enhance their respective reputations in Thailand if they wish to foster increased trust in their brand with Thai audiences. The results also suggest that creating a bespoke approach for Thailand (e.g. utilisation of Thai-language resources and country-specific social media platforms) would assist in developing trust with this group. While regional universities appear to sufficiently manage agent relationships from the perspective of Thai students, there is room for improvement in terms of their utilisation of additional strategies identified in this study that hold sway over Thai students' enrolment decisions.

With regard to the overall study, this phase reinforced insights from the qualitative phase, whereby recruitment practitioners expressed their unwillingness to invest in tailored approaches for the Thai market; this was due to the prevailing belief that this kind of investment would be a longer-term endeavour (while the enrolment outcomes would only be realised at a later stage). While practitioners believed that longer-term strategies were necessary for fostering trust in the Thai market, their execution of such initiatives was lacking because of their prioritisation of markets yielding return on investment (ROI) within shorter timeframes.

As was evidenced from these quantitative phase results, Thai audiences were attuned to this lack of bespoke efforts. When considered within the context of the previous qualitative phase, the survey findings were reflective of the approach that has been taken by regional universities in Thailand. Moreover, these findings indicate that Thai students' decision to enrol could be further influenced if regional universities were able to accommodate longer-term strategies aimed at building trust and improving universities' reputations. This study therefore concluded with a revised conceptual model and practical recommendations for regional universities to consider in their strategies for marketing and recruitment initiatives, both in Thailand and other emerging markets. These proposals were based on the collective insights from both phases of the study.

Following the finalisation of this part of the study, the researcher travelled to Thailand to present these findings to various stakeholders that are involved in this phenomenon. This included education agents, the Education Attache of the Australian Embassy to Thailand and Thai alumni of regional universities. The purpose of these discussions was to offer an overview of the study's findings with these people and gather their input on the revised conceptual model and overall recommendations.

From these discussions, there was a consensus that the findings were consistent with their observations. They agreed that regional universities' marketing and recruitment strategies were lacking in terms of longer-term engagement – as such, this was creating a self-perpetuating cycle where students viewed regional institutions as having lower reputational strength. The Education Attache also mentioned that despite their advocacy for increased engagement with the Thai market, regional universities had expressed an unwillingness to invest in initiatives when there was no guarantee of favourable enrolment outcomes in the short term.

Additionally, these stakeholders spoke favourably about the previous achievements of regional universities that persevered with this endeavour, fully aware that it was a long-term investment. These institutions garnered positive reputational benefits over time, which still continue to this day. On the whole, the stakeholders expressed contentment with these insights, which elucidate the factors for augmenting influence over Thai students' enrolment decisions. They were optimistic that similar revelations would prompt other regional universities to recognise the necessary inputs for attaining such results over an extended timeframe. This is particularly relevant as universities are compelled to intensify their efforts in diversifying beyond the primary source markets.

Overall, this chapter has detailed the quantitative phase of this mixed methods exploratory study. The factor analysis has provided further insight into and a greater understanding of the main influences on Thai students' decision to enrol; an integral part of this study's goal is to integrate the holistic perspective of both practitioners and Thai students. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, the findings derived from both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study will be outlined to address the research questions that were initially delineated at the outset of the project.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1   Overview

The outcomes of this study have offered insights into how regional Australian universities strategize their student recruitment in Thailand as well as how marketing and recruitment factors influence Thai students' decision to enrol. As an exploratory study, the findings contribute new knowledge to the field of international student recruitment in a more niche area. These findings are anticipated to be of value to universities seeking to optimise their student recruitment efforts in emerging markets, and to mitigate the risks of any future market downturns.

By starting out with the scoping literature review in Chapter 2, this study commenced by assessing the breadth to which this phenomenon had been covered in the extant literature. This review enabled the identification of research gaps, which subsequently served as the foundation for the research questions that guided the exploratory mixed methods study.

Chapter 5 will now utilise the collective insights from the investigation to address the research questions outlined earlier in the thesis. This chapter will also provide personal reflections, outline the limitations of the study, and propose areas for future research.

5.2   Response to the Research Questions

The overarching research question sought to understand the following phenomenon:

> *How do regional Australian universities develop their marketing and student recruitment strategies in Thailand, and what are the factors that influence Thai students to enrol at these universities?*

The aim was to answer this question through the prism of both student recruitment practitioners and Thai students as they are both directly involved in the phenomenon. The main research question was divided into further questions, with each of them making a contribution to the overall research problem. Table 2 summarises how the research questions were addressed through the stages of this exploratory mixed methods study and the relevant papers put forward in this thesis.

Table 2: Summary of Research Questions and Findings

Method	Question	Output	Findings
Qualitative phase: Semi-structured interviews	1. What marketing and recruitment strategies are used by regional Australian universities to recruit students from Thailand? 2.1: What is the influence of push factors on regional Australian universities' strategies in Thailand and their recruitment of Thai students? 2.2: What is the influence of pull factors on regional Australian universities' strategies in Thailand and their recruitment of Thai students?	Paper Two	Insight provided into how regional universities strategize their recruitment efforts in emerging markets, including the use of education agents. While recruitment practitioners were aware of strategies required to increase trust in university brand in Thailand, they were reluctant to implement these. Their strategies were ultimately passive, with push and pull factors having little influence over their efforts. Rather, they prioritised markets with more immediate outcomes. This is due to their budgetary limitations and pressures from senior management to achieve enrolment targets.
Quantitative phase: Survey	3. What are the marketing and recruitment factors that influence Thai students to enrol at a regional Australian university? 4. Based on the previous answers, what practices should be undertaken by regional Australian universities to ensure that their marketing and recruitment strategies remain relevant to contemporary and future target audiences in Thailand?	Paper Three	The PCA revealed eight underlying factors explaining the influences on Thai students' decision to enrol. The agent/university relationship holds strong influence over student decisions. However, regional universities face challenges in terms of building trust, integrating migration and job opportunities and incorporating country-specific needs within their strategies. Using the PCA results, a modified conceptual model, typology and framework are provided.

The collective findings of the study provided a holistic response to the main research question by revealing how regional universities develop their marketing and recruitment strategies in Thailand. They then indicated the underlying factors that influenced Thai students to enrol at a regional university. The response to the main research question also offered necessary insights to inform recommendations for future practice and research.

This section will discuss how the study's findings address these research questions.

Research Question 1*: What marketing and recruitment strategies are used by regional Australian universities to recruit students from Thailand?*

In the scoping literature review, it was found that there was a noticeable gap in the research regarding this question. While there was already a limited amount of literature that addresses student recruitment in Thailand, the number of studies examining this phenomenon from the perspective of regional universities was even more scarce.

Therefore, this question was first addressed through the initial stage of the exploratory study, which involved the semi-structured interviews with student recruitment professionals (working at regional universities) who were responsible for Thailand as part of their portfolio. The initial expectation of these discussions was to uncover the active marketing and recruitment strategies that regional Australian universities utilise in Thailand. However, surprisingly, the study's results revealed the existence of a generally passive approach towards student recruitment in this market.

The first qualitative stage results indicated that regional Australian universities employ a passive strategic approach towards student recruitment in Thailand, due to the following factors:

a) There are perceived to be more limited resources than larger metropolitan universities, and

b) There is pressure from senior management to achieve short-term enrolment targets.

As a result, regional universities recognized that targeting markets with faster ROI/enrolment outcomes would better serve their needs. Given the already established brand recognition of larger metropolitan universities (in Australia) in Thailand, regional universities believed that it would require a long-term investment to attract students from this market. While some agreed that building trust in their brand was necessary to recruit effectively from Thailand (due to there being relatively little knowledge about their institution or regional location) (Forbes & Hamilton, 2004; Townsend & Huay, 2008), short-term recruitment targets made it clear that longer-term market development was not a feasible option.

Nonetheless, the regional universities agreed that maintaining strong relationships with education agents in Thailand was crucial, echoing the findings of previous studies (Pimpa, 2003b; Tarry, 2008). These agents played an active role in disseminating information about universities to their target markets and received commissions for successful enrolments. The

responses emphasised the need for providing agents with adequate support and incentives to promote regional universities to Thai students. However, even this approach was viewed as short-term and passive as underperforming agents were reviewed if they failed to meet semesterly targets.

The findings highlighted that regional universities acknowledged the importance of establishing trust in their institutional brand for effective recruitment of Thai students. Nevertheless, this recognition was mainly from the standpoint of 'if' they were given sufficient time and resources to do so, rather than the current emphasis on achieving semester-related recruitment targets set by senior management. Participants suggested that if they were afforded the required time, they would express the advantages of having a Thai-speaking representative, increase alumni testimonials and have a greater presence on Thai online forums, blogs and social media platforms, which would all be aimed at fostering trust in their brand among prospective Thai students.

The qualitative phase's responses highlighted a prominent theme of regional universities lacking strategic ambidexterity in their marketing and recruitment strategies. Specifically, it was evident that due to their limited resources compared to larger universities, regional institutions were solely concentrating on exploiting short-term opportunities in markets where they were confident that they would meet enrolment targets. As a result, the longer-term explorative aspect, which is critical for business sustainability (Dimitrios et al., 2021), was disregarded, particularly in the case of Thailand. This lack of strategic flexibility in the international offices of regional universities has impacted their strategic approach in Thailand, leading to hesitancy in adopting a more active approach that requires protracted commitment. Consequently, the strategic approaches mentioned by respondents were passive and short-term in nature as their priorities were directed towards other markets.

Research Question 2:

*2.1: What is the influence of **push** factors on regional Australian universities' strategies in Thailand and their recruitment of Thai students?*

This research question emerged from the scoping literature review, which revealed a focus on investigating push factors in relation to students' decision-making processes. However, scant attention was given to how universities themselves acknowledge these push factors and strategically incorporate them into their marketing and recruitment approaches. By addressing this research gap, we aimed to shed light on whether universities are cognisant of

push factors and if they utilise them as influential elements in their marketing and recruitment strategies.

To explore this research question, qualitative interviews were conducted with recruitment practitioners who were responsible for Thailand. The findings indicated that push factors had a limited impact on the marketing and recruitment strategies employed by these practitioners. However, it was evident that they were aware of certain push factors and selectively incorporated them into their strategies.

The recruitment practitioners acknowledged specific push factors that could be highlighted as unique selling points in their approaches. This mainly included the perceived limitations and shortcomings of the Thai higher education system and the unavailability of certain fields of study at Thai universities. For instance, they recognised the significance of promoting specific courses in Thailand that were not commonly available at local universities, which catered to the needs and preferences of certain Thai students. Additionally, they emphasised the appeal of niche degrees, which served as a distinguishing factor in attracting prospective individuals. Moreover, the practitioners echoed extant literature and acknowledged the perception among Thai students that an Australian degree carries greater value compared to a Thai one (Rhein, 2016; Tantivorakulchai, 2014), thereby leveraging this perception in their strategies. While the practitioners seemed to grasp these push factors, infusing them into recruitment strategies is undeniably intricate due to the need for a nuanced approach.

Furthermore, the qualitative interviews unveiled that recruitment practitioners considered macroeconomic push factors, such as periods of economic growth, when devising their strategies. They recognised the significant impact of these overarching influences on student demand and interest in studying abroad (Buasuwan, 2018). However, although they acknowledged this principal aspect, the participants did not mention the inclusion of more specific contemporary push factors in Thailand, such as political uncertainty or economic hardships, which could potentially influence their strategies.

Evidently, the influence of push factors on regional universities' strategies in Thailand appears limited. While the recruitment practitioners involved in the study acknowledged certain issues that might be important considerations for Thai students, they had a minimal impact on how they devised their marketing and recruitment strategies. Instead, the interviews revealed that their marketing and recruitment strategies were predominantly driven by the potential for short-term results (due to pressures from senior management).

Essentially, the push factors relevant to Thai students (e.g. macroeconomic factors, perceived limitations of the Thai higher education system and political circumstances) did not provide comparable opportunities for immediate recruitment outcomes, prompting regional universities to redirect their focus towards other markets.

Perhaps the impact of push factors on strategic decisions would have been more apparent if they had an immediate influence on student intakes, as was exemplified in the case of Australian universities' student recruitment approach to Hong Kong in 2020. Due to political uncertainties in Hong Kong, Australia implemented special student visa policies, which led to a significant surge in the number of Hong Kong students seeking to enrol at Australian universities (Li & Liao, 2023). During this time, Australian universities increased their marketing and recruitment operations in Hong Kong to appeal to this exodus of students. This situation highlighted how Australian universities were quick to incorporate this macroeconomic push factor into their tactics due to the potential for immediate results (Feng & Horta, 2021). However, as Thailand's current macroeconomic conditions do not necessitate urgent action, the impact of push factors on recruitment strategies of regional universities in Thailand remains relatively subdued.

The limited integration of push factors within marketing and recruitment strategies may explain why students expressed the idea that university marketing and recruitment strategies were not sufficiently tailored to Thai audiences during the subsequent quantitative phase. Conducting more comprehensive market research could potentially improve recruitment practitioners' awareness of relevant push factors that could be incorporated into their strategies (Bamberger et al., 2020). Nevertheless, this aspect circles back to the question of whether regional universities have the flexibility to give specialised attention to markets that require a longer-term strategic approach and may not yield immediate outcomes.

*2.2: What is the influence of **pull** factors on regional Australian universities' strategies in Thailand and their recruitment of Thai students?*

This research question was addressed through the qualitative interviews with recruitment practitioners from regional universities, which investigated their marketing and recruitment strategies in Thailand. From the qualitative interviews, it was gathered that regional universities were cognisant of pull factors that are relevant to Thai students, including various trust building initiatives and agent partnerships. However as mentioned earlier, the

commitment to actually incorporating these into their strategies was limited due to their focus on short-term recruitment outcomes.

First, it seemed that regional universities recognised the significant role of education agents in recruiting students to Australian universities as a pull factor. As a result, agent partnerships were strategically prioritised as they placed emphasis on fostering these relationships in order for regional universities to be promoted as an option to Thai students. Practitioners observed the specialised expertise of the agents, particularly in matters specifically relating to the Thai market, and they noted the high regard in which Thai students held their professional acumen. With a high percentage of international students relying on the professional advice of education agents (Nikula, 2022), it makes sense that regional universities knew a focus on this pull factor would be necessary. This finding upholds prior research that similarly indicates the importance of education agents within the decision-making process of a Thai student (Pimpa, 2003b).

Second, the interviews indicated that practitioners understood how trust in a university brand was a key pull factor for Thai students. The theme of building trust was frequently mentioned in the interviews as a focus within regional universities' strategies to recruit Thai students; this is due to the comparatively lower rankings and visibility of these institutions compared to larger metropolitan ones. The practitioners mentioned several initiatives that could be used to increase the pull factor of trust in their university brand in Thailand, including having country-specific resources (Thai marketing materials, having Thai-speaking representatives); hiring full-time representatives in Thailand; utilising Thai alumni testimonials and accessing Thai peer-to-peer platforms (e.g. forums, blogs and social media).

As evidenced from the interview findings, pull factors did influence regional universities' strategies in Thailand to the extent that practitioners were aware of initiatives that would assist in influencing students' decision to enrol. Their awareness of the importance of agent partnerships and building trust within the market was prevalent in their responses, indicating that they knew the utilisation of these practices was required to pull Thai students to select their institution.

Despite being aware of the pull factors that are relevant to Thai students, the recruitment practitioners of regional universities exhibited limited commitment to the full incorporation of these pull factors into their strategies. This was primarily due to an overarching belief by regional universities that Thailand is a passive market in their broader student recruitment

strategy. Consequently, there was a lack of dedication to developing a brand presence and building trust in the country.

Regional universities also grappled with restricted resources (Aslan, 2020; Forbes & Hamilton, 2004; Gao, 2020), intensifying the challenge of establishing trust in their lesser-known brands within the Thai market, especially when contending with competition from larger universities. They essentially viewed many of the aforementioned strategies as long-term in nature, necessitating patience from senior management as the recruitment outcomes would not yield immediate results. However, the pressure from those in charge often leaned towards achieving quicker ROIs (Voss & Voss, 2013), prompting practitioners to invest in markets like the Philippines where enrolment outcomes were more immediate. This paradox forces regional universities to choose between investing in brand development in emerging markets or concentrating on existing markets for higher (and faster) short-term returns on investment.

Clearly, regional universities prioritise immediate recruitment opportunities to fulfill semesterly targets, often sidelining the long-term cultivation of emerging markets, which explains why practitioners acknowledged their understanding of pull factors that are relevant to Thai students, yet they failed to incorporate these fully into their marketing and recruitment strategies.

This research reveals that regional universities comprehend the pull factors that could enhance their marketing and recruitment strategies in Thailand; however, they predominantly prioritise markets that fulfil their goal of realising more immediate enrolment outcomes. Consequently, the influence of pull factors on the strategies of regional Australian universities in Thailand and their recruitment of Thai students is constrained.

Research Question 3*: What are the marketing and recruitment factors that influence Thai students to enrol at a regional Australian university?*

As the previous research questions have shown, the marketing and recruitment practices of regional universities have been passive and inhibited due to practitioners' perceptions of Thailand being a longer-term market with delayed enrolment outcomes. Research Question 3 then aimed to discover how these marketing and recruitment strategies subsequently influenced Thai students' decision to enrol at a regional university.

This quantitative phase of the mixed methods study involved an online survey addressed to Thai students and recent alumni of regional Australian universities. The aim of this phase was to validate, reject or modify the findings from the qualitative phase in relation to the students. Following this, it would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and would subsequently lead to the development of a conceptual model and typology to inform future research and practice.

The online survey (a five-point Likert scale questionnaire) aimed to assess respondents' perceptions of regional universities' marketing and recruitment in Thailand. Using their answers, EFA and PCA were used to discover the underlying factors influencing the Thai students' decisions to enrol at regional universities.

The factor analysis uncovered eight factors as a result of the PCA's solution:

1) University reputation

2) Trust-building sources

3) Migration and job opportunities

4) Enrolment decision

5) Country-specific resources

6) Agent/university relationship

7) Uniqueness and accessibility of course offerings and information

8) In-country presence

Of these factors, agent/university relationship possessed the highest mean score, indicating that this was a predominant influence on students' decision to enrol. This validates the recruitment practitioners' responses and also the literature in terms of the importance of agent relationships due to their influence on Thai students (Pimpa, 2003b). In contrast, university reputation received the lowest mean score, suggesting that it had the least influence on their choices.

The factors were further analysed using component inter-correlations. It was found that enrolment decision (Factor 4) exhibited positive correlations with country-specific resources (Factor 5) and agent/university relationships (Factor 6), signifying that these elements should be further prioritised within strategies to influence students. Nevertheless, there was not a

significantly positive relationship between enrolment decision and trust-building sources
(Factor 2). This could be attributed to insufficient investment in trust-building initiatives in
Thailand, resulting in "trust-building sources" having little impact on students' enrolment
decisions.

Figure 4: Modified Conceptual Model: Factors Influential to Students' Decision to Enrol
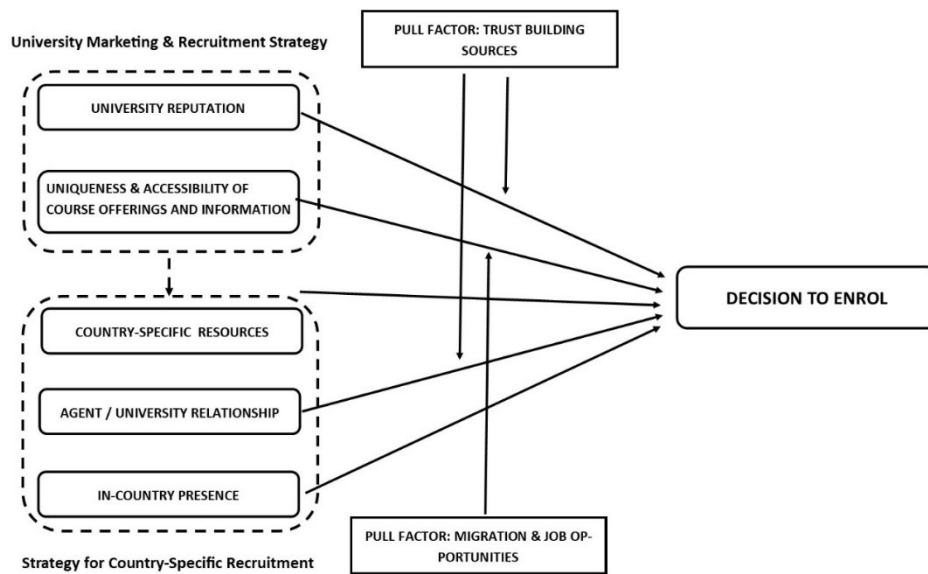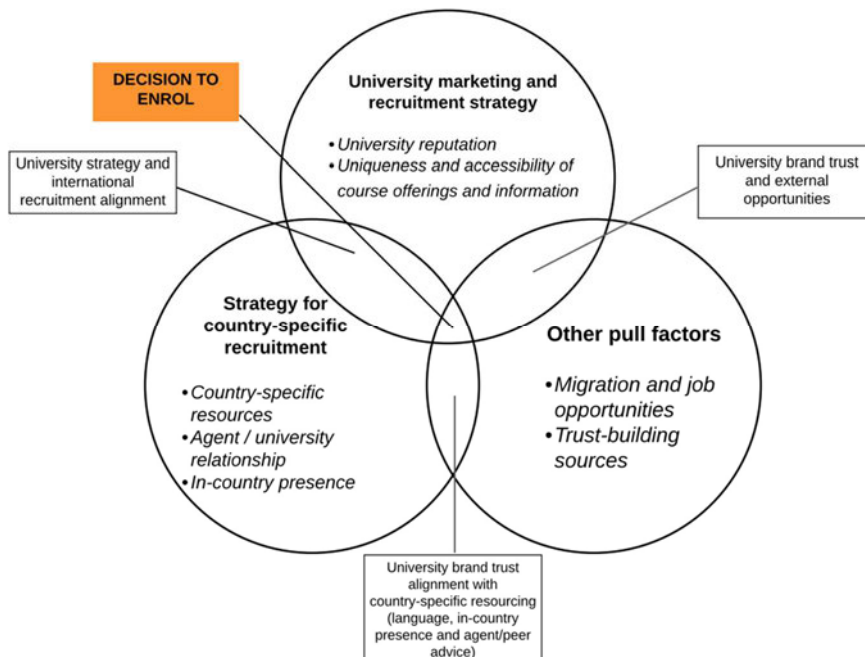
Figure 5: Typology Based on the Factors Identified During the PCA

The factors derived from the PCA solution were incorporated into a modified conceptual model (Figure 4), which depicts the influences on the students' decision to enrol. These elements were then categorised into organisational types of considerations and further categorised in a typology (Figure 5). The factors will now be discussed with regard to their influence on students' decision to enrol in accordance with the groupings within the modified conceptual model and typology.

<u>University Marketing and Recruitment Strategy</u>

Within this grouping, the Thai student respondents indicated that regional universities did not have strong reputations in Thailand; therefore, university reputation had minimal impact on their decision to enrol. They also viewed regional universities' marketing and recruitment efforts as lacking in terms of long-term strategy and targeted campaigns that are relevant to Thailand. This again reinforces the qualitative results, which highlighted an unwillingness to invest in building a brand for regional universities in Thailand due to the long-term commitment required.

Meanwhile, the uniqueness and accessibility of course offerings and information had minimal influence on Thai students. From this, it was gathered that while this factor might be

influential for other countries' students (e.g. Malaysia and Singapore), it does not hold the same level of relevance in Thailand. This reiterated the need for country-specific marketing plans within universities' overall global strategies.

Strategy for Country-specific Recruitment

This grouping contained factors pertaining to country-specific recruitment strategies, which exerted influence on Thai students. First, it was observed that country-specific resources (such as Thai language materials, alumni testimonials and online discussion forums) were a key influence on Thai students when deciding to enrol at a regional university. This essentially portrayed a modernisation of prior literature that identified "word-of-mouth" as a key influence on Thai students' decision to study abroad (Pimpa, 2004). Although the recruitment practitioners in the qualitative phase also identified the need for country-specific resources within their strategies, they were again reluctant to comprehensively implement these due to the long-term commitment required.

Second, students responded positively to the influence from agent/university relationships. As mentioned before, Thai students hold the expertise of agents in high regard (Nikula, 2020). This therefore highlights an area for further development for regional universities in terms of optimising these relationships and providing increased support to agents over the long-term.

Other Pull Factors

This final grouping contained pull factors that were influential to students' decision to enrol, yet they were seemingly not fully integrated into regional universities' strategies.

First, migration and job opportunities were a key influence on Thai students in relation to their decision to enrol as regional locations provide favourable post-study migration options to international students. Moreover, the relatively affordable tuition fees and the availability of jobs in regional locations were key deciding factors for students (Forbes-Mewett et al., 2022; Forbes & Hamilton, 2004). Despite the evident impact of this on Thai students, the qualitative interviews did not spotlight it as a focal point within the strategies of practitioners at regional universities. It is conceivable that this lack of emphasis might stem from regulatory constraints limiting universities' promotion of migration and job opportunities. Consequently, a potential avenue could involve partnering with study syndicates and agents to jointly champion the regional locations, showcasing these attributes as a compelling factor for enrolment.

Finally, the factor of trust-building sources indicated that while trust was a prominent influence on Thai students' decision to enrol, regional universities' strategies to foster further trust from Thai students require improvements. Specifically, the responses highlighted a deficiency in regional universities' strategies in terms of tailored approaches to build trust and relatability with Thai audiences.

While it was demonstrated earlier that agent partnerships are pivotal for Thai student recruitment (Pimpa, 2004), this factor revealed that they view agents as advocating for larger universities in a more prominent way. Presumably, larger institutions possess greater resources to support agents. Thus, regional universities ought to explore sustained means of agent support to foster a perceived stronger alliance with agents, bolstering their trust in the eyes of students. This factor also indicated the positive influence of in-country representation (in Thailand) on students' decisions.

Overall, the findings revealed that while agent relationships hold considerable influence over student decisions, regional universities face challenges in fostering trust, integrating migration and job opportunities and tailoring for country-specific needs within their overall marketing and recruitment strategies. Despite the findings highlighting the influence of these factors on Thai students' decision to enrol, regional universities seem to under-utilise them. As per the qualitative phase results, this can be attributed to practitioners' perceptions of Thailand as a market requiring longer-term investment with delayed enrolment outcomes. Therefore, regional universities instead seem to prioritise investment into markets with more immediate returns.

This phase of the study underscores the imperative need for regional universities to reassess their marketing and recruitment strategies within Thailand. As demonstrated by the quantitative phase findings, there is a clear opportunity to adjust their strategies to be more aligned with the factors that influence Thai students' decision to enrol.

Research Question 4: Based on the previous answers, what practices should be undertaken by regional Australian universities to ensure that their marketing and recruitment strategies remain relevant to contemporary and future target audiences in Thailand?

Based on the findings of both the qualitative and quantitative phases of this mixed methods study, this section proposes recommendations that were structured with the input of both the recruitment practitioners and the Thai student respondents; therefore, they provide holistic recommendations that address the specific challenges posed by the Thai market.

Adopt strategic ambidexterity*:* First, to effectively implement a sustainable international student recruitment strategy, regional universities must adopt a strategic ambidextrous approach. This entails maintaining a balance between short-term exploitative strategies that target immediate gains from high-volume markets and exploratory strategies designed for long-term sustainability in emerging markets, such as Thailand. This dual focus acknowledges the economic importance of high-volume markets, while recognising the potential for future growth in new markets (Dimitrios et al., 2021).

Without this balanced approach, the results have shown that regional universities will simply prioritise high-volume markets and neglect those with future potential. This ad-hoc approach raises concerns regarding regional institutions' long-term sustainability (Cunningham et al., 2022) as entering some emerging markets at a later stage without prior investment – such as that linked to cultivating trust and reputation – can prove significantly more challenging.

Integrate marketing and recruitment strategies with country-specific nuances*:* Successful engagement and influence with the Thai student audience requires a nuanced approach that aligns the university's marketing and recruitment strategy with country-specific distinctions, push factors and pull factors. By adopting strategic ambidexterity and a longer-term outlook, regional universities could be more willing to weave these nuances into their strategies to foster trust in their brand among Thai students.

Focus on relationship building with education agents*:* The study found that a cornerstone of effective recruitment in the Thai market is the development of strong relationships with education agents. Instead of pressuring agents for immediate recruitment outcomes, regional universities should emphasise maintaining open lines of communication, providing agents with accurate information and nurturing mutual trust in the partnership. A collaborative approach not only enhances the university's reputation in Thailand, but also empowers agents to be more enthusiastic advocates for the university over the long-term.

Utilise Thai-language marketing resources: The results revealed that tailoring marketing resources to the Thai language is pivotal in establishing relatability and visibility among Thai students. Investing in the development of Thai promotional materials, websites and social media content can bridge the communication gap, conveying the university's long-term commitment to connecting with and understanding the local audience. This country-specific approach resonates with students and creates greater trust in the university's brand.

Develop long-term tailored marketing strategies*:* The findings of this study suggest that the development of long-term marketing strategies that cater specifically to Thai audiences is central to success in the Thai market. Regional universities should leverage certain strategies, such as alumni testimonials, utilising social media platforms and increasing in-person presence within Thailand (including hiring full-time representatives that are based there). Such a concerted effort would increase awareness of and trust in the university's brand and improve its reputation within the country.

Highlight post-study migration opportunities*:* Regional universities should strategically integrate the allure of post-study migration into marketing and recruitment efforts as the findings indicate that this was a key influence for Thai students with regard to their decision to enrol. Collaborations with study syndicates and agencies and the showcasing of alumni success stories provide tangible evidence of career prospects and pathways that are unique to regional cities. By ensuring these messages are disseminated through the right channels, universities can effectively address this key decision-making factor.

Conduct ongoing market research*:* Regional universities should conduct ongoing market research to stay attuned to shifts in political, economic and societal dynamics within Thailand. This would allow them to accordingly adapt marketing strategies to evolving trends. Regular market research would empower regional universities to proactively respond to emerging opportunities and challenges and ensure that their strategies remain relevant and effective in influencing Thai students (Austrade, 2023). However, the ongoing research should not just be limited to the stakeholders presented in this study. Instead, to validate and refine these proposed strategies, further insights could be obtained from university senior leadership and prospective students.

Overall, by implementing the recommendations produced by this study, regional Australian universities can develop a holistic and tailored approach to marketing and recruitment in Thailand. This section provides an overview of practices for regional universities to effectively influence the enrolment decisions of contemporary and future target audiences in Thailand – utilising a longer-term approach to foster trust, reputation, and sustainable influence.

***Main research question**: How do regional Australian universities develop their marketing and student recruitment strategies in Thailand, and what are the factors that influence Thai students to enrol at these universities?*

The collective findings from the exploratory mixed methods study have effectively addressed the main research question, with each phase contributing valuable insights.

In summary, the study revealed that regional Australian universities are passive in their strategies to student recruitment in Thailand. This stance mainly arises from their perception of Thailand as a market necessitating longer-term investment with delayed enrolment outcomes. As such, regional universities do not invest in developing involved and proactive approaches to recruiting Thai students. Moreover, the study revealed the underlying factors that influence Thai students' decision to enrol. It was shown that key factors of influence included agent/university relationships, trust, migration/job opportunities and country-specific resources.

From the study's findings, it is evident that regional universities lack clear and active strategies for recruiting Thai students, and this deficiency was reflected in the limited influence these strategies had on their decision to enrol. Consequently, the research highlights crucial improvements that are necessary to optimise recruitment outcomes.

To this end, this study recommends that regional Australian universities adopt a strategic ambidextrous approach that allows them to cultivate emerging markets, giving them the time and resources to implement tailored and proactive marketing and recruitment strategies for student recruitment in Thailand. Their strategies should be grounded in trust-building, agent relationships, a country-specific approach and highlight post-study migration opportunities. This would allow regional universities to tap into Thailand's longer-term potential as a source market and address the specific influences on Thai students.

Balancing short-term goals with the long-term cultivation of emerging markets, while also staying attuned with evolving trends through ongoing market research, will enable regional universities to effectively and sustainably strategize their marketing and student recruitment efforts in Thailand. By developing sustainable strategies that consider emerging markets, such as Thailand, regional universities can reduce their over-reliance on high-volume markets and hedge themselves against policy changes or major macroeconomic shifts in these source countries.

5.3   Contributions (Reflections)

This PhD journey has been a fascinating learning experience that has defied my expectations of a structured educational path. This non-linear learning journey has provided me with expanded insights into the intricacies of the professional practice within which I operate. Throughout this study, I have had the privilege to not only enrich my academic knowledge but also engage closely with the real-world dynamics that shape the field of international student recruitment. This amalgamation of theory and involvement in practice has profoundly enhanced my understanding of the subject matter (especially across different types of regional universities and from the perspective of students), bridging the gap between theory and practical application. This section outlines the theoretical and practical contributions derived from this research and concludes with further reflections on the overall study.

5.3.1   Theoretical Contributions

On the theoretical front, this study produced new insights about regional universities' approaches to international student recruitment. Initially, the research was focused on investigating the marketing and recruitment strategies employed by regional universities, with an assumption that these strategies would form the backbone of the findings. This assumption was based on the extant literature within this field, which mainly concentrated on the overarching strategic approaches taken to student recruitment (Frølich & Stensaker, 2010; Hung & Yen, 2022; Ross, 2009). As indicated in the literature review, existing research in this field mostly regards Australian universities as a homogenous group and mainly focuses on the traditional high-volume source markets (Chin et al., 2022). Indeed, regional institutions possess inherent distinctions from their larger metropolitan counterparts (Gao, 2020); thus, it was deemed unreasonable to assume that the findings would mirror the extant literature.

The findings diverged from initial expectations and revealed a surprisingly passive approach to Thailand as a source market. This revelation has theoretical implications as it sheds light on the significance of strategic ambidexterity within the phenomenon; specifically, the interplay between short-term gains and strategic foresight in the decision-making processes of regional universities. It highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of the factors that influence international student recruitment strategies, including the trade-offs between immediate enrolment outcomes and sustainability.

Additionally, the study validates certain theoretical assumptions regarding influential factors that are relevant to Thai students' decision to enrol. It confirms the importance of tailoring strategies to Thai target markets, aligning with findings from the existing literature that highlighted the importance of country-specific approaches (James, 2018; Onk & Joseph, 2017; Yin, 2018). The empirical support provided in the study contributes to the academic literature on international student recruitment strategies, especially in terms of highlighting key concepts that are pertinent to crafting effective recruitment approaches in emerging markets.

5.3.2   *Practical Contributions*

A major practical contribution of this study is the spotlight it brings to the distinctive characteristics of regional universities' international student recruitment strategies. By investigating their marketing and recruitment strategies for Thailand, I have cultivated a nuanced understanding of how these institutions operate within their limitations, which leads them to adopt a discerning and calculated approach to emerging markets. This element of regional universities' decision-making has remained largely unexplored in prior research, making it a significant contribution that adds depth to our understanding of international student recruitment dynamics.

Furthermore, the study provides insights into the challenges faced by regional universities, such as resource constraints and financial limitations, which affects their strategic efforts in recruiting international students. Moreover, it highlights how these limitations subsequently affect regional universities' influence over students' decision to enrol. This is a key practical consideration for regional institutions with longer term ambitions to sustainably recruit from emerging markets. This practical insight is valuable for regional university administrators and policymakers seeking to enhance the competitiveness of regional universities in the international education market.

5.3.3   *Reflections*

As mentioned earlier, my initial focus in this study was to examine the marketing and recruitment strategies employed by regional universities, and I assumed that these strategies would form the basis of the study. From my experiences as a recruitment practitioner at a small regional Australian university, I was fortunate that the Executive Director for International Operations was open to the idea of fostering trust in emerging markets with a view to delayed outcomes and ROI in future years. Therefore, I was encouraged to invest into

markets such as Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar, even though it was clear that the enrolment outcomes would not be immediate. This experience formed the basis for my assumptions that other regional universities would have similar strategic approaches to emerging markets.

However, the findings that emerged from the study diverged from my initial expectations. In contrast to my assumptions, the data revealed a surprisingly passive approach to Thailand as a source market. To my surprise, it became evident that regional universities were prioritising short-term gains over creating a balanced approach that could address immediate needs while also laying a foundation for sustainable future growth. This warranted deeper inquiry and highlighted a broader issue, which was caused by the resource constraints and financial limitations that regional universities are faced with.

On the other hand, the findings from the quantitative phase provided validation for some of my pre-existing assumptions on influential factors relevant to Thai students' decision to enrol. Having been involved in recruiting these students and actively engaging with Thai agents and stakeholders, I have always stressed the importance of tailoring strategies to the Thai context. My observations as a practitioner had shown me that generic passive approaches often produced lacklustre results in Thailand; instead, bespoke campaigns with elements like Thai student testimonials and social media promotions (on Thai-specific platforms) were most effective. The survey responses from Thai students and alumni essentially reiterated these observations, lending empirical support to the strategies I have advocated as a practitioner.

Seeing these findings align with my practical observations was satisfying as it adds credibility to the methods I have learned and employed in my career thus far. The survey's validation provides a contribution that I hope will prove beneficial to fellow practitioners in terms of shaping their strategies for recruiting Thai students. By grounding these insights in empirical data, this study not only strengthens our understanding but further encourages practitioners to utilise an evidence-based ethos to navigate the complexities of international student recruitment in Thailand and other emerging markets.

This study's ability to bridge both theoretical and practical insights emphasise the value of combining academic research with real-world experiential learning. As both a researcher and practitioner, this study has reaffirmed the value of research-informed decisions. It is hoped

that practitioners within this industry adopt similar approaches in their roles, providing benefits to both academia and the practical world of international student recruitment.

In conclusion, this PhD journey has not only uncovered significant facets of regional universities' strategies and the influences on students' decision to enrol, but it has also offered a fresh lens through which to view the intricate balance between short-term goals and strategic foresight and illuminated how this impacts operational performance. This journey has motivated me to pursue the continued exploration and refinement of these insights, both as a researcher and a practitioner, to contribute a more nuanced understanding to the field of international student recruitment.

5.4   Limitations

There are a few limitations that merit consideration in the interpretation of the study's findings. First, during the qualitative phase of the investigation, the engagement of regional university recruitment practitioners was impacted by the study's commencement in 2021 (coinciding with the height of the pandemic and its effect on the industry). During this period, a number of Australian universities were undertaking measures to reduce international operations budgets, resulting in corresponding reductions to their associated workforce. Consequently, there may have been some recruitment practitioners that were laid off prior to the initiation of the qualitative interviews who would have provided further insights.

Furthermore, as the qualitative interviews were conducted within the context of the pandemic, this inherently deviated from the usual operational circumstances within the industry. This dynamic might have influenced the practitioners' responses due to the prevailing economic conditions and the broader industry uncertainties, potentially affecting their overall optimism and the depth of the information gathered. Revisiting the research when the market normalises might provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

There were also limitations emerging from the quantitative phase, particularly concerning the involvement of participants within the survey. While the sample size was considered sufficient for this exploratory study, it is important to acknowledge that sampling conditions could have been improved without the constraints imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic – which hindered many Thai students from travelling to Australia for their studies during those affected years. Further, the inclusion of alumni participants in the survey introduced a time

gap in their experiences as a "potential student" and the factors that influenced their decision to enrol at that time. This may have resulted in hazy recollections and the likelihood of bias stemming from their subsequent encounters with the university environment (e.g. student support, facilities and academic outcomes).

These limitations need to be considered within the interpretation of the study's outcomes, and opportunities need to be outlined for future research to address these constraints.

5.5   Future Research

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the findings should be used as a starting point for future research to further investigate this phenomenon.

The qualitative phase of this study engaged practitioners that are directly involved in Thai student recruitment. However, for future research, it is advisable to incorporate the viewpoints of senior university management, including individuals at the level of Pro Vice-Chancellor or Executive Director. This study has unveiled a key factor that is driving regional universities to overlook Thailand in favour of markets promising quicker returns on investment. This inclination, according to the practitioners interviewed for this study, arises due to pressure from senior management to meet semesterly enrolment targets. Consequently, conducting interviews with senior management would serve to authenticate this strategic decision, shedding light on whether they genuinely subscribe to this short-term goal-oriented philosophy, which is potentially at the expense of the development of emerging markets. The insights obtained from senior management could further unveil the rationale underpinning these strategic decisions, given their deeper involvement in shaping the broader direction of the university.

Future research should also revisit this phenomenon after a number of years as the factors exerting influence on Thai students could undergo transformations due to shifts in macroeconomic, political and societal dynamics. For example, this study revealed how the guidance of family and friends wielded significant influence previously (Pimpa, 2005), but this dynamic has shifted in the present context. Moreover, given the rapid evolution of digital marketing and social media, it is crucial to reassess the specific influences associated with these platforms, which newer generations of students are exposed to. As digital marketing and social media strategies evolve and become increasingly integrated into universities'

interactions with prospective students, it will become necessary for future research to thoroughly examine their subsequent impacts on enrolment decisions.

At the time of writing there were also prevailing political uncertainties in Thailand that are potentially impacting the push factors guiding Thai students in their decision to pursue overseas education. Therefore, when considering these variables collectively, there is a rationale for conducting a follow-up investigation. Follow-up studies could also prioritise recently enrolled students to gain more immediate insights into their decision-making process, thus circumventing potential memory bias that could distort their recollections. Finally, while the primary focus of this study was on the strategies of regional Australian universities within Thailand, it is advisable to explore the applicability of these findings to other contexts. Although the study provides valuable insights for regional universities, there is merit in investigating the strategies adopted by different types of institutions, such as private universities or vocational colleges. These institutions may have different strategic foci that could lead to varied approaches to student recruitment. Furthermore, this study focused on Thailand as a source market. Future research could incorporate a comparative analysis, investigating and contrasting other emerging markets to observe whether universities tailor their strategies differently in response to varied market factors. For instance, examining whether universities adapt their strategic direction in the face of divergent ROI potentials would provide a more nuanced understanding of their decision-making processes.

5.6 Conclusions

In conclusion, this study has provided new insights into the marketing and student recruitment strategies utilised by regional Australian universities within the Thai market. Through an exploratory mixed methods study that encompassed qualitative interviews (with recruitment practitioners) and a quantitative survey (with Thai students and alumni), this research reveals the interplay of factors that influence institutions' approaches and students' decisions.

Central to these findings is the concept of strategic ambidexterity, which emerged as a pivotal theme in this project. The balancing act between exploiting immediate opportunities in high-volume markets and cultivating a reputation in emerging ones, which is typified by Thailand, reveals the conflict that is inherent in regional universities' recruitment strategies. The pressing need to meet semesterly enrolment targets often prioritises short-term gains over longer-term investments, contributing to this challenge of aligning strategic priorities.

This study also revealed key marketing and recruitment factors that exert influence on Thai students' decision to enrol at a regional university. While education-agent relationships, university reputation, Thailand-specific marketing resources and trust-building initiatives emerged as significant marketing and recruitment factors, the findings revealed a disconnect between their influence on students and their integration into university recruitment strategies. The resource-constrained nature of regional universities often impedes the complete realisation of these influential factors, further emphasising the strategic flexibility required to balance immediate outcomes with sustained brand cultivation.

Acknowledging the study's limitations is crucial in contextualising its implications. The study's commencement during the COVID-19 pandemic introduces a unique market situation that may have influenced recruitment practitioners' responses. Moreover, the inclusion of alumni in the quantitative phase introduces a temporal gap that could introduce biases due to their subsequent experiences. These limitations, while shaping the study's scope, present avenues for reinvestigation that could delve deeper into the phenomenon.

While this study focused on regional universities and their marketing and recruitment strategies in Thailand, the insights provided may have relevance in other similar contexts within the field of international student recruitment. By embracing strategic ambidexterity, creating tailored strategies that harmonise with the market's cultural nuances and optimising the interplay of push and pull factors, universities could have a higher chance of success in emerging markets. Beyond its practical contributions, this research further lays a foundation for ongoing exploration into a rapidly evolving field, inviting future scholarship to delve deeper into the dynamics of international student recruitment.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS), SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AND CONSENT FORMS

University of Southern Queensland
Participant Information Sheet
Interview

USQ HREC Approval number: HXREAXXX

Project Title

Marketing and recruitment strategies used by Regional Australian Universities in Thailand: A mixed methods study investigating their influence on Thai students' selection of institution

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator Details	Principal Supervisor	Associate Supervisor
Mr Daniel Chin	A/Prof Luke van der Laan	Dr Jiraporn Surachartkumtonkum

Description

This project is being undertaken as part of the Doctor of Professional Studies through the University of Southern Queensland.

The purpose of this project is to find out how Regional Australian universities recruit students from Thailand, and the extent to which these strategies influence students' selection of university.

This will fulfil a gap in the current knowledge, as most of the previous studies have focused on high volume markets such as China and India.

Participation

Your participation will involve partaking in an interview that will take approximately 30-60 minutes of your time.

Questions will include:

- What has been the most effective recruitment pipeline for recruiting Thai students?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your strategy to recruiting Thai students, now and in the future?

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. You may also request that any data collected about you be withdrawn and confidentially destroyed.

If you do wish to withdraw from this project or withdraw data collected about yourself, please contact the Research Team (contact details at the top of this form).

Your decision whether you take part, do not take part, or take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

Expected benefits

It is expected that this project will directly benefit you as the studies' findings will be shared with you upon finalisation of the results. These insights will provide you with an overview of how your peers at fellow universities are approaching recruitment in Thailand, and may be beneficial when crafting your future strategies in this region.

Risks

While no significant risks of participation are anticipated, there may be social risks associated with participation. These possible social risks are associated with the participant sharing their views on their recruitment / work .

Privacy and confidentiality

All comments and responses are confidential unless required by law.

The interview will be audio recorded, so please note the following:

- The audio recording will be for the purpose of transcription.
- You will be provided with a copy of the interview transcript for review and endorsement prior to inclusion in the project data.
- After provision of the transcript, you will be given 1 week to review and request any changes to the transcript before the data is included in the project for analysis
- The recording will only be accessed by the research team. An external transcribing team may be used.
- The results will be non-identifiable, with no mention of your name or the university that you are employed at. Likewise, if there is a need for data to be stored, it will be made non-identifiable.
- Any data collected will not be made available for future use.

You will be able to request a summary of the project's results by contacting the research team at the conclusion of the study.

Any data collected as a part of this project will be stored securely, as per University of Southern Queensland's Research Data and Primary Materials Management Procedure.

Consent to participate

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate in this project. Please return your signed consent form to a member of the Research team prior to participating in your interview.

Questions

Please refer to the Research team contact details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project, you may contact the University of Southern Queensland, Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics on +61 7 4631 1839 or email researchintegrity@usq.edu.au. The Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics is not connected with the research project and can address your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this document for your information.

University of Southern Queensland

Consent form
Interviews

Project Title

Marketing and recruitment strategies used by Regional Australian Universities in Thailand: A mixed methods study investigating their influence on Thai students' selection of institution
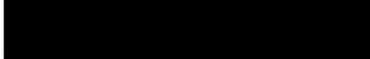
Research team contact details

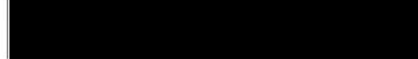**Principal Investigator Details**

Mr Daniel Chin
Email:

Principal Supervisor

A/Prof Luke van der Laan

Associate Supervisor

Dr Jiraporn Surachartkumtonkum

Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.   ☐ Yes / ☐ No

- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.   ☐ Yes / ☐ No

- Understand that if you have any additional questions, you can contact the research team.   ☐ Yes / ☐ No

- Are over 18 years of age.   ☐ Yes / ☐ No

- Agree to participate in the project.   ☐ Yes / ☐ No

Name (first & last)			
Signature		Date	

Please return this document to a research team member before undertaking the questionnaire.

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE CONSENT FORM

University of Southern Queensland
Consent form
Questionnaire

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND
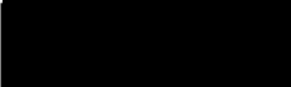
USQ HREC Approval number: HXREAXXX

Project Title

Marketing and recruitment strategies used by Regional Australian Universities in Thailand: A mixed methods study investigating their influence on Thai students' selection of institution

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator Details	Principal Supervisor	Associate Supervisor
Mr Daniel Chin Email:	A/Prof Luke van der Laan	Dr Jiraporn Surachartkumtonkum

Statement of consent

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- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.   ☐Yes / ☐ No

- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.   ☐Yes / ☐ No

- Understand that if you have any additional questions, you can contact the research team.   ☐Yes / ☐ No

- Are over 18 years of age.   ☐Yes / ☐ No

- Agree to participate in the project.   ☐Yes / ☐ No

Name (first & last)			
Signature		Date	

Please return this document to a research team member before undertaking the questionnaire.

APPENDIX C: SURVEY QUESTION INVENTORY

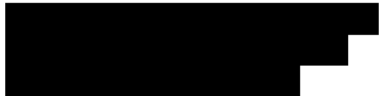**Marketing and student recruitment strategies of regional Australian universities**

แผนการตลาดและการรับสมัครนักศึกษาของมหาวิทยาลัยในออสเตรเลียนอกเมืองใหญ่ (ซิดนีย์ เมลเบิร์น และบริสเบน)

Research team contact details / ข้อมูลการติดต่อทีมวิจัย		
Principal Investigator Details	**Principal Supervisor**	**Associate Supervisor**
ข้อมูลผู้วิจัยหลัก	**อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาหลัก**	**ผู้ช่วยอาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา**
Mr Daniel Chin	A/Prof Luke van der Laan	Dr Jiraporn Surachartkumtonkum
██████████	████████████	██████████

Description / รายละเอียด

This project is being undertaken as part of the Doctor of Professional Studies through the University of Southern Queensland.

The purpose of this project is to find out how Australian universities recruit students from Thailand, and how these strategies influence students' selection of university.

งานวิจัยนี้กำลังดำเนินการในฐานะส่วนหนึ่งของดุษฎีบัณฑิตสาขาวิชาชีพศึกษา มหาวิทยาลัยเซาเทิร์นควีนส์แลนด์

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อทำการค้นคว้าวิธีการรับสมัครนักศึกษาจากประเทศไทยของมหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศออสเตรเลีย รวมไปถึงการที่กลยุทธ์เหล่านี้มีอิทธิพลต่อการเลือกมหาวิทยาลัยของนักศึกษาอย่างไร

Participation / การมีส่วนร่วม

Your participation will involve a questionnaire that will take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time.

Your participation in this project is voluntary, and your response will be anonymous. If you do not wish to take part, you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. You may also request that any data collected about you be withdrawn and confidentially destroyed.

If you wish to withdraw from this project or withdraw data collected about yourself, please contact the Research Team (contact details at the top of this form).

Your decision whether you take part, do not take part, or take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

การเข้าร่วมทำแบบสอบถามจะใช้เวลาประมาณ 10-15 นาที

การเข้าร่วมในโครงการวิจัยนี้เป็นไปโดยสมัครใจโดยที่คำตอบของคุณจะไม่ถูกเปิดเผย และจะไม่มีข้อผูกมัดใดๆหากคุณไม่ประสงค์จะเข้าร่วม หากคุณตัดสินใจเข้าร่วมและเปลี่ยนใจในภายหลัง

คุณสามารถถอนตัวจากการทำแบบสอบถามนี้ได้ทุกเมื่อ

คุณมีสิทธิที่จะร้องขอให้มีการเพิกถอนข้อมูลใดๆเกี่ยวกับตัวคุณที่ถูกรวบรวมไว้และทำลายอย่างเป็นความลับ

หากคุณต้องการถอนตัวจากการทำแบบสอบถามนี้หรือต้องการให้มีการเพิกถอนข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับตัวคุณที่ถูกรวบรวมไว้
โปรดติดต่อทีมวิจัย (ข้อมูลการติดต่อบริเวณด้านบนของแบบฟอร์มนี้)

การตัดสินใจของคุณว่าจะเข้าร่วมหรือไม่ รวมไปถึงการเข้าร่วมและได้มีการถอนตัวในภายหลัง
จะไม่ส่งผลกระทบใดๆต่อความสัมพันธ์ในปัจจุบันหรืออนาคตระหว่างคุณกับมหาวิทยาลัยเซาเทิร์นควีนส์แลนด์

Statement of consent / การให้ความยินยอม

By proceeding, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information above regarding this project.

- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.

- Understand that if you have any additional questions, you can contact the research team.

- Are over 18 years of age.

- Agree to participate in the project.

หากเลือกดำเนินการต่อ จะถือเป็นการแสดงว่าคุณ:

- ได้อ่านและมีความเข้าใจในข้อมูลข้างต้นเกี่ยวกับโครงการวิจัยนี้ดีแล้ว
- ได้รับการตอบคำถามในข้อสงสัยต่างๆจนเป็นที่พึงพอใจแล้ว
- เข้าใจว่าสามารถติดต่อทีมวิจัยได้หากมีคำถามเพิ่มเติม
- มีอายุมากกว่า 18 ปีขึ้นไป
- ยินยอมเข้าร่วมโครงการวิจัยนี้

Student details / ข้อมูลนักศึกษา

- What is your age? คุณอายุเท่าไหร่
- What is your gender? เพศของคุณคือ
- What province are you from in Thailand? คุณอาศัยอยู่ในจังหวัดไหนของประเทศไทย
- Which university did you select for your studies in Australia?
  คุณเลือกศึกษาต่อที่มหาวิทยาลัยใดในประเทศออสเตรเลีย
- What level of degree did you study, or are currently studying, at that university?
  คุณจบการศึกษาในระดับใดหรือกำลังศึกษาที่มหาวิทยาลัยนั้นในระดับใด
- What study area did you select at your university? คุณเลือกศึกษาสาขาวิชาใดที่มหาวิทยาลัยของคุณ
- What year did you graduate / will you graduate? คุณเรียนจบในปีไหน / คุณจะเรียนจบในปีไหน

(Likert scale:

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree)

(มาตราส่วนลิเคิร์ท:

ไม่เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่ง | ไม่เห็นด้วย | ไม่มีความเห็น | เห็นด้วย | เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่ง)

Overall marketing and recruitment strategy / แผนการตลาดและการรับสมัครนักศึกษาโดยภาพรวม

1) My chosen Australian university has a strong reputation in Thailand.
มหาวิทยาลัยในออสเตรเลียที่ข้าพเจ้าเลือกมีชื่อเสียงในประเทศไทย
2) My chosen Australian university is well-known in Thailand /
มหาวิทยาลัยในออสเตรเลียที่ข้าพเจ้าเลือกนั้นเป็นที่รู้จักดีในประเทศไทย
3) The city my university is based in, does not have a strong reputation in Thailand for those who wish to study abroad.
มหาวิทยาลัยที่ข้าพเจ้าเลือกตั้งอยู่ในเมืองที่ไม่เป็นที่นิยมในหมู่ผู้คนไทยที่ต้องการไปศึกษาต่อต่างประเทศ
4) Education expos are a good way to obtain information on which university to choose.
งานการศึกษาต่อต่างประเทศมีประโยชน์ในการช่วยหาข้อมูลว่าจะเลือกศึกษาต่อที่มหาวิทยาลัยใด

5) Information on my university was easy to obtain from their website.
ข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับมหาวิทยาลัยของข้าพเจ้าสามารถค้นหาได้ง่ายจากเว็บไซต์ของมหาวิทยาลัยเอง

6) My university appears to have a long-term strategy to grow their reputation in Thailand.
มีความเป็นไปได้ว่ามหาวิทยาลัยของข้าพเจ้ามีแผนระยะยาวในการสร้างชื่อเสียงในประเทศไทย

7) My university adjusts their marketing strategies to suit local audiences in Thailand.
มหาวิทยาลัยของข้าพเจ้าปรับเปลี่ยนแผนการตลาดให้เหมาะกับกลุ่มเป้าหมายในประเทศไทย

8) It was useful to meet a representative directly from the university, as they were able to provide trustworthy advice beyond what was available with the education agent.
การพบตัวแทนจากมหาวิทยาลัยโดยตรงนั้นมีประโยชน์

เนื่องจากตัวแทนจากมหาวิทยาลัยสามารถให้คำแนะนำที่น่าเชื่อถือมากกว่าที่จะได้รับจากเอเจนซี่แนะแนวศึกษาต่อ

9) The marketing strategies of regional Australian universities are different from those used by larger universities.
แผนการตลาดของมหาวิทยาลัยในเมืองรองของประเทศออสเตรเลียนั้นแตกต่างจากแผนการตลาดที่ปรับใช้โดยมหา

วิทยาลัยขนาดใหญ่

10) The marketing messaging of regional universities is relatable to Thai students.
การทำการตลาดผ่านรูปแบบข้อความของมหาวิทยาลัยในเมืองรองมีความเกี่ยวข้องกับนักศึกษาไทย

11) Regional universities are doing enough to grow their brand in Thailand.
มหาวิทยาลัยต่างๆในเมืองรองกำลังพยายามอย่างเต็มที่เพื่อโปรโมทมหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศไทย

Partnering with agents in Thailand / การติดต่อผ่านเอเจนซี่ในประเทศไทย

12) Education agents provided the necessary assistance to help me choose my university.
เอเจนซี่แนะแนวศึกษาต่อให้ความช่วยเหลือต่างๆที่จำเป็นในการเลือกมหาวิทยาลัยของข้าพเจ้า

13) Education agents promoted regional universities as much as those based in Sydney / Melbourne / Brisbane.
เอเจนซี่แนะแนวศึกษาต่อได้โปรโมทมหาวิทยาลัยที่ตั้งอยู่ในเมืองรองพอๆกับมหาวิทยาลัยที่ตั้งอยู่ในซิดนีย์ /
เมลเบิร์น / บริสเบน

14) If I did not have the assistance of an education agent, I would have been able to process my own application to study abroad.
ข้าพเจ้าสามารถดำเนินการสมัครเรียนต่อต่างประเทศด้วยตัวของข้าพเจ้าเองได้แม้ข้าพเจ้าจะไม่ได้รับความช่วยเหลื
อจากเอเจนซี่แนะแนวศึกษาต่อในการสมัครเรียนต่อต่างประเทศก็ตาม

15) Education agents are trustworthy and provided information that was in my best interests.
เอเจนซี่แนะแนวศึกษาต่อมีความน่าเชื่อถือและให้ข้อมูลที่เป็นประโยชน์สูงสุดต่อข้าพเจ้า

16) Regional universities are well-represented by their agents in Thailand.
มหาวิทยาลัยต่างๆที่ตั้งอยู่ในเมืองรองได้รับการโปรโมทเท่าที่ควรโดยเอเจนซี่แนะแนวศึกษาต่อในประเทศไทย

17) Education agents promote the university with integrity.
เอเจนซี่แนะแนวศึกษาต่อได้ทำการโปรโมทมหาวิทยาลัยอย่างมีคุณธรรม

18) Education agents had a good understanding of all universities in Australia, not just the large ones.
เอเจนซี่แนะแนวศึกษาต่อมีความรู้ความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับมหาวิทยาลัยทุกสถาบันในประเทศออสเตรเลีย
ไม่ใช่เพียงแค่มหาวิทยาลัยใหญ่ๆเท่านั้น

19) It seemed that education agents have a good relationship with the Australian universities they represent.
มีความเป็นไปได้ว่าเอเจนซี่แนะแนวศึกษาต่อนั้นมีความสัมพันธ์อันดีกับมหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศออสเตรเลียที่พวกเข
าทำหน้าที่เป็นตัวแทนมหาวิทยาลัยดังกล่าว

20) Education agents seem to be well supported by their Australian university partners.
มีความเป็นไปได้ว่าเอเจนซี่แนะแนวศึกษาต่อจะได้รับการสนับสนุนเป็นอย่างดีจากมหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศออสเตรเลี
ยที่เป็นพันธมิตรกับเอเจนซี่เหล่านั้น

Influencing factors on Thai students / ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อนักศึกษาไทย

21) Regional universities are an attractive option due to the post-study migration opportunities (e.g. longer duration for post-study work visa, extra migration points).
มหาวิทยาลัยต่างๆในเมืองรองเป็นตัวเลือกที่มีความน่าสนใจอันเนื่องมาจากโอกาสในการย้ายถิ่นฐานหลังเรียนจบ
(เช่น ระยะเวลาในการทำงานที่นานขึ้นสำหรับการขอวีซ่าทำงานหลังเรียนจบ
คะแนนที่จะได้รับเพิ่มขึ้นจากการย้ายถิ่นฐาน)

22) University ranking was an important factor in my selection of university.
การจัดอันดับมหาวิทยาลัยเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญในการเลือกมหาวิทยาลัยของข้าพเจ้า

23) The course I selected to study is not easily found at universities in Thailand.

คอร์สเรียนที่ข้าพเจ้าเลือกเรียนไม่ได้เปิดสอนทั่วไปที่มหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศไทย

24) I chose my university because they are experts in the field of study I have selected.
ข้าพเจ้าเลือกมหาวิทยาลัยที่ศึกษาต่อเพราะมีความเชี่ยวชาญในสาขาวิชาที่ข้าพเจ้าเลือก

25) I selected a regional university because of their affordability compared to larger universities.
ข้าพเจ้าเลือกมหาวิทยาลัยที่ตั้งอยู่ในเมืองรองเพราะค่าใช้จ่ายถูกกว่าเมื่อเทียบกับมหาวิทยาลัยใหญ่ๆ

26) The opportunity to migrate away from Thailand was an influencing factor on my decision.
โอกาสในการย้ายถิ่นฐานจากประเทศไทยเป็นปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจของข้าพเจ้า

27) My selection of university was influenced by family members.
สมาชิกในครอบครัวมีอิทธิพลในการตัดสินใจเลือกมหาวิทยาลัยของข้าพเจ้า

28) I chose my university because there were good job opportunities in the area.
ข้าพเจ้าตัดสินใจเลือกมหาวิทยาลัยที่ศึกษาต่อเพราะมีโอกาสในการหางานที่ดีในเมืองนั้น

Building trust / การสร้างความน่าเชื่อถือ

29) Online Thai discussion forums are a valuable source of information on which university to select.
ฟอรั่มออนไลน์ที่ใช้ภาษาไทยในการพูดคุยกันเป็นแหล่งแลกเปลี่ยนข้อมูลที่มีประโยชน์ในการเลือกมหาวิทยาลัย

30) If the university representatives were able to speak Thai, it made them a more trustworthy source of information.
ถ้าตัวแทนจากมหาวิทยาลัยสามารถพูดภาษาไทยได้จะยิ่งทำให้แหล่งข้อมูลมีความน่าเชื่อถือมากขึ้น

31) It was challenging to interact with university representatives who were not able to speak Thai.
การต้องติดต่อพูดคุยกับตัวแทนมหาวิทยาลัยที่ไม่สามารถพูดภาษาไทยได้เป็นเรื่องที่ค่อนข้างท้าทาย

32) Alumni testimonials from other Thai students on the university were a trusted source of information during my decision-making.
คำบอกเล่าจากศิษย์เก่านักศึกษาไทยคนอื่นๆในมหาวิทยาลัยเป็นแหล่งข้อมูลที่มีความน่าเชื่อถือเพื่อประกอบการตัดสินใจของข้าพเจ้า

33) Student reviews and testimonials on the university could be easily found online on Thai social media sites.
ความคิดเห็นของนักศึกษาและคำบอกเล่าเกี่ยวกับมหาวิทยาลัยสามารถเสิร์ชหาได้ง่ายผ่านช่องทางออนไลน์บนแพลตฟอร์มโซเชียลมีเดียของไทย

34) There was enough information available in Thai about the university, to assist me in selecting a university.
มีข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับมหาวิทยาลัยที่เป็นภาษาไทยมากเพียงพอในการช่วยข้าพเจ้าตัดสินใจเลือกมหาวิทยาลัย

35) Regional universities have a good presence in online Thai social media platforms.
มหาวิทยาลัยที่ตั้งอยู่ในเมืองรองปรากฏบนแพลตฟอร์มโซเชียลมีเดียออนไลน์ของไทย

Decision to enrol / <u>การตัดสินใจสมัครเรียน</u>

36) The marketing of my university influenced my decision to enrol.
กลยุทธ์ทางการตลาดของมหาวิทยาลัยที่ข้าพเจ้าเลือกไปศึกษาต่อมีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจสมัครเรียนของข้าพเจ้า

37) Education agents were influential in my decision to enrol at the university.
เอเจนซี่แนะแนวศึกษาต่อมีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจสมัครเรียนที่มหาวิทยาลัยนั้นของข้าพเจ้า

38) The location of my university was influential in my decision to enrol.
สถานที่ตั้งของมหาวิทยาลัยมีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจสมัครเรียนของข้าพเจ้า

39) My decision to enrol was influenced by family and friends.
ครอบครัวและกลุ่มเพื่อนมีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจสมัครเรียนของข้าพเจ้า

40) My decision to enrol was influenced by the level of trust I had in the university.
ระดับความเชื่อมั่นที่ข้าพเจ้าที่มีต่อมหาวิทยาลัยมีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจสมัครเรียนของข้าพเจ้า