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## **Factors Influencing Undergraduate Students' Loyalty: A Study of Thai Private Universities Offering International Programs**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to identify factors that influence undergraduate students' loyalty on their universities. The focus is on the international programs offered at six prominent Thai private universities in the greater Bangkok Metropolis and the outskirts area. A quantitative survey research method was employed. The respondents were Thai and International students who are between ages 18 and 25. An online survey was conducted using questionnaire distributed to 360 students. The researcher used quota sampling method in which 60 responses were obtained from each of the six universities. Results from Multiple Linear Regression analysis indicate that university image, reputation, functional service quality and student perceived value impact student satisfaction. University reputation scores highest on the students' satisfaction (Beta = 0.755), followed by the students' perceived value (Beta = 0.677), university image (Beta = 0.562) and functional service quality (Beta = 0.542), respectively. Results from Simple Linear Regression indicate that university image also impacts the students' loyalty at the beta value ( $\beta$ ) of 0.573. The findings conclude that Thai private universities should maintain and enhance university trustworthiness and heritage, such as campus culture, to build a favorable university image. It is also concluded that university reputation has the strongest impact on student satisfaction whereas student satisfaction has massive impact on student loyalty. Students from different universities do not express loyalty differently while students of different years of study hold distinct views when expressing loyalty to their respective universities.

**Keywords:** Thai private universities, university image, reputation, functional service quality, student perceived value, student satisfaction, student loyalty

### **Introduction**

Over the centuries, attending famous and reputable universities has been the goal of many students hoping that after graduation, they would gain wisdom and knowledge to meet the challenge in the workplace. People from all walks of life worldwide look up to university life as an important phase of their life's journey. Near or far, aiming to study at reputable universities at

home or abroad continues to be someone's goal and ambition. Fierce competition among universities around the globe over the past 60 years has pushed prestigious academics to build the brand for their respective universities. Similar to the degree to which businesses put every effort into building their brand image, higher education is a competitive field in which each brand strives to strengthen its relationship with potential customers, i.e., students (Casidy, 2013). Brand image—intentionally created or naturally developed—has become an effective tool for universities to market themselves and continue to draw the younger generation's attention, especially when higher education is challenged by IT disruption. Alves and Raposo (2010), whose research concentrates on the image of colleges and universities, stress that the image of a university is a perception of services being provided. Brand image can be partly communicative and partly cognitive to the audience. Schools' reputation can be attributed to their students' performances, alumni's achievement, academic services, or even venues' attractiveness.

Nowadays, another aspect added to augment a university's image is its offer for international exposure; an international program seems imperative to keep a university's name alive. International Program—be it at the undergraduate or graduate level—is a critical part of a university's image. When making high-risk decisions of selecting a university, international students look for evidence of better quality in the services offered (Angell et al., 2008). There has been an intense competition among universities offering international programs both abroad and in Thailand. Many universities outside English-speaking countries have created international programs to appeal to their local students and international residents living in the country. By having an international program, each university not only offers curricula conducted in English but also ensures that its services and environment meet international standards. As English has become a basic requirement for job applicants, students seek to be educated in a university with reputable international programs. As the competition among higher education institutions grows more intense (Vrana et al., 2015), international programs that were first in the education market seem to have a competitive edge due to their brand image and reputation. Like any organization or merchandise, universities need to maintain their image and monitor brand loyalty (Hennigsthuau, et al., 2001). Many research studies have been conducted on Thailand's International Program of Thai private universities during 1990s and early 2000s, but little have focused on their university's image in relation to its impact on the current students' satisfaction and loyalty to their universities. In the time of technology disruption and new normal, it is necessary to investigate the extent to which students at large—local Thai and international students would hold their views towards their universities. Therefore, the researcher aims to investigate the factors that build the university's image as well as evaluate the extent which such factors influence student satisfaction and loyalty.

Several reputable private universities in Thailand offer international programs. Considering Thai private university ranking in 2021 (4icu.org) the researcher focused on six universities that offer international undergraduate programs based on their ranking. The universities include Assumption University, Sripatum University, Bangkok University, Siam University, University of the Thai Chambers of Commerce, and Rangsit University.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To investigate what attributes help build the image of Thai private universities' international programs
2. To identify the extent to which these attributes impact their current students' satisfaction and loyalty.
3. To determine the extent to which students from different universities express their loyalty to their universities; and,
4. To assess the extent to which students in different years of study express their loyalty to their universities.

### **Research Questions**

1. What attributes help build the image of Thai private universities' international programs?
2. To what extent do these attributes impact their current students' satisfaction and loyalty?
3. To what extent do students from different universities express their loyalty to their universities?
4. To what extent do students in different years of study express their loyalty to their universities?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study fills the gap of limited research on the impact of the university's image on students' satisfaction and loyalty. The research will add to the existing literature in the field as it extends the knowledge of the attributes that constitute a university's image, thereby further investigating the extent to which such attributes impact students' satisfaction and loyalty to their respective universities. In addition, the discussion and outcome of this study will help Thai private universities, researchers, and university business owners understand how best they can manage institutional image to enhance student loyalty.

### Literature Review

Panda et al. (2019) studied university brand image as a competitive advantage. Thus, the researcher aimed to investigate the impact of university image in terms of heritage, service quality and trustworthiness on student satisfaction. This study involved two geographic locations such as United States and India to examine the hypothesized influence. To test this influence, the authors performed regression analyses. Results show that a distinct image plays a vital role in student satisfaction in both the United States and India. This study benefits the current study since the researcher will investigate the impact of Thai private *university image* with regard to *student satisfaction*.

Teeroovengadum et al. (2019) investigated higher education service quality, student satisfaction, and loyalty. The objective of this study was to test an improved structural model that predicts *student loyalty* in terms of *image*, *perceived value*, *satisfaction*, and *service quality* attributes using a confirmatory approach and to verify the higher education service quality (HESQUAL) scale using a confirmatory technique. The results show that student satisfaction is determined by technical service quality, image, and perceived value, but not by functional service quality. This study is useful to the current study since the researcher aims to discover the impact of Thai university image on student satisfaction and loyalty which is also an area predicted by the previous study as far as *university image* and *student loyalty* are concerned.

Ali et al. (2016) focused on determining if higher education service quality effect student *satisfaction*, *image*, and *loyalty*. The objective of this study was to investigate the impact of service quality at Malaysian public universities on international student satisfaction, institutional image, and loyalty. The findings reveal that all five higher education service quality characteristics influence student satisfaction, which influences the institutional image and student loyalty. This study is of paramount importance to the current study since international students are specified as an area of concentration and *satisfaction*, and *reputation* and *image* influence *loyalty*.

The study of Latif et al. (2021) studied on ways universities can improve *student loyalty*. This study aimed to test the hypotheses that university social responsibility (USR) would predict student loyalty but that this relationship would be mediated by perceived *service quality*, *student satisfaction*, and student trust in their university, using a theoretical framework developed by consumer researchers. Results show that increased perceived USR would be connected to higher student loyalty, and this relationship would be mediated by perceived service quality, student satisfaction, and student trust, according to structural equation modeling using partial least squares software. This study is significant to the current study because it involves a deep analysis of ways required to improve *student loyalty* for *student satisfaction*.

Abdulla and Wilkins (2022) investigated on student retention in higher education. Thus, the researcher aimed to discover the factors that would improve retention levels by examining the degree to which *institutional reputation* and organizational identification affect student satisfaction and behavior. The results reveal that, perceived teaching quality, organizational identity, and *institution reputation* were important predictors of student satisfaction, with student satisfaction having both direct and mediation effects on students' intentions to stay and support one another. This study is useful to the current study because it recognizes *university reputation* as a predictor of *student satisfaction*.

Hossain et al. (2018) focused on understanding the success of private universities. The objective of this study was to create and test a model that accounts for private university success that clarifies theoretical concepts and explains the relationships between variables. The findings reveal that, a private university's "curriculum quality," "teaching competence," "service facility," and "service delivery" are all positively related to "*perceived value* (PV), while "service facility" and PV are both necessary for *students' perceived satisfaction* (SPS). This study will benefit the current study since the researcher aims to discover the impact of *student perceived value* on *student satisfaction* in relation to the international program.

### Research Framework

The modified framework for this study is proposed from 3 research models. Panda, et al. (2019) contend that varsity image can create a competitive advantage when measuring its impact on student satisfaction in terms of heritage, service quality, and trustworthiness. Reputation was also recognized to have an impact on student satisfaction. Teeroovengadum et al. (2019) also posit that a confirmatory approach predicts student loyalty based on image, perceived value, satisfaction, and service quality attributes. Chandra, et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of service quality in relation to university image, which may lead to students' loyalty.

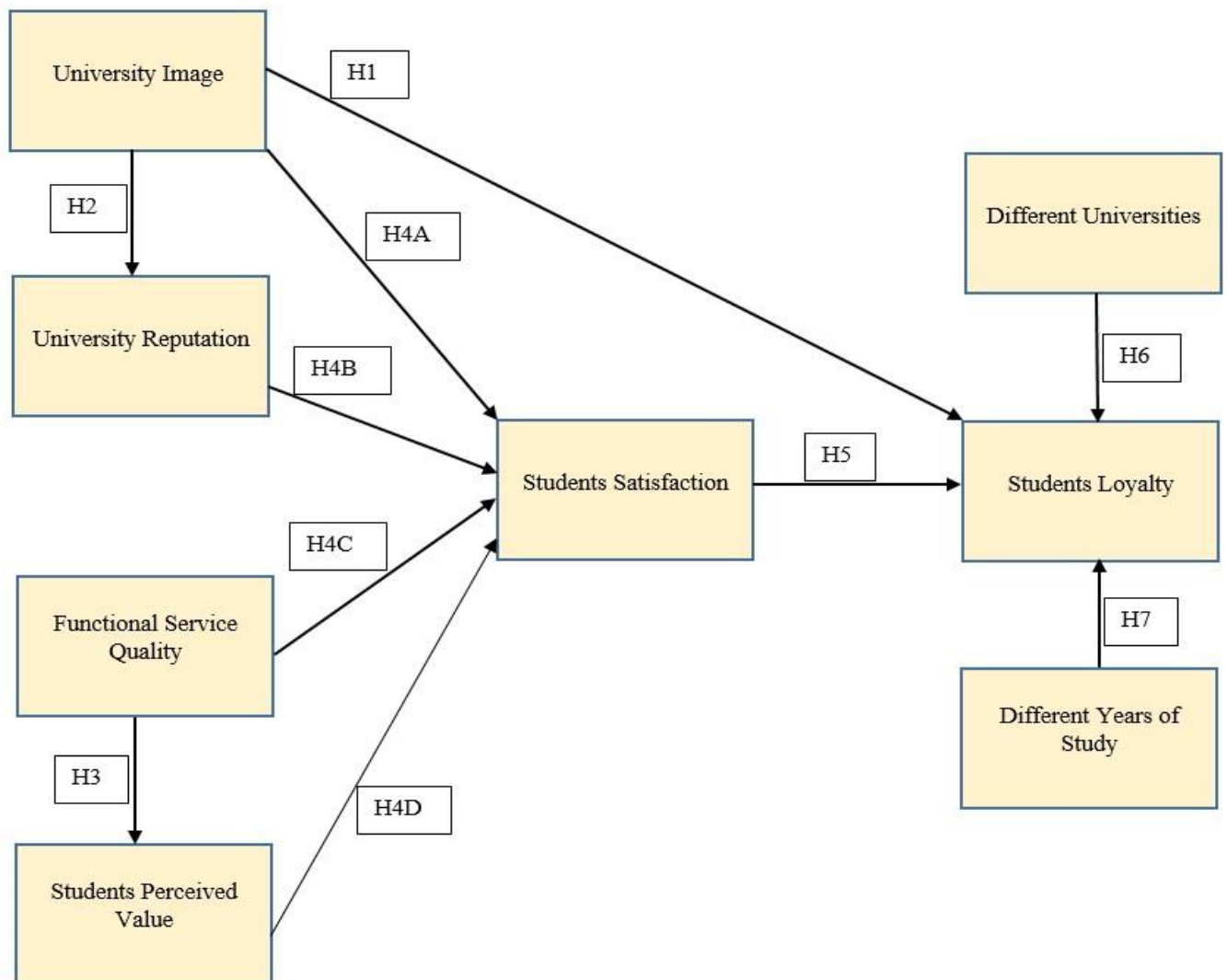
The above synopsis indicates that the variables of this research are university image, university reputation, functional service quality, student perceived value, student satisfaction, and student loyalty.

Figure 1 demonstrates the combination of the studies of Panda et al. (2019) and Teeroovengadum et al. (2019), of which independent variables, namely, university image, university reputation, student perceived value, and functional service quality, are linked to satisfaction, leading toward dependent variable of students' loyalty. In addition, one should be skeptical that students from different universities should feel differently towards the attributes of their respective universities since each university holds different publicity and brand perception in

the public's eyes. The student's classes or levels—freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior—in their year of study should reveal the degree to which they feel loyal to their respective universities. Therefore, this conceptual framework adds hypotheses 6 and 7 to measure different views of students if they are enrolled at different universities and belong to different year of study.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*



Note. Constructed by the author (2021)

## Research Methodology

### Research Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses were developed:

**H1:** The image of Thai private universities with international programs has an impact on their students' loyalty.

**H2:** The image of Thai private universities with international programs has an impact on reputation.

**H3:** Functional service quality of Thai private universities with international program has an impact on their students' perceived value.

**H4A:** The image of Thai private universities with international programs has an impact on their students' satisfaction.

**H4B:** Reputation of Thai private universities with international programs has an impact on their students' satisfaction.

**H4C:** Functional service quality of Thai private universities with international programs has an impact on their students' satisfaction.

**H4D:** Perceived value of students from Thai private universities with international programs has impact on their satisfaction.

**H5:** Satisfaction of students from Thai private universities with international programs has an impact on their loyalty.

The researcher suggested that students belonging to different universities may have different responses to loyalty; this is the case because different schools employ different systems as they tend to have variations in terms of administration, such as quality of service provision, which are perceived differently by students from one institute to the other. On the other hand, it was also speculated that students from different years of study might also have different responses to loyalty. For example, first-year students are mostly new to the school environment, which makes them excited about new university rules, and new sporting activities; hence, being in a position to influence others to join the institute. The same could be true for second-year students, who are still in compliance with university rules and regulations and are apt to further their studies in the same institute. Third-year and fourth-year students, on the other hand, could have different opinions since they have been at the school for some time, affecting how they respond to loyalty.

The above insight introduces hypotheses 6 and 7.



**H6:** Students of different universities express different degree of loyalty to their universities

**H7:** Students of different years of study have different degree of loyalty to their universities

## Research Design

This research employed the quantitative survey research method. The researcher chose quantitative research for this study as it is the ideal nature of the study whereby empirical assessment was made to find out the extent to which university image of Thai private universities has an impact on the satisfaction and loyalty of students at said universities. The questionnaire was administered online. Table 1 shows the population, sample size and sampling method.

**Table 1**

*Population/Sample Size and Sampling Method*

Population	Sample Size	Sampling Method
5000 students	360 students	Quota Sampling

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

## Population and Sample Size

According to studyinThailand.org (2021), about 5000 Thai and International students are pursuing their studies in Bangkok. It was a challenge for the researcher to contact every student in Bangkok. As a result, a sample of 360 respondents was established. Comrey and Lee (1992), who embrace the notion of the sample size, propose that the sufficiency of the sample size may be very crudely assessed on the following scale: 50 is very poor; 100 is poor; 200 is fair; 300 is good; 500 is very good; 1,000 or more is excellent.

## Sampling Technique

This study employed a non-probability quota sampling method, to represent the total population. In quota sampling, the researcher has a quota to attain such that in this study, the researcher collected 60 responses from each Thai private university out of 6 universities to reach out to the respondents from each university equally. The researcher utilized quota sampling in consideration to each university's characteristics such as faculties and majors.

## Data Analysis

The researcher modified item statements from various authors to develop the questionnaire. Items of each variable in the questionnaire that were measured were tested for Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient. The researcher used the statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) as a statistical tool to analyze responses of 46 respondents as part of pilot testing. Table 2 shows the findings of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. The acquired reliability scores ranged from 0.713 to 0.884. The reliability test's acceptable level is  $>0.7$  or higher (Nunnally, 1967); therefore, the internal consistency of the items was acceptable. To analyze the data and assess the hypotheses, Simple and Multiple Linear Regression and one-way ANOVA were used.

**Table 2**

*Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient Results of Pilot Testing*

Variables	Numbers of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
University Image	3	.713
University Reputation	3	.766
Functional Service Quality	8	.884
Student Perceived Value	3	.809
Student Satisfaction	4	.736
Student Loyalty	4	.774

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

## Results and Discussion

### Demographic Information

Table 3 shows that most of the respondents were females than males.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive-Analysis (Gender)*

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Male	150	41.7	41.7	41.7
Female	210	58.3	58.3	100.0
Total	360	100.0	100.0	

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

Table 4 indicates the age range of the respondents.

**Table 4**

*Descriptive Analysis (Age)*

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
18-25 years old	360	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total	360	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

Most respondents came from Asia, followed by Africa and Europe. 6.4% of the respondents were from America as it is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Descriptive Analysis (Continent of Origin)*

Continent	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Asia	281	78.1	78.1	78.1
Europe	27	7.5	7.5	85.6
America	23	6.4	6.4	91.9
Africa	29	8.1	8.1	100.0
Total	360	100.0	100.0	

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

Since the researcher used quota sampling, 60 respondents were selected from each participating university as it is indicated in Table 6.

**Table 6***Descriptive Analysis (Students per University)*

University	Frequency
Assumption University	60
Sripatum University	60
Bangkok University	60
Siam University	60
UTCC	60
Rangsit University	60
Total	360

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

Table 7 shows that Year 3 students (109) represented 30.3%, followed by Year 1 students (100), representing 27.8%, Year 4 had 78 respondents, representing 21.7%, and Year 2 had 73 respondents, representing 20.3%.

**Table 7***Descriptive Analysis (Year of Study)*

Year of study	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Year 1	100	27.8	27.8	27.8
Year 2	73	20.3	20.3	48.1
Year 3	109	30.3	30.3	78.3
Year 4	78	21.7	21.7	100.0
Total	360	100.0	100.0	

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

Business major had the highest frequency of 74, representing 20.6%, followed by Communication Arts, which had 44 respondents representing 12.2%, the English Language had 36 respondents representing 10.0%. Nursing had the frequency of 35 representing 9.7%. Further details are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8***Descriptive Analysis (Major)*

Major	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Business	74	20.6	20.6	20.6
Nursing	35	9.7	9.7	30.3
Engineering	22	6.1	6.1	36.4
Economics	26	7.2	7.2	43.6
Accounting & Finance	14	3.9	3.9	47.5
Communication Arts	44	12.2	12.2	59.7
Political Science	1	.3	.3	60.0
Architecture	8	2.2	2.2	62.2
Laws	11	3.1	3.1	65.3
Education	5	1.4	1.4	66.7
Psychology	1	.3	.3	66.9
Liberal Arts	27	7.5	7.5	74.4
Biotechnology	16	4.4	4.4	78.9
Technology Management	3	.8	.8	79.7
Computer Science & IT	13	3.6	3.6	83.3
Hotel & Tourism Management	22	6.1	6.1	89.4
English	36	10.0	10.0	99.4
Other	2	.6	.6	100.0
Total	360	100.0	100.0	

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

A majority of students (269) prefer sports, representing 74.7%, followed by 37 students (10.3%) who were interested in other extracurricular activities, while the Speech club had 32 students, representing 8.9%, and the remaining 6.1% (22) of the respondents were members of the Music Club as indicated in Table 9.

**Table 9***Descriptive Analysis (Extra Curricular Activities)*

Extra curricula activities	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Sports	269	74.7	74.7	74.7
Music club	22	6.1	6.1	80.8
Speech club	32	8.9	8.9	89.7
Other	37	10.3	10.3	100.0
Total	360	100.0	100.0	

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

Table 10 shows that two hundred thirty-six students representing 65.6%, did not have international program experience at high school or primary level, while 103 students, representing 28.6%, had international program experience for six years. The remaining 5.8% (21) of the respondents were students who had experienced an international program experience for more than six years.

**Table 10**

*Descriptive Analysis (International Program Experience)*

International Program Experience	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Yes, I had 6 years' experience	103	28.6	28.6	28.6
Yes, I had more than 6 years' experience	21	5.8	5.8	34.4
No, I didn't have an International program experience at high-school or primary level	236	65.6	65.6	100.0
Total	360	100.0	100.0	

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

### Summary of Item Statements for each Variable with the Highest Mean

**Table 11**

*Item statements with the highest mean per variable*

Variables	Item Statements	The Highest Mean
University Image (UI)	I recommend that my university is a remarkable institution.	4.08
University Reputation (UR)	My Institution has a good academic fame.	4.01
Functional Service Quality (FSQ)	This university provides facilities to support students' learning environment.	4.05
Student Perceived Value (SPV)	I receive good value from my education in exchange for my time and effort.	3.98
Student Satisfaction (SS)	My educational experience has left a good impression on me.	4.06
Student Loyalty (SL)	I recommend obtaining higher studies in this university	4.09

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

As seen in Table 11, on account of university image, the item statement “I recommend that my university is a remarkable institution” has the highest mean of 4.08. Thus, both Thai and International students hold positive opinions towards their respective universities’ image, which are trustworthiness and university heritage.

The highest mean in the variable “university reputation” is the statement “My University has a good academic fame” and has a score of 4.01; this implies that a majority of students notice that their universities are highly spoken of and recommended hence suggesting high-quality standard of international programs offered by the university.

The statement “This university provides facilities to support students’ learning environment” in the variable of functional service quality, has a mean score of 4.05 indicating that Thai private universities provide useful and adequate material support for creating good student's learning environment.

In terms of student perceived value, the item statement “I receive good value from my education in exchange for my time and effort” has the highest mean of 3.98. It shows that students view their university as a place to acquire useful skills and knowledge worthy of their time and effort.

For the variable “Student Satisfaction,” the item statement which states, “My educational experience has left a good impression on me,” has a mean of 4.06, the highest average mean for this part. Thus, it can be deduced that the current students have a positive experience in their educational journey; this is to say, they express how the institute has impacted and is still impacting their lives in various ways, such as academics and general knowledge, which will be applied later on in their future career.

The last statement, “I recommend obtaining higher studies in this university” in the variable of Student Loyalty, has a mean score of 4.09 which indicates that a majority of students express their intention of furthering their studies in their university which they believe could provide them with the right knowledge they could use later in their career hence, expressing loyalty to the university.

### **Research Hypothesis Testing**

To analyze the views of Thai and international students from the said private universities, the researcher employed Simple and Multiple Linear Regression as well as one-way ANOVA to test the hypotheses. Results showed that all hypotheses were supported except for H6. The summary of the results is illustrated in Table 12.

H1: The researcher found that university image significantly impacts students’ loyalty to their respective universities with a beta value ( $\beta$ ) of 0.573. Thereby, H1 was supported. Thai private universities that ensure their trustworthiness and improve university heritage over the years (campus culture) influence students to be loyal to their respective universities. Campus culture is characterized by individuality, academic feature, leadership, variety, and creativity (Shen & Tian, 2012). The results of this study are consistent with the study of Chandra, et al. (2019) on the influence of service quality, university image on student satisfaction, and student loyalty, whereby it was found that there is a significant impact of university image on student loyalty hence indicating a relationship between the two variables

H2: The data revealed a significant impact of university image on university reputation with the beta value ( $\beta$ ) of 0.694, thereby supporting H2. During enrollment, students observed that their expectations from an institute were at par with the fame or information people spoke highly of the same institute. Therefore, they were in a good position to choose a private Thai university that possessed the recommended attributes. The result of this study is consistent with Panda, et al. (2019), who studied university image in the context of being a competitive advantage and found that university image has an impact on university reputation.

H3: The researcher found a significant influence of functional service quality on student perceived value with the beta value ( $\beta$ ) of 0.458. Thereby, supporting H3; When Thai private



universities address the needs of the students through administrative processes such as creating a favorable learning setting during virtual classes during the pandemic period (covid-19), students interpret the conduct as an acceptable standard of service provision hence influencing them to give positive remarks. The relationship between these two constructs was aligned with the previous empirical research which clarified that functional service quality has a massive impact on students' perceived value (Teeroovengadam et al., 2019).

H4: University image, university reputation, functional service quality, and student perceived value have a significant impact on student satisfaction at the significant level of 0.000, whereby supporting H4. The beta of standardized coefficient ( $\beta$ ) is equal to 0.755 for university reputation, followed by 0.677 for student perceived value, 0.562 for university image, and 0.542 for functional service quality. In terms of university reputation impacting student satisfaction(H4B), the results indicate that the more Thai private universities have favorable academic fame, the more the students are convinced that they made an appropriate choice by selecting that institute. This also implies that though classes are conducted online, these Thai private universities proved to offer better online services than other universities. The result of this study is consistent with Helgesen and Nesset's (2007b) study on the student loyalty account, whereby it was found that university reputation influences student satisfaction.

In the case of student perceived value having a significant impact on student satisfaction(H4D), the findings showed that the more students receive good value in exchange for their time and effort, the more they are satisfied with their universities such that these universities continue to stand out despite the competition from other universities of the same caliber. This study's results are consistent with the study of Lai et al. (2009) on the way quality, value, image, and satisfaction create loyalty. The study found that perceived value influences satisfaction, hence signifying a relationship between the two variables.

In terms of university image having a significant impact on student satisfaction(H4A), the data revealed that Thai private universities create and express value in response to the student's desires which results in their satisfaction. Furthermore, these universities meet students' needs through their international programs, making students satisfied and not regret their decision to enroll in their university. The findings of this study are similar to that of Masserini, et al. (2019). They investigated if the quality of services and institutional image impact students' satisfaction and loyalty in higher education, whereby they found that institutional image was a robust predictor of student satisfaction. Furthermore, the results were also consistent with the study of Alves and Raposo (2010) whereby a model reflecting the influence of image on student satisfaction and loyalty was applied. The findings revealed that the construct most strongly influencing student satisfaction is image.

With regard to functional service quality significantly impacting student satisfaction(H4C), the outcome showed that these Thai private universities improve the functional services that suit

the international programs and the learning experience, such as providing state-of-the-art facilities to assist students in adapting to the curriculum content. In return, the students are satisfied with the services given since it is in the day-to-day operations from which students make appropriate analysis on whether their university is making enough effort to meet their demands or not which could impact satisfaction of students. The results of this study contradict that of Teeroovengadum, et al. (2019), whose findings showed that technical service quality, image, and perceived value impact student satisfaction, but not functional service quality

H5: The researcher found a significant influence of student satisfaction on student loyalty with a beta value ( $\beta$ ) of 0.782. Thereby, supporting H5. The more Thai and international students feel their needs are being considered and addressed, the more they intend to further their studies in the same university and convince others to join the university. The results of this study are consistent with the study of Thomas (2011), who discovered that student satisfaction drives or predicts the loyalty of students.

H6: Students of different universities express a different magnitude of loyalty to their respective universities. With a p-value of  $.339 > .05$ , the hypothesis was not supported, meaning that students from different universities, express their loyalty to their universities differently. Thereby, not supporting H6.

H7: Students of different years of study express different degrees of loyalty to their universities with a p-value of  $.004 < .05$ . Thereby, supporting H7. In addition, the mean differences of the post hoc test showed that second-year students followed by third-year students are more loyal to their universities than those in the first and fourth year. This could be the case because for second-year students, being exposed to their freshman year meant new experiences that made them develop a sense of belonging as they became second-year students, such that they are already excited and have high expectations that a lot is coming their way on campus thereby willing to show compliance by recommending the institute for further studies. Third-year students are also more loyal because, at this juncture, they are at their climax of interest in the school's activities and are proud of the experience they have been exposed to for the two years they spent. Therefore, third-year students are in a good position to cooperate with the university management and give a positive word of mouth to fellow students.

On the contrary, first-year students are third to be loyal since, being in their freshman year, they are in between exploring new experiences and adopting to the new environment and hence, they tend not to be fully decided about committing to the institute's operations. Lastly, fourth-year students are last to be loyal because they get used to the school's system, activities, and management thereby, making these activities unappealing. The results of H7 are illustrated in tables 13 and 14.

## Summary of the Result from Hypotheses Testing

**Table 12**

*Results from Hypotheses Testing*

Hypothesis	Statistical Analysis	Level of Significance	Standardized Beta Values & ANOVA results	Result
H1: UI→SL	SLR	0.000	$\beta = 0.573$	Supported H1
H2: UI→UR	SLR	0.000	$\beta = 0.694$	Supported H2
H3: FSQ→SPV	SLR	0.000	$\beta = 0.458$	Supported H3
H4: UI, UR, FSQ and SPV→SS				
-UI (H4A)	MLR	0.000	$\beta = 0.562$	Supported H4A
-UR (H4B)		0.000	$\beta = 0.755$	Supported H4B
-FSQ (H4C)		0.000	$\beta = 0.542$	Supported H4C
-SPV (H4D)		0.000	$\beta = 0.677$	Supported H4D
H5: SS→SL	SLR	0.000	$\beta = 0.782$	Supported H5
H6: Students of different institutes express different magnitude of loyalty on their institutes	One-way ANOVA	0.339	.339>.05	H6 not supported
H7: Students of different years of study have different magnitude of loyalty on their institutes	One-way ANOVA	0.000	.004<.05	Supported H7

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

**Table 13**

*One-way ANOVA based on students' year of study and loyalty to their institute*

ANOVA - Mean Loyalty					
Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Which year of study are you in?	0.856	3	0.285	4.565	0.004
Residuals	22.252	356	0.063		

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021). P value = 0.004 which is less than .05 (alpha-value), hence the result is significant.

**Table 14***Post hoc test for the year of study and students' loyalty*

Post Hoc Comparisons - Which year of study are you in?						
Groups	Year of Study	Mean Difference	SE	t	p <sub>Tukey</sub>	
1	2	0.13	0.038	3.384	0.004	
	3	0.016	0.035	0.463	0.967	
	1	0.015	0.038	0.389	0.98	
2	4	-0.114	0.038	-3.02	0.014	
	4	-0.116	0.041	-2.838	0.025	
3	4	-0.001	0.037	-0.036	1	

*Note.* Constructed by the author (2021).

## Conclusions

This study aims to identify the impact of university image on undergraduate students' satisfaction and loyalty to Thai private universities offering the international program at the undergraduate level. Empirical data were drawn from 360 Thai and international students enrolled in international programs within the greater Bangkok metropolis and the nearby vicinity. The students' opinions on university image, university reputation, functional service quality, student perceived value, student satisfaction, and student loyalty were analyzed.

The findings show that university trustworthiness and heritage emphasizing campus culture constitute university image. The researcher also found a significant impact of the universities' image on both student satisfaction and their loyalty, with more impact on loyalty than the satisfaction of students. Among the selected variables, 0.782 was the highest coefficient beta value ( $\beta$ ), suggesting that there is a strong impact of student satisfaction on student loyalty. The second highest beta coefficient ( $\beta$ ) is from the impact of university reputation on student satisfaction at 0.755, followed by university image on university reputation at 0.694, student perceived value on student satisfaction at 0.677, university image on student loyalty at 0.573, university image on student satisfaction at 0.562, functional service quality on student satisfaction at 0.542 and functional service quality on student perceived value at 0.458.

Furthermore, the researcher found that students in different years of study showed a different degree of loyalty to their respective universities. In addition, the findings showed that

65% of the students representing 236 respondents did not have international programs experience at the primary level. This means that most students have international program experience at the tertiary level, that gives business advantage to higher learning universities offering international programs.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results from hypothesis one, university image had a moderate impact on students' loyalty. However, since the moderate result was higher than the impact on student satisfaction and therefore was close to a strong impact, the researcher would like to recommend that Thai private universities must ensure that their universities are more trustworthy in terms of dependability and that they embrace their university's heritage such as campus culture. This is to imply that university trustworthiness will enhance students' loyalty to their universities since students will have better international program experience as they are offered quality and convenient services such as introducing an online one-stop-shop by launching a mobile application that enables students to access various on campus services while also initiating a robust student engagement. The management's quick feedback to the students' enquiry must also be made a priority. On the other hand, when students adapt to the campus culture, the adapted way of living will not only be valid for the time that the students are active at the schools but will further be applied and showcased after their campus life hence expressing their loyalty to the respective universities. Shen and Tian (2012) support this argument by stressing that campus culture involves individuality, academic feature, leadership, variety and creativity of which the researcher of the current study identifies such attributes as those that will impact students even when they become alumni.

From the findings of hypothesis two, the university image had strong impact on university reputation. The management teams must maintain a good job of promoting their university image by ensuring a positive reputation through brand assessment whereby a survey should be conducted to analyze the university's standing in the context of what people think about its reliability when addressing students' needs. In addition, the universities must make it an obligation to make sure that there is an increase in the number of graduates employed by various companies in notable fields of expertise. This can be achieved by improving the standards of learning where necessary, for instance, by updating curriculum content to reflect current trends in the industry.

According to hypothesis three results, functional service quality has a moderate impact on student perceived value. The university administrators must ensure that the assistance they give students is well delivered and that students' positive experience should be a priority. In other words, the services must be good enough to ensure that students are satisfied with the services rendered by the university.

Hypothesis 4A revealed that the university image moderately impacted student satisfaction. The management must ensure that the school's academic standard is maintained. Moreover, campus culture must also be favorable to the student's needs.

According to the findings of hypothesis 4B, university reputation had strong impact on student satisfaction, thus, Thai private universities must invest more in advertising. There must be an effort to employ Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) whereby not only one mode or medium of communication should be used. In this case, besides word of mouth, Thai private universities must promote the university's fame by putting ads on social media, web pages, and billboards, to mention a few. Through advertisement, a majority of people will be able to know what the university is all about, starting from the international programs offered, learning environment, and any achievements the university has made to promote the university and what strategies the university has employed to manage the teaching and learning especially during the pandemic.

The outcome of hypothesis 4C testing revealed that there is a moderate impact of functional service quality on student satisfaction. The university management must see to it that their day-to-day operations conform to acceptable standards that will be beneficial to the students. This is to say that the attitude and behavior of administrative staff must be positive when giving service to students. The learning environment and setting must be flexible and convenient for students especially when classes are conducted online to accommodate students' needs. Organizing extracurricular activities would help alleviate boredom and lack of interaction among students.

Results of hypothesis 4D testing indicate that there is a strong impact of student perceived value on student satisfaction. For more positive results, the researcher suggests that Thai private universities must ensure that students receive good value from their education in exchange for their time and effort. In addition, this also means that the students should perceive excellent value for the money they pay for their education.

Findings of hypothesis five testing reveal that there is a strong impact of student satisfaction on student loyalty which could be attributed to the quality of facilities, quality international degree programs, and the university's image. Wireless local area network should be installed in all areas of the university for easy access to the internet.

Hypothesis seven results indicate that students of different years of study have a different degree of loyalty to their universities. The researcher suggests that students' needs must be considered and addressed based on the year of study's perspective; this implies that students' perspective about their institute differ as they move to higher level of study, thus, the university management should organize different activities for each level to satisfy student needs.

### Suggestions for Further Studies

This research investigated the impact of university image on students' satisfaction and loyalty in Thai private universities offering international programs at the undergraduate level. For further studies, the researcher suggests that an investigation should be made on the factors that attract international students to increase the host countries' export market. This comes from an understanding that higher education sector is one of a country's sources of revenue in terms of foreign exchange as it is known that international students pay income in exchange for the education they acquire abroad. Therefore, analysis on how international students can be attracted will be of significant benefit for the host country's economy as well as the universities reputation through increasing global recognition.

Since the international program comprises both local and international students, it is suggested that further studies must be done on how local students and international students differ in their perception of the international program offered in Thai universities.

Furthermore, the researcher suggests that a study should be conducted on exploring views of students in different majors in terms of their loyalty to their universities.

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