

EXPLORING MARKETING TO NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

EXPLORING TARGET MARKETING AT PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES DIRECTED TO
THE NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT POPULATION

by

Connie Christian

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Liberty University, School of Business

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Abstract

Nontraditional Adult Learners exist worldwide. These potential students can improve self-confidence, increase their wages, and improve workforce opportunities with provided education opportunities. This current study explores value proposition within private institutions with the influence of marketing to the nontraditional adult learner. Exploration includes the challenges and constraints the nontraditional student faces and the impact these challenges present. Marketing programs directed to specific populations and the component that the marketing strategy implements for post-secondary educational opportunities.

Key words: Nontraditional Adult Learners (NAL's), diversity, target marketing, bias

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Dedication

This dedication is to a beloved mother, Zetta Mae Chester, who dropped out of high school to marry and begin a family at sixteen years of age. After the death of her husband at an early age forced her to raise four children alone, she set out to continue her education as an adult learner. With these challenges, she continued to maintain employment while she completed her general education diploma. Her sacrifice and unconditional love combined with encouragement, inspiration, and accomplishment of finishing her high school educational degree, instilled in her children the importance of education and knowledge. In success of this academic achievement, additional research acknowledges her accomplishment of being a successful parent and finisher of the path God had for her.

Acknowledgments

Important individuals had a role in making this research possible. Primarily, God allowed this possibility for achievement of a terminal degree. To acknowledge everyone who played a role in the research and academic accomplishments: First, Paul Darl Christian Jr. and our children, who have always encouraged my academic endeavors with love and understanding. Without the support of Tabitha, Israel, Isaiah, and Sarah, I could have never reached this level of academic success.

Secondly, my committee research chair and mentor, Dr. Janet Harrison, and committee members, each of whom have provided encouragement, patient advice, and guidance throughout this research process. Thank you to everyone for all the unwavering encouragement and support. "Looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017, Hebrews 12:2).

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Direct marketing in post-secondary educational systems places focus on student enrollment in higher education institution programs. Success of any business program involves updating programs to align with goals of stakeholders, global markets, and surrounding communities. To maintain higher enrollment levels all business schools' administration must understand competition that challenges institutions. Post-secondary education systems must consider all potential students within the country and not target market to one group.

The purpose of this study was to explore target marketing focus of post-secondary private universities surrounding Charlotte Metropolitan areas. This study examined value proposition for business schools and programs that are influenced by target marketing. The study included research from primary and secondary data collected for graduation rates, retention rates, marketing, and challenges encountered by the nontraditional adult learner. Research investigated marketing directed to the nontraditional learner after high school graduation. This research sought to provide additional information and add to the body of knowledge for future research. The examination process looked at current scholarly literature and used interviewing techniques to better understand marketing and delays in the enrollment of the nontraditional learner. Benefits to this research include enhanced administration understanding of the challenges facing this population group. Research included percentage rates of two post-secondary higher education institutions' graduation rates, retention rates, and dropout rates. Within this population group, factors are examined during the use of live real time interviews with the current student of the nontraditional adult learner. The COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on the study and the percentage rates provided by the institutions administration. The research study provided

beneficial factors directly and indirectly to higher education institutions and their marketing departments.

Background of the Problem

Direct marketing in post-secondary educational systems is directed to high school seniors and not nontraditional adult learners (Crittenden et al., 2020). Recent studies by (Crittenden et al., 2020) note that universities are targeting high school students and neglecting potential nontraditional students, creating a direct impact on enrollment, lowering value proposition, and creating a non-diversified classroom atmosphere for students. After graduation from university programs, an expected relationship develops between graduates and employers that reflects education and training received from educational institutions.

Worldwide, universities target high school students (Goggin et al., 2016). Reasons for attracting high school students near their junior years of high school are to ensure no additional remedial work is necessary and to create a work ethic/goal in students in hopes of more successful graduates. To create a seamless transition from high school to a potential university, remedial work factors must examine remedial work needed for career pathway of success to tertiary education (Goggin et al., 2016).

Universities are educational institutions, but administrative functions operate as a business. This study focused on nontraditional adult learners and examined target marketing at post-secondary educational systems. Research enhanced understanding of value proposition in post-secondary private university communities by investigating this population group. This research incorporated primary and secondary data collected. Interviewing occurred addressing nontraditional adult learners, faculty, and administrative staff. This research is to introduce current information, and to add information to the body of knowledge for all post-secondary

educational systems. Value proposition in universities directs marketing to nontraditional population groups and enhances market potential by innovation and service.

Problem Statement

The general problem to be addressed was the loss of value proposition by the lack of marketing to the nontraditional student population, resulting in lower enrollment, a less diverse education experience, and a less productive competitive marketing strategy (Remenick & Bergman, 2021). Remenick and Bergman (2021) stated institutions that are enhancing the learning classroom experience with nontraditional students increase enrollment, retainment, and graduating percentages and are succeeding in a more diverse population marketing plan (Remenick & Bergman, 2021). Survey findings concluded that nontraditional students learn about college programs through word of mouth, from family, and from colleagues; therefore, recruitment strategies need improvement for adult learners and a more tailored marketing to their intent (Ashford, 2019). Direct neglect of target marketing to this nontraditional population within academic institutions resulted in lower enrollment, less classroom diversity, and continuous decline in competitive marketing strategies, which creates a negative influence in all programs offered (Ashford, 2019). According to Oken-Tatum (2019), universities have overlooked marketing to adult learners. Post-secondary educational institutions should address marketing solutions to reach adult learners (Melchiorre & Johnson, 2017). With increasing numbers of interested adult learners seeking additional education, this is a large untapped market. Furthermore, Sutton (2019) noted that universities failed to advertise to adult learners and focused on high school seniors instead of adult learners. The specific problem to be addressed was the potential loss of value proposition by the lack of marketing to the nontraditional population in post-secondary private universities surrounding Charlotte Metropolitan areas of

North Carolina, resulting in lower enrollment, a continuous decline in market strategies, and less classroom diversity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this flexible design in a single case study was to expand the understanding and highlight reasons behind lost value proposition through not target marketing directly to nontraditional adult learners, and the effect it has on enrollment rates, classroom diversity, and competitiveness in marketing techniques used. This research can enhance marketing programs in colleges and business schools by adding to the body of knowledge for marketing departments (Oken-Tatum, 2019). A flexible design, in a single case study method, was used for evaluation and understanding in qualitative study form. Research methods measured amounts of direct target marketing to nontraditional populations. This research focus measured marketing techniques used by post-secondary marketing departments directed to adult learners. Examining beneficial relationships to private university business schools' marketing departments with primary and secondary data provided strategies put into place for this student population. This study examined nontraditional population challenges and provided primary data that seeks to bring additional knowledge to challenges this population encounters. Research was derived from private universities in Charlotte Metropolitan areas of North Carolina. Existing sample size was small but could be used as an example to other universities, adding new and additional information to educational marketing departments. The larger problem of not target marketing to the nontraditional population was explored through an in-depth study of challenges faced by the adult learner, a combination of immigration compared to national origin work experience for the population, and the diversity factor by focus on students' age factor identity. Focus on diversity of students centered on the participants' ages.

Research Questions

Research questions addressed marketing to a single population, suggesting increased bias in target marketing for universities. Target marketing to high school seniors increased enrollment of a specific age group, creating a gap within classroom diversity. This study was necessary to explore influences that major target marketing has on private university enrollment and challenges the nontraditional student encounters. These questions were exploratory in nature to support discussion.

RQ1. How do university marketers fail to target the nontraditional student population?

RQ2. What challenges do university marketers encounter when marketing to the potential nontraditional student?

RQ3. How do post-secondary education institutions provide support to the nontraditional students either educationally or psychologically?

RQ4. What more can administration or faculty do at post-secondary educational institutions to help the nontraditional adult learner be successful?

These research questions examine elements that create a collective deterrent of college enrollment by adult learners. Answers to these research questions can provide information to administrators at universities exploring additional marketing to a nontraditional population. Nontraditional students learn about college programs from family members, through word of mouth, and from colleagues; upon survey findings recruitment strategies need improvement for the adult learner population, as well as tailor marketing to their intent (Ashford, 2019).

Nature of the Study

In recent years, conversations dealing with marketing and adult learners for student achievement have become a more prevalent topic within national educational systems.

Accountability standards for techniques used by marketing departments within university systems are a passage for successful graduates and higher enrollment; therefore, additional resources include a reinvestment of resources in the university after operational costs. Concepts of adult learners at the university level have become increasingly less prominent in educational systems. This research introduced a research topic of exploring target marketing at private universities directed to nontraditional student population.

Research has noted that educational interest for isolated groups appeared to be on a national agenda but had not been addressed for lifelong learners' model (Lee et al., 2016). This concept resulted in adult literacy education becoming a part of mainstream trend when receiving legal backing within educational systems by the Lifelong Education Act of 2007. One question someone might ask is: Why is marketing so important? At one time, marketing was thought to only benefit a production environment. Production benefit was early marketing philosophy. However, marketing has shifted dramatically, evolving into a significant business function recognized across all organizations and expanding to have a global presence (Lee et al., 2016). Marketing creates a long-lasting relationship between customers and organizations that can continue for years and generations to come.

Significant impacts in marketing techniques have a direct effect on potential students and encourage colleges to help individuals find jobs after graduation. Using correct marketing techniques provides important communication of programs, expanding a global presence within areas or a field of importance (Lee et al., 2016). It can be a pervasive tool across a supply chain market to increase individuals with interchangeable benefits and supply society with an abundance of entrepreneurs. These factors play an essential role in enriching society, serve as an

illustrated key to cross-business function, and have a role in connecting traditional and nontraditional student roles in our everyday communities (Hollensen & Opresnik, 2019).

Marketing serves as a promotional tool that communicates value of goods or services offered by universities. This study looked at why marketing techniques have neglected adult learner and attempts to change any bias within staff and faculty perceptions of nontraditional adult learner students. Data was collected in a pragmatism paradigm, using a single case study, with a flexible design in a qualitative method.

Discussion of Research Paradigms

A research paradigm is a representation of any researcher's worldview and their interpretive view of reality or truth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This understanding allows interjected views of how literature and understanding of problems develop. Paradigms are divided into three basic orientation sections: post-positivism, constructivism, and pragmatism (Creswell & Poth, 2018), these represent a researcher's individual interpretive view on subjects. Post-Positivism can be used in qualitative research that uses a scientific approach. This style of interpretation denotes a lack of belief in an approach of strict cause and effect but instead proposes an outcome that may or may not occur (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Post-positivist researchers project a series of steps from participants and use rigorous methods to collect data and analyze it. This type of framework structure resembles a quantitative approach with use of a problem, posed questions, data collection, results, and production of a conclusion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, a strict positivism framework relates to a single main objective of reality focused within research relating to discover a framework.

Constructivism is a paradigm framework that researchers use with an outlook that reality is determined by everyone. The researcher seeks knowledge to fully understand views of that

reality. This paradigm is an interpretivism approach to a participant's outlook, seeking to understand world views with subjective meaning and understand experiences encountered by participants. Researchers rely on participants' views of situations to form a constructive summarization of positions individuals construct from different situations. Researchers use an interpretive approach with questions that are broad and general. This research draws an interpretive conclusion based on participants' backgrounds that have shaped interpretation of subjective meanings within research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type of worldview is geared towards understanding historical and cultural setting.

Pragmatism paradigm's focus is on current problems rather than views of reality, using any tools available. Qualitative research methods approach educational research by conducting educational research, understanding situational meanings, and placing emphasis on shared meanings that produce possible joint actions that are based on a belief that theories can be a combination of contextual and generalizable situations (Tran, 2017). A pragmatic approach relies on inductive reasoning that can move between induction and deduction, connecting theory and data. This qualitative method of deductive reasoning provides results that allow for additional data that is viewed as incompatible data (Tran, 2017). Research that uses a pragmatism approach is concerned with action and change that can be revisited within appropriate basis of intervening into problems and not just observing problems and hoping for change. A process of building facts and combinations of interventions within an organized structure make this type of investigation an important framework with a pragmatism approach. Pragmatist paradigm's research methodological framework consists of three orientations that include aiming for explanation and prediction, for beneficial interpretation with understanding, and for intervention

and change (Tran, 2017). This has been known as action and change oriented research process (Goldkuhl, 2017).

Pragmatism paradigm was used in this research and was intended for clarification in this paper. Pragmatism approach allowed for inductive reasoning and investigation to develop an explanation for occurrence. It allowed for problems to be examined and an approach to produce action and change to be devised when information is revisited. This allowed current information to be added with body of knowledge and additional focus to be on problems with using tools to create intervention and change. An investigative framework allowed for building of fact-using data and comparison of enrollments to allow for an appropriate look at marketing techniques used at private universities (Tran, 2017). Findings and conclusions substantiated how this impacts marketing practices and distribution techniques directed to nontraditional populations within post-secondary learning institutions. A pragmatism approach was the best choice for this type of information to be collected and used by university marketing departments. This pragmatism approach allowed research to be conducted with a problem-solving approach to seek answers and reasons as to why university marketing departments do not promote and target adult learners. Research questions provided answers to specific questions that made up the basis of reasoning to explain challenges and promote equal marketing techniques. Questions are designed to promote a broad answer for an exploratory purpose.

Research questions included an investigation of the challenges faced and different marketing strategies used for nontraditional learners. This data collected was compared to target marketing strategies used for high school students. In development of these research questions, consideration was given to maintain a non-biased mindset and develop informative seeking questions that provide clear answers pertaining to fair marketing practices towards the

nontraditional population. Questions produced answers by primary data, providing sufficient attention to marketing department leadership within private university settings. Direct information substantiates value proposition in current strategies used to be a competitive source for universities.

Discussion of Design

Other case study designs are an option for distinct types of research. These include the narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, and the grounded study of methodologies. However, the single case study in a qualitative research design was more appropriate for developing an understanding of social phenomena that are related to value proposition and helped with identifiable boundaries (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The narrative design is based on events that happen in a chronological order and provides a collection of stories. These stories are from specific organizations and occurrences that provided an explanation of an individual's life and the individual's experience. These story collections include data that was gained from observations, documents, experiences, and pictures. The information can be collected from a single individual or small numbers of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, this narrative design lacks the focus needed to address complex problems or produce the associated outcomes from the problem.

Phenomenology design describes a connection that all the participants share or have in common. These experiences center around a specific concept or phenomenon and focuses on an overall experience of a feeling, such as grief (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenology design allows for the researcher to focus on phenomena that are difficult to observe or measure. Value position is directed to the additional education that is attractive and beneficial to potential students. Phenomenology is focused on the experience. This research allows for outcomes from

the research that needs to be discovered and certain tendencies and impulses are not conditions or the underlying essence of the research consisting of value proposition and the nontraditional learner (Wenn, 2019).

Ethnography is a research method defined to focus on interpretation of learned patterns of values, beliefs, and behaviors, based on a culture sharing group of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher incorporates individuals' day to day lives and is a suitable method for investigation of human phenomena. The ethnography design is a research method that involves intuitive knowledge acquired in a process that flows into one another from contexts of significance and is constantly reflective and uses interdisciplinary dialogue (Müller & Brailovsky, 2021). The ethnography design is best used when focusing on a cultural group with understanding of their beliefs and would not be beneficial in providing appropriate outcomes for the potential nontraditional student.

Grounded theory is seeking to discover a theory or action that is shaped by views and generated from common experiences from a single experience description. These interactions are shaped by the participants and this practice seeks to generate a process or action to be taken (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Grounded theory gives the opportunity to develop other theories from the basis of samples and populations of the current models in literature, which promotes a new study form the grounded theory design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, the grounded theory design was not the most appropriate design because this study is not focused on explanation of a process or a theory.

The single case study was the most appropriate choice for this research study because this method helps incorporate practical and accessible interpretive methods in qualitative research. This structural analysis brings concepts together in a comprehensive pragmatic approach that

bridges gaps between traditional marketing techniques directed to nontraditional adult learners (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These interpretive methods utilize a unique pragmatic approach that can bring an exploration into marketing fields and improve pedagogy with exposition of key issues and concepts (Hackley, 2020). This single case study is helpful in accumulating meaningful evidence and helps researchers engage in more applied research for details in an in-depth accumulation of data. This method is beneficial with descriptions of individual's experience, events that happened, or activities that occurred (Ledford & Gast., 2018). Parallels within research produces time constraints in finishing research for documentation; therefore, a single case study best aligned with this research method that does not hinder time constraint factors and produced an investigative analysis to draw findings and conclusions.

Discussion of Method

The quantitative method (fixed) approach has the ability to examine and provide data determining a cause-and-effect relationship associated with the problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The quantitative approach would be useful in finding the relationship between the nontraditional student and the graduation rate. However, this approach does not consider the experiences, reasons, and challenges encountered by the nontraditional learner. The quantitative approach relies heavily on linear attributes, statistical analysis testing theories, and measurements within the collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2019). This method would also be useful in the study of primary and secondary data collected in the comparison of statistical analysis in post-secondary diversity levels. However, this research study was concerned with the experiences of and influence on the potential students that affect value proposition by marketing departments in educational institutions; therefore, this research demanded the qualitative

research method for complex social phenomena. These social phenomena are the experiences encountered by nontraditional students to be applied to their decisions made.

This study was conducted with a qualitative (flexible) design method. Specifically, a single case study design was used. A qualitative method was the best approach to use in this research concerning adult learners, allowing for exploration in educational fields, including schematics and diagrams to aid in understanding key issues and concepts (Hackley, 2020). A qualitative method approach helped with abstract concepts encountered during a single case study. Using this method was helpful in an academic setting to provide clear interactions of nontraditional students and main techniques used with traditional students, with interpretations of qualitative data that is presumed. This qualitative research structure helped bring qualitative marketing research into a discovery and understanding phase for researchers. This information can assist universities with value proposition examination needed to maintain current data, as well as with understanding attitudes and challenges of adult learners (Maison et al., 2019). This qualitative research design allowed for a natural setting, allowing researchers to be a key instrument in data collection. Complex reasoning that requires a through inductive and deductive logic within patterns and categories concluded that a qualitative design approximates this research (Maison et al., 2019).

The mixed method research approach is used in the attempts to improve quality of evidence that has been investigated in the research study. Mixed research methods use a combination of both qualitative and quantitative design. This approach to gathering information is done by a combination of descriptive statistics and uses a descriptive and thematic interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researchers use this method to collect data and analyze data, using a numerical scale to ensure researcher confidence (Creswell & Creswell,

2018). However, data collected would not take into consideration the reasoning and experiences that delayed the nontraditional student from entering a post-secondary education institution immediately after high school graduation. Nontraditional students may need to complete remedial classes before entering programs. The data collected would encounter graduation rates from high school students and not consider these remedial classes. Therefore, a mixed method would not be flexible enough to consider the entrance levels of the nontraditional student.

Discussion of Triangulation

The triangulation used within this research includes research concepts that are based on literature that relate to this research study. This literature demonstrates that universities target market to high school seniors and do not sufficiently market to nontraditional adult learners. Triangulation works with a flexible design with a qualitative research method that uses multiple concepts. The triangulation of data collection considers time constraints, which aids a framework for interviewing multiple participants, allowing for a supply of multiple levels for aggregate, interactive interviews, and collectivity of data to produce concrete data. An investigator triangulation allows for involvement of multiple participants to secure different viewpoints and research behaviors of adult learners. Considering different elements of research employs research strategies to provide examination of data collection. Strategies include audio recordings, interviews, surveys, and questionnaires. Data collected from universities on age of enrolled students is documented to examine validity of information pointing to target market (Rooshenas et al., 2019). This research incorporated a single case study design with a context focus of direct data collection. Using a flexible design allowed for data collection with ability to intervene during collection, reduced any sensitivity of personal topics encountered within a research phase,

and allowed for any changes during research to ensure a researcher adapted during emerging results.

Summary of the Nature of the Study.

This research examined marketing techniques used by universities that target market to high school seniors and do not sufficiently market to nontraditional adult learners. This problem had the necessary amounts of information needed to provide conclusions, primarily with a qualitative method approach. Data collected while doing this research was confidential and produced new, uncharted information using specific methods to combine new and existing information to develop a conclusion to a researcher's investigation. The single case study method allowed for an analysis which made it possible for researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of situations and meanings that involve this population (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017).

This information gleaned from case studies can have a direct impact and influence on administration's policies, procedures, and university branding and can produce future research within post-secondary marketing departments. A case study methodology brings clarification to aspects of the problem statement. This useful information that embeds data within this case study aims to describe features and phenomena that individuals have experienced and are currently experiencing. It also allows key components of value proposition, including human and environmental changes, to be included in marketing strategies at universities. This direct informational source includes primary data drawn from confidential matters that affect certain population groups and their ability to share information, in combination with obtaining permission for collection from a variety of different informational sources (Pauluzzo, 2020). Research is drawn from a pragmatic standpoint and is researched by a flexible design with a qualitative method approach that uses a single case study method. Collected information is used

to draw recommendations from research questions created and does include findings from an examination process of the problem statement of why universities target market to high school seniors and do not sufficiently market to nontraditional adult learners. In research collected, main information obtained brings attention to key concepts of neglecting certain population groups by university marketing departments and brings consideration to nontraditional adult learners within educational systems. A change in marketing techniques to specific individuals therefore directly impacts marketing departments, addressing bias issues that have a direct effect on enrollment and value proposition created by the loss of this student population by neglecting to market to this population group.

Conceptual Framework

This research study explores marketing by universities that target market high school seniors to encourage enrollment from this population. Target marketing faces challenges to sufficiently market to nontraditional adult learner, resulting in lower enrollment, lower value proposition, and a less diverse educational experience. Establishing processes to focus on continuous improvement of universities within marketing departments needs to increase for the adult learner. According to Gleaton, Board Chairman Milton Irvin of South Carolina State University, universities must do a better job when it comes to marketing and communication across different regions. This includes contacting school superintendents and contacting school guidance counselors being key main key to marketing universities (Gleaton, 2019). This marketing strategy is target marketing to high school students and neglects nontraditional adult learners. This study was conducted with a flexible design using qualitative methods in a single case study research design.

This research included concepts based on literature relating to universities target marketing to high school seniors. Universities are neglecting marketing to nontraditional adult learners. Universities worldwide generally market to high school students (Goggin et al., 2016). The fundamental purpose in attracting high school seniors is related to students' performance in high school and universities' desire to attract students that assure higher graduation numbers (Goggin et al., 2016).

A seamless nature of transition from high school to university provides successful pathways for students that have higher grade point averages (Goggin et al., 2016). However, the nontraditional adult learner is often a neglected population. Nontraditional adult learners do not have similar lifestyles that younger students share. Therefore, universities focus on youth-centric lifestyles and design campuses for younger students. An additional problem exists that focuses on merit accumulated relating to credit hour system instead of gained experience and skills acquired, resulting in a barrier for adult learners (Chen, 2017). Universities credit hour factors result in the nontraditional adult population rejecting enrollment and getting frustrated with educational systems.

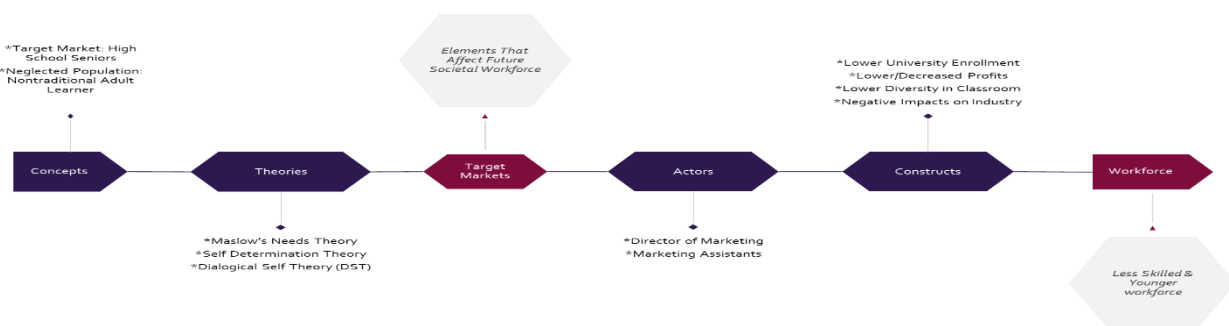


Figure 1. Framework diagram.

Figure 1 shows a flow of information processed by nontraditional student encounters versus students who attends a university directly out of high school. Nontraditional adult learners can face a variety of different challenges before receiving an acceptance letter from a university.

Theories relating to self-determination provide motivation for employees to seek different employment after graduation (Chen, 2017). Nontraditional students can complete remedial course work before enrollment in a university at community colleges while employers pay a portion of tuition. A marketing department that neglects marketing to nontraditional population ensures a bias against nontraditional students and does not provide enough information needed for these students to seek opportunities to obtain a degree.

University marketing directly impacts both potential students and the educational system's competition. Post-secondary educational systems desire students to be successful and provides success stories for branding representation of a university (Chen, 2017). This neglect of marketing to nontraditional students impacts workforce and available skilled laborer. However, with changing societal and environmental demands, successful employment requires continued education. Individuals with little to no education will need to continue to compete in evolving job markets.

Based upon the findings of this research, the literature was consistent with the concepts listed. The conceptual content stated insufficient marketing by higher educational institutions. According to the participants' statements during the research study, it became clear that marketing of the program was profoundly by word of mouth. The thematic findings were also consistent with the research connected to the literature assumptions. These thematic findings included three main theories projected in the research study prior to the actual findings: Dialogical Self-Theory, Maslow's Need Theory, and Self-Directed learner (SDL). The actors of the conceptual findings were found to overlap within positions and job duties at the institution. The main actors that contributed the primary data were the student participants that voluntarily gave data and personal information representative of what the nontraditional adult learner

encounters. The administration provided the secondary data to be used in future research. The constructs of the research had findings opposite of the expectation from the initial research.

COVID-19 was the main construct that interfered with the research by changing the normal data of class attendance, enrollments, and student challenges. Therefore, later research is recommended to collect additional data as the trends of challenges change with time.

Concepts

Research concepts are based on current research studies. Literature consists of information on universities target marketing to high school seniors and not sufficiently marketing to nontraditional adult learners. Universities and community colleges worldwide target students with a higher-grade point average or an outstanding student athlete (Goggin et al., 2016). The purpose of attracting recent high school graduates is to ensure a greater number of students enroll who are more prepared for post-secondary learning procedures and educational learning styles, with the goal of producing a successful university representation of graduates (Goggin et al., 2016).

Universities desire a smooth transitional period from high school to university, and employees seek to provide support for these students (Goggin et al., 2016). Universities in the United States often neglect diverse populations, one such population being nontraditional adult learners. Universities consider high school graduates academically ready for college life and focus on this lifestyle (Chen, 2017). College campus designs are for a younger traditional student. This aspect of living in a college dorm interests young high school graduates seeking to leave home, and the merits of credit hour systems give these students a benefit factor over nontraditional student (Chen, 2017).

Results in marketing techniques have negative future industry impacts on societal workforce, while higher volume of immigration heavily influences working job positions that require less skill and education. Therefore, to override these effects, a more skilled worker is needed (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019). These campus designs do not differentiate for adult learners and family responsibilities. This design correlates with educational age levels university marketing departments target and attract. While immigration continues to grow, and newer immigrants do not have any education or technical skills needed to fulfill job openings (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019), decreases in skilled laborers rise and universities continue to design their campuses more in line with younger population (Chen, 2017).

Fast-growing immigration produces fewer skilled younger workforce. This generation does not promote a culturally aged, diversified workforce with technical skills. According to Goggin (2016), attracting students to enroll in a university depends on targeting high school students and attracting these students in the beginning of their high school years to encourage enrollment and academic success. A transition directly from high school to the university involves less enrollment in remedial classes and provides a pathway to become a successful university graduate (Goggin et al., 2016). United States universities often cater to mostly younger generations' lifestyles, displayed by on-campus activities and sports. Based on literature research related to this study that consists of universities' target market to high school seniors, marketing bias by not sufficiently marketing to nontraditional adult learners is prevalent.

The essential purpose of attracting students during high school is to address any remedial classes they may need before college, to instill confidence, and to nurture aspirations (Goggin et al., 2016). Transition for adult learners is not seamless and often requires remedial classes for students to be successful in a transitional phase from a working world to a classroom setting,

while students continue to work and go to school (Goggin et al., 2016). University designs are for younger student. An invisible aspect of undergraduate diversity focuses on merits of a credit hour system, which is a barrier for the adult learner (Chen, 2017).

Results in target marketing techniques have negative future industry impacts on societal workforce. With higher volumes of immigration heavily influences workforce diversity is prevalent. Therefore, to override these effects, a higher level of skilled workers is required (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019). There is a direct comparison with increasing educational levels in adult learners and university marketing departments. Assuming this holds in coming decades, higher skilled individuals are declining in the workforce (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019).

Fast-growing, less skilled, younger workforce does not promote a culturally aged, diversified workforce. According to Goggin et al. (2016), universities target high school students, and a critical purpose of attracting these students at the beginning of their high school years is to instill confidence and nurture aspirations. A seamless transition from high school to university life provides pathways of success to tertiary education (Goggin et al., 2016). In the United States, marketing is often directed to youth-centric lifestyles (Goggin et al., 2016). Though universities have developed online programs to include nontraditional students.

Institutions offer a variety of programs, and of these usually fall into five overall categories. These categories are dependent on individual institutions, available majors, and the area of study that interests the student. These are subgroups of concentrations, majors, minors, certifications, and a combination of programs. In various degrees, programs are titled differently at various institutions, depending on the concentration. For this analysis, emphasizing a general category of certification, technical, associates, bachelor's, or a higher degree will suffice.

In some cases, university policies restrict sharing of information on program concentrations, courses, or levels of participation, while graduation percentages within programs are eliminated or withheld from research data. Marketing departments at universities play an essential role in boosting enrollment in each of these programs during their initial sales presentation at marketing events. An example of marketing includes fair events held yearly at high schools, community colleges, and community-organized events. In a recent survey, 54 educators (66.7% of those surveyed) stated external selling or events assisted in enrollment in their school's program (Spiller et al., 2020). Other student populations (33.3%) are derived from location, hierarchy, reputation, affordability, acceptance, specialization, or friend association.

Transitional programs support adult learners in seeking a desirable college education. These programs find it essential to understand adult learners' experiences and perspectives on education and self-perception (Karmelita, 2018). In Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Cross, 1991), a study noted experiences of five adult learners in a similar transitional program, which created support systems that were essential to their success. They depended on these programs as a support system. This study indicated that a formed relationship created a framework to highlight barriers such as technology difficulty. These support programs enhance the students' self-confidence with training classes (Karmelita, 2018).

Theories

Theories associated with nontraditional adult learners can fit into levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This theory focuses on career pathways on five diverse levels, much as Maslow's hierarchy of needs works on five levels: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Schulte, 2018). Theories that best describes nontraditional adult learners can embark on career pathways in five distinct levels. Maslow's Hierarchy Theory is based on

five levels of needs, but studies compare and analyze career pathways based on similar concepts associated with a pyramid. This pyramid from basic to complex is (1) physiological needs, (2) safety needs, (3) love and belonging, (4) esteem, and (5) self-actualization. These five levels fulfill basic needs from bottom to top, proceeding upward in complexity, which suggests their needs will dwindle as individuals accomplish levels. Research pathway begins with completing high school diploma or general education diploma (GED), which can be considered to fulfill level one of the pyramid. During an individual's lifetime, a person may change jobs multiple times for varied reasons, including to attain a better work environment or pay increase, because of a change in geographical location, or to promote a change in their career pathway that provides better work opportunities or promotions and requires higher credentials (Schulte, 2018). This is comparable to the pyramid framework in level three (love and belonging), or feelings for individual of achievement being beneficial for that individual. Adult learners can fit into any of these levels from most basic level to proceeding upward.

The Dialogical Self Theory (DST) is a theory that has two notions of self and dialogue together to build a bridge between individuals and society. This theory refers to internal processes of an individual's mind and impact individuals have on current societal workforce, allowing adult learners to study self as a society of 'I-positions' to consider population, stimulated, and renewed by individual students (Meijer & Hermans, 2018). DST represents a Self-Confrontation Method and asks individuals what they find essential and meaningful to themselves in their expected future. This method plays an explicit influential role in their conception of DST, which assumes self conceives a "society of mind" or embodies the I-position relationships and can shift or contrast from situations or positions within a cooperative relationship (Wijzen & Hermans, 2020). This theory projects that everyone adds value to their

self and social society through their interconnections, and their experiences contribute to a common conceptual framework by including information from those experiences.

Another theory noticed is self-determination theory. This theory is essential in education constructs for individuals to pursue personal acquired motives and incorporates psychological needs that have associated popular stigma attached to a position (Bernhardt, 2018). With competence and relatedness to theories, marketers have found an association with adult learners and essential needs are pursued by educational endeavors (Bernhardt, 2018). Nontraditional students have an elevated level of desire to achieve a substantial education to overcome challenges—theories associated with describing this desire based on theories researched. To be successful, adult learners must understand reasons for pursuing their education later in life. Certain behaviors and target marketing can have a direct impact on society (Padelford, 2017).

This research includes effects within societal community and shared in university classrooms. Marketing departments are responsible for advertisements of products and services. Marketers choose marketing tools and techniques to distribute information. Self-determination theory combines an individual's personality with their motivation and identifies their psychological needs. This inherent initiative-taking tendency evolves into a dominant role of intrinsic motivational individual behavior and becomes the focus (Wang et al., 2019).

Actors

University marketing department assistants have a direct link to students they are attempting to attract. Marketing directors are in direct contact with administrative personnel to make leadership decisions which corresponds with university branding (Wang et al., 2019). Target marketing can determine diversity within student enrollment of North Carolina private universities and serves as a link to channel direct marketing to high schools. This link provides

information to universities concerning in what demographical areas marketing fairs should be located (Trinity College, 2017). Marketing director's responsibilities include development and execution of integrated marketing plans. This plan consists of communicating projects to other staff campus-wide (Trinity College, 2017). Marketing assistants follow instructions from marketing directors to ensure the university's culture and branding is maintained (Nkhoma, 2020). This information is corresponded to staff and marketing department assistants to match students with the correct institutional culture, seeking those students who aspire to a university culture (Nkhoma, 2020).

Constructs

The constructs include using a selected target marketing population to focus toward, this produces a bias target market by post-secondary institutions impacting enrollment. Insufficient enrollment automatically creates a decrease in class diversity and increases a significant competitive challenge questioning value proposition for stakeholders. Marketing has a direct effect on enrollment numbers, and potential differentiation of nontraditional adult learners considering post-secondary educational opportunities leads to assumptions of biased target marketing by post-secondary institutions.

Colleges consider diversity as a particular ethnicity or race. However, diversity is considered within an age group bracket that is discriminate. Selective colleges have binary variables that equal one for a particular race group of students and will equal to zero otherwise (Karikari & Dezhbakhsh, 2019). Educational programs marketing to students helps increase more enrolled students, therefore increasing market shares (Veletsianos et al., 2017).

Furthermore, a lack of multicultural competence in classrooms exacerbates difficulties. Expectations of understanding broader social, economic, and political contexts has a cultural

influence effect on a diverse student population (Weinstein et al., 2004). Therefore, lower enrollment numbers create less value proposition for a university. Constructs include lower university enrollment, which impacts the university reputation and branding and affects competitiveness within educational programs and services. Direct marketing helps gain more enrolled students and increases market shares (Veletsianos et al., 2017).

Higher education markets are a basis of college selection process. Substantial amounts of this process can be attributed to timing, marketing segmentation, influential persons, geographical location, and ability level of prospective student. These attributes correlated with high initial recruitment expense must consider proper research relies on primary market segmentation to target. Loss of retention and student satisfaction are significant factors to universities. Any loss of revenue attributed to unfavorable word of mouth can impact opinions of potential students, consumer behavior, and socioeconomic factors that contribute to loss in value proposition (Goodrich et al., 2020). Implication for marketers choosing and enrolling students in college provide this interactive social platform (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2016). Furthermore, a lack of multicultural competence in classrooms exacerbates difficulties. These expectations of understanding broader social, economic, and political context have a cultural influence effect on a diverse student population (Weinstein et al., 2004).

The constructs go along with the assumptions of the research study that participants were truthful in depicting their personal opinions and not those of another regarding the provided situation. To provide a safe environment for participant to express their true opinions, specific parameters were taken to ensure that anonymity and confidentiality are preserved for each participant (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

Relationships Between Concepts, Theories, Actors, Constructs

Relationships between concepts, theories, actors, and constructs flow between graduate students, jobs, and employers based on higher productivity by skilled worker within workplaces. Relationship satisfaction between job satisfaction and adult learners are noticed on many job sites, and nontraditional adult learners have better behavior (Wang et al., 2019). Selective target marketing directed to high school senior is counterproductive for universities and societal workforce markets. Theories have been researched and brings attention to self-fulfillment of nontraditional students. These theories include Maslow's Need Theory, Dialogical Self Theory (DST), and self-determination theory.

Each of these theories reaches a transformational moment within individuals, who set a self-determination goal for accomplishment. With this self-transformation, becoming a leader within one's self-fulfillment is a driving factor in producing a higher levels of gratification and worth (Wang et al., 2019). Individuals serving as main actors within direct marketing aspect included directors of marketing and their assistants. These individuals make decisions to target market students to fulfill enrollment quotas for universities. Projected target marketing is known to produce higher enrollment with less cost. Constructs are a direct factor from target marketing, creating bias against nontraditional adult learners. These effects of bias have long lasting effects on a university.

Summary of the Research Framework.

This research included concepts based on literature relating to universities employing target marketing strategies that seek high school students rather than nontraditional adult students. This research explored value proposition of marketing departments at higher educational institutions, as well as marketing bias that neglects to market sufficiently to all

individuals, such as the nontraditional population. Universities worldwide generally target needs to high school students (Goggin et al., 2016). The fundamental purpose in attracting high school seniors is related to students' performance in high school and projecting a successful graduate, thereby building a university's reputation (Goggin et al., 2016).

Definition of Terms

The following terms are considered operational terms used during this study:

Bias. Seeking to identify strategic behaviors and gain insight to improve outcomes within a particular population (Bergeron, 2016). Attributing favoritism to a selected group can significantly contribute to a marketing bias against adult learners.

Diversity. Diversity associated with education maintains a combination of five major categories: socioeconomic status, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, and age (Mitchell, 2016). Challenged educators are more effective in teaching and find more effective ways to accommodate these diversities in a classroom.

Nontraditional Adult Learners (NALs). Nontraditional students are defined as being over 25 years old and not having completed high school. According to the National Center for Education, (NALs) nontraditional adult learners represent 38.2% of postsecondary population (Chen, 2017). This contrasts with the traditional student, who lives on campus, enrolls full-time, and receives the university's attention.

Target Marketing. Strategies used in marketing to recognize similarities and differences in the population of students, having a clear differentiation of demonstrating an ordinary brand personality producing a successful outcome of positioning (Rutter et al., 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions dealing with any educational institution include the educational institutions being equally open and accessible to everyone who wishes to further their education. However, this may not necessarily be true for adult learners. Potential nontraditional students seeking to attend a university may have a lack of knowledge of the currently offered programs. The admission process is selective regarding prospective students. This process at universities uses a consistent method of comparing standardized tests, grade point averages, high school transcripts, recommendation letters, interviews, and essays (Posecznick, 2017). Universities use this process to help an institution determine prospective students considered worthy to attend college. This process creates heated public debates (Posecznick, 2017).

The public does not view higher education institutions as a business. However, areas in these institutions operate as a business. Higher enrollment contributes to additional funding for expenses occurred during operational process. Colleges market and advertise with hopes of increasing enrollment. Institutions are marketing to survive within a marketplace of education (Posecznick, 2017).

Universities compete with other institutions, and admissions staff are relied upon to fill empty seats to maintain higher enrollment. Potential students seek financial options and affordable programs for enrollment. Although students grade point average and test scores factor into an acceptance process of universities, student's individual preference is a determining factor. Mediocre institutions and less-selective colleges are contingent on a student's life goals. Universities focused on getting the most successful student have better outcomes for student success and university graduation rates (Posecznick, 2017).

Limitations

Limitations in this research study may include universities not keeping accurate records of enrollments related to target marketing used at high schools. Universities may be hesitant to share data and information with the researcher, creating a gap in gathering reliable data. The university's administrative structure could delay or object to granting access to data or interviewing employees and distributing surveys, which could be a limitation to the research. However, a confidentiality form signed provided assurances of confidentiality of specifics from where or from whom the data was collected.

Obtaining and sharing of data can only be achieved as the researcher if universities allow this process, secondary data used in research if necessary. The university's data provided enrollment and retention rates by following state's public records of enrollment. This data should also highlight characteristics of graduation rates of students. These factors should provide information on age of prior enrolled students. Also, marketing departments should share information on target marketing aspects of marketing contributing to branding of a university. A potential weakness is obtaining approval for sharing of data from each university is necessary, and the researcher needs permission for primary information. This confidentiality form provided assurance of not sharing specific details where the information was obtained; however, this study provides the universities current records of graduation and retention rates in comparison to age brackets for tracking the marketing process prior to and during this current pandemic.

Replacement in universities with data access system equipment will create a system to maintain continuous records during the COVID-19 pandemic. Public records provide impacts the pandemic has on enrollment numbers. Therefore, previous years' data needs to be analyzed. An online seminar will show how institutions can stay connected by achieving high records of

enrollment and retention even during COVID-19 pandemic (Conway/PRNewswire, 18 September, 2020). An established data access system allows continued tracking of enrollment reporting information during uncertain times.

Delimitations

Due to time constraints within this research study, numerical amounts of each individual's program enrollment may not be accurate. This includes organization's nontraditional learners' participation. Collaboration is necessary to reach boundaries. The interviewing process combined with a questionnaire was distributed and collected with time to process data and record outcomes. The scope of research included, at minimum, two nonprofit universities and thirty individuals interviewed. This number may be higher until saturation has been reached. This allowance for six different universities to include in this study provided a comparison of data and a comparison of marketing techniques used.

This data correlates with enrollment and retention data on students presently attending a university. Private universities are open to public data. Therefore, information may not be readily available for sharing, and permission has been obtained for specific information to be included in this study.

Significance of the Study

This research examined data gathered by specific methods used to bring a theory to these research questions and conduct an analysis of marketing techniques used by universities that target high school seniors and not nontraditional adult learners. This single case study method allowed for data to gain an in-depth understanding of situations and basic meanings involved in them (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Information gathered adds to the body of knowledge from

other higher-level education institutions. University marketing departments can have access to policies and procedures used, as well as impacts by future change after examination of research.

The methodology used by a case study design provides pertinent information about an individual's reasons and direct causes in delay in returning for additional education. This study provides vital information from nontraditional adult learners, which is comparable with experiences other traditional students have encountered. These components allow administrative departments to analyze societal impacts on students based on environmental, economic, or societal class combination. Information collected from various sources produced data within a geographical area (Pauluzzo, 2020). This data can conclude research questions and provide valuable information to universities that target high school graduates and do not market to nontraditional adult learners. In data collection and obtained results brings attention to problem of neglect by universities' marketing departments not considering nontraditional adult learner in marketing for educational systems.

Reduction of Gaps in the Literature

The research study of examining data and reasoning of a nontraditional student in respect to why education did not occur directly after high school graduation may exist. This study aids in understanding reasoning a potential student considers when interested in furthering their education. This decision to further their education is associated with human maturity or need. A narrative guide of individual participants interviewed was noted within this study. In recent studies with university students, career choice was associated with a negative decision making and self-efficacy related to anxiety. Students that participated in this study demonstrated a positive effect with associational outcomes of influential practical implications of decisions made. Identified practical implications include daily life experiences of these students. These

experiences have a direct impact on their decision-making process. Additional associated career choices are impacted by experiencing anxiety, affecting social support system and self-esteem, both of which are related to negative career choices. Emotional and interindividual differences influence decisions and indicate a connection with nontraditional adult learners (Park et al., 2018). Gaps in literature are related to each individual's personal experience and reasoning behind their choice. Validity in subjective reasoning in career choices aids in nontraditional students experiencing anxiety by external influences. These factors link outcome expectations, combined with increased maturity levels, low self-esteem, low social support, and outside influences have a direct impact on nontraditional adult and decision to return to school to seek a degree. Reasons for returning for a degree associated within universities marketing techniques have yet to be explored. Although nontraditional adult learners have varied reasons why they did not enter a university setting directly after high school, additional research provides data, adds to the body of knowledge, and provides marketing departments with insight to marketing techniques for future higher educational institutions.

Implications for Biblical Integration

Biblical perspective of marketing to future generations of leaders is vital to economic business transactions. Christians are faced with contemporary issues daily that may lead to unethical behavior. Therefore, marketing has a responsibility to advertise products and services to an audience of their choosing with using direct marketing techniques. Certain behaviors and target marketing can have a direct impact on society (Paddleford, 2017). This research includes effects within a societal community and within university classrooms.

For a Christian, everyday businesses should conduct operation as in 2 Corinthians 5: 11-14, which states that a Christian should avoid opportunities to be prideful for self-gain, nor

should they be prideful in their appearance or achievements, being humble and serious in all endeavors (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017, 2 Corinthians 5:11-14). These scriptures speak of love of Christ who knew man should sow after flesh or fleshly gain. Marketers should strive to be a representation of God in all dealings. Relationships between Christians and a businessperson presents a symmetrical relationship. These relationships include accounting and finance, management, marketing, and in educational aspect of training next generational leaders. Marketing especially can contribute to developing behaviors that are deforming behaviors. These types of behaviors encourage consumer society to seek pleasure or desires instead of ethical behavior. However, Christians consecrated to God should avoid neutralizing tactics that lower standards or may grant individuals to be an exception to principles of ethical right and wrong (Paddleford, 2017).

Potential students consider their friends' choices when they are considering which university to attend for educational purposes, and marketers strive to pursue certain individuals to enroll in their universities. Christian marketers must remember ethical code and biblical representation they project when marketing to ensure institutional continuity and what an institution is able to offer. Unethical practices include fixing their prices for a candidate, false advertising giving dishonest information, and making dishonest promises (Hawkins & Cocanougher, 2018). A Christian in business should not entertain an idea of utilization of profit or enrollment maximization with dishonest practices or unethical behavior.

Benefit to Business Practice and Relationship to Cognate

Research has shown that universities employ target marketing directed to high school students and do not sufficiently market to nontraditional adult learners. Research focuses on older individuals that expand their knowledge in education. Christian leadership needs to be

pursued in the workplace and many times adult learners can have this relational process in the pursuit of a common purpose. A main common purpose for a Christian is a mission of pointing other individuals to Christ for salvation. This process should be applied in business and expectations to follow Jesus in obedience to His commandments. To fulfill these accomplishments, community leaders and business leaders need to support both the mission and process of obedience. This is essential to a Christians identity within communities, businesses, and educational systems (Patterson, 2017). This research concludes that adult learners need to be included within target marketing processes at universities. This inclusion allows for an older individual to achieve their goals through further education, within a workplace, and within the mission every Christian should wish to accomplish. In this hostile business world, a goal to love and to bear fruit (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017, John 15:12-17) will strengthen foundational values related to accomplishment of identifying Christ's love in the business world and educational systems for all ages and communities. This supports roles of business marketing through value proposition.

The cognate is marketing and is in direct relationship to business schools across the country and their marketing departments. Target marketing is strategically planning to market according to individual segments, therefore increasing marketing share. Neglected segments will not obtain additional results in a more dominate market segment. Within a university setting, this creates lower enrollment and produces a less diverse classroom experience.

Summary of the Significance of the Study.

This research builds on the body of knowledge within higher education institutions to consider marketing and its impact on future social work environments. Direct marketing to high school seniors seems to produce more of a desirable outcome. However, this research proposes

that implementing target marketing at private universities directed to high school students neglects the nontraditional population. This topic looks at outcomes of marketing techniques directed to high school students and a need for university classrooms to have diversity within an age bracket. The significance of this study includes outlining existing gaps in literature, combining biblical integration that can be in a business world for Christians. A key point of value proposition is structure of marketing strategies.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The research topic is a single case study of implementation of target marketing at private universities directed to high school students, neglecting nontraditional student populations. This topic looks at outcomes of marketing techniques directed to high school students and neglecting needs for university diversity within a classroom experience that adult learners can provide. Therefore, coercive marketing structures need to strengthen arguments for foundational marketing techniques and essential identity within larger communities (Patterson, 2017).

Studies have identified biased practices in higher education marketing departments and observed performance problems within student selection and evaluation scores. These biases influence classroom learning experiences and selection processes. With a rise in nontraditional students going back to seek a degree at higher educational institutions, decision-making focus for marketing departments should incorporate nontraditional students. These students are goal-driven, financially independent, and a fast-growing population, with over half of university students today being 25 years old (Patterson, 2017).

Social and mobile marketing have found a viable place within our social media platforms. This newest technology information sharing has potential in target marketing to have a social influence for today's market. The simplest way to communicate with friends and family is to use

these social platforms, and businesses have increasingly found this an excellent platform to advertise. These expanding networks, online programs, and schools have multiplied recently, making it easier for nontraditional students to go back to school (Rishi & Bandyopadhyay, 2017). Ethics and social responsibility in marketing have taken a different role in prior years. Ethical practices have been in the news with scandals such as WorldCom, Enron, Arthur Anderson, and Tyco (Rishi & Bandyopadhyay, 2017).

Business Practices

Within a business market, organizations will acquire different goods and provide different services. Raw materials are combined to produce a product during production, and services are non-tangible, supplied to others, or sold to consumers. Business marketing is considered a sales potential. However, services provided to enhance individuals' choices are considered worth an exchange of a service for monetary value (Rishi & Bandyopadhyay, 2017).

Since the nineteenth-century, colleges and universities have developed a capitalist education system similar to the business structure of society. This development is obvious with emergence of fee-paying, privately educated universities that have become reflective and reproduce population classes within society. Contemporary capitalist graduates find occupational positions within leading or managing workforces (Maisuria & Helms, 2019). University designs are to work in an interest in capital (Maisuria & Helms, 2019). Therefore, results in the sum of the educational system come as a tool that can produce substantial amounts of people that will become the subordinate workforce within the production hierarchy. These production-producing schools are becoming "dominated by the imperatives of profit and domination" rather than the primary purpose of human need (Maisuria & Helms, 2019, p. 4).

This condition is an actional nature and design of educational systems. Economic reasoning to produce successful adults highlights an economy's middle-class and upper-class backgrounds, which benefit universities' social networks. These networks and social capital can be mobilized and become monetary resources for universities' particular purposes and will be considered an unparalleled resource. Utilization of resources and networking of social connections highlight capitalism within university systems which creates inequity in diversity offered by a university (Maisuria & Helms, 2019). Diversity is necessary to sustain vast growing culture differences, including age, ethnicity, and gender (Maisuria & Helms, 2019).

Policy agenda deepens and changes basic nature of universities that are known for learning and teaching experiences to becoming a demand side of economics and part of a landscape seeking scarce resources (Maisuria & Helms, 2019), therefore contributing to a deregulated educational market. For universities, student fees are a vital source of income and enable universities to function within a bracket of reduced government funding. However, this reduced funding creates a competition between universities in performativity, outcome measures, and student fees, emphasizing a university's need to compete within an educational marketing arena (Maisuria & Helms, 2019, p. 10). Individuals perceive investment in education as an individual financial gain. Students are under an impression that a college degree is an investment for their future, ensuring they will be a well-qualified worker and that employment after graduation is guaranteed. However, this can be problematic and untrue for students seeking employment after graduation.

Assorted reasons exist that hinder fulfillment of expectations for a graduated student, such as low job markets in areas needed by graduates. Additionally, industries and employers seek mostly highly professional qualified workers with experience to fill positions. Graduates

take a lower-paying position, disappointing their expectations. Senior managers play a crucial part in an identity relation of a university and policies, staff, stakeholders, students, and sponsors. This brand identity within higher education emphasizes academic managers, board members, and school leaders articulating a university's identity (Lowrie, 2007).

Higher-level educational systems are currently experiencing an unpredictable market (Kashyap & Kleinaltenkamp, 2020). For universities, competition is high for prospective students, and to maintain a competitive advantage these higher educational institutions need rapid change. This change needs to accommodate interested students and include nontraditional adult learners. This should be a goal for all universities that wish to continue investing in a future.

The future in marketing and research, including education, resonates with an increased realm of Business-2-Business (B2B) marketing. The *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* (JBIM) has research engaging in B2B scholarship and models that apply for a Van de Ven engaged scholarship diamond model on marketing. This research highlights problem formulation, theory building, research design, and creating relevance in marketing.

This research is to generate a collaborating impact on current research relevant to a realm of B2B. Educational forums need to consider three challenging trends that marketing strategists consider, having greater scrutiny on return of investment for universities in the future. These three trends are why methodological and statistical requirements for journal publication and collaboration with companies in doctoral programs should be increased (Kashyap & Kleinaltenkamp, 2020). Opportunities and challenges for future research in educational marketing and business and industry marketing topics play a valuable insight into where this future should go.

Topics discussed provide further future action in depth and context of marketing networks for academic purposes. Various marketing research initiatives for securing valuable innovation and behaviors for modern marketing research can be used as a trendsetting analytical tool (Kashyap & Kleinaltenkamp, 2020). Increasing customer satisfaction has a vital role in target marketing. Selection of market segmentation must consider a university's primary course offering and student interest as an equitable solution when considering techniques and populations to target for educational purposes.

In academic marketing, the objective is to have a minimum of students interested in school programs. Once a solidly established client or prospective student have gained, an additional offer for customer satisfaction marketed to prospective student to continue student's interest in returning to school until actual enrollment and paperwork are signed. The considerations marketers must consider are skills necessary to transfer into initial classes. For this, students must seek advice from academic counselors. Grade point average and grades must transfer over into an enrollment process for registration for correct classes. Nontraditional students have skills acquired from non-academic corporate training that promotes job skills through workforce development programs. Therefore, these students may not start at the same level as an average high school graduate. A remedial class may be necessary for nontraditional student to place in a correct course.

This exploration is through tests administered known as entrance exams. Nontraditional students go directly to a community college for additional schooling after basic high school diploma. These students enroll in CTE classes to promote and build job skills working through a workforce developing a program in their community. These programs include learning life skills

such as time management, finances, and how to manage day-to-day commitments of responsibility that it takes to be successful in life.

Involvement in these types of programs promotes and develops skills needed to better their chances of becoming employed. Skills such as learning technology and social media, business, marketing, finances, accounting, recording keeping, ethics, and social obligations play a vital role of responsibility for these students. Nontraditional students are responsible for all regular assignments, projects, tests, and class preparations. All traditional students are responsible for maintaining a student evaluation scale of a passing score calculated within a same point system criteria and grading scale.

The Problem

The general problem to be addressed is the loss of value proposition by the lack of marketing to the nontraditional student population, resulting in lower enrollment, a less diverse education experience, and a less productive competitive marketing strategy (Remenick & Bergman, 2021). Remenick and Bergman (2021) stated institutions that are enhancing the learning classroom experiences with nontraditional students increase enrollment, retainment, and graduating percentages and are succeeding in a more diverse population marketing plan (Remenick & Bergman, 2021). Survey findings have concluded nontraditional students learn about college programs through word of mouth, from family, and from colleagues; therefore, recruitment strategies need improvement for adult learners and a more tailored marketing to their intent (Ashford, 2019). Direct neglect of target marketing to this nontraditional population within academic institutions result in lower enrollment, less classroom diversity, and continuous decline in competitive marketing strategies, which creates a negative influence in all programs offered (Ashford, 2019). According to Oken-Tatum (2019), universities have overlooked marketing to

adult learners. Post-secondary educational institutions should address marketing solutions to reach adult learners (Melchiorre & Johnson, 2017). With increasing numbers of interested adult learners seeking additional education, this is a large untapped market. Furthermore, Sutton (2019) noted that universities fail to advertise to adult learners and focused on high school seniors instead. The specific problem to be addressed is loss of value proposition by the lack of marketing to the nontraditional population in post-secondary private universities surrounding Charlotte Metropolitan areas of North Carolina.

Concepts

The research concepts are based on this study's literature, consisting of university's target marketing to high school students and not sufficiently marketing to nontraditional adult learners. Universities and community colleges worldwide target students with a higher-grade point average or an outstanding student athlete (Goggin et al., 2016). The purpose of attracting these recent high school graduates is to produce a successful university representation.

A seamless transition from high school to a university lifestyle is an effortless adjustment for a younger student; however, a nontraditional student has more obstacles to overcome before entry into college (Goggin et al., 2016). Universities in the United States often neglect a nontraditional population for these reasons. These universities consider a younger population when considering student lifestyles. Designs of university dorms normally are for two students to share one room in small areas and share a bathroom with other students. This aspect of living in a college dorm interests young high school graduates seeking to leave home, and merits of a credit hour system give these students a benefit factor over an adult learner (Chen, 2017).

Results in marketing techniques have a negative impact on future industry and societal workforce. Higher volumes of immigration heavily influence open job positions by supplying

workers to fill these positions (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019). These campus designs differentiate from an adult learner with family responsibilities and configuration. This design correlates with increasing educational age levels within a university marketing department to target and attract this age bracket. This leads to a workforce continually decreasing in skilled laborers. When universities start designing their campus more in line with adult learners, the enrollment for this population will increase. The students straight out of college do not have technical skills needed to fulfill these jobs.

Fast-growing immigration flowing into this country produces fewer skilled laborers. This generation does not promote a culturally aged, diversified workforce with technical skills. According to (Goggin et al., 2016), attracting students to enroll in a university depends on a targeted high school student and maintaining a relationship with school counselors to encourage college enrollment preparing them for academic success (Goggin et al., 2016). The transitional student from high school to university has less enrollment in remedial classes, and this provides a pathway to become a successful university graduate (Goggin et al., 2016). United States universities often cater to younger generation lifestyles, displayed by on-campus activities and sports. Based on literature research related to this study, universities target market to high school students and do not sufficiently market to nontraditional adult learners (Goggin et al., 2016).

Universities target high school students for higher enrollment from this population. An essential purpose of attracting students during high school years is to instill confidence and nurture aspirations, and studies show these students have an easier transition from high school to a university, which provides pathways of success to tertiary education (Goggin et al., 2016). University designs continue to be focused on a younger generation, and an invisible aspect of

undergraduate diversity focuses on merits of a credit hour system which is a barrier for the adult learner (Chen, 2017).

Results in marketing techniques have negative future industry impacts on a societal workforce. The higher volume of immigration heavily influences the workforce creating a need for skilled workers (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019). There is a direct override with increasing educational levels in university marketing departments. Assuming this holds in coming decades, higher skilled workforce is decreasing.

A less skilled younger workforce does not promote a culturally aged, diversified workforce. According to Goggin et al. (2016), universities target high school students, and the critical purpose of attracting these students at the beginning of year 12 of high school to instill confidence and nurture aspirations. A seamless transition from high school to the university provides pathways of success to tertiary education (Goggin et al., 2016). In the United States, marketing is often directed to a youth-centric lifestyle.

Institutions offer a variety of programs, and these usually fall into five overall categories, including medical, business, social sciences, humanities, and STEM. These categories are dependent on individual institutions, available majors, and area of study that interests these students. These are subgroups of concentrations, majors, minors, certifications, and a combination of programs. In various degrees, titles are different depending upon the various institution's concentration. For this analysis, emphasizing a general category of certification, technical, associates, bachelor's, or a higher degree will suffice.

In some cases, university policies restrict sharing of information and restrict information on program concentration, courses, or levels of participation, while graduation percentages within a program are eliminated or withheld from research data. Marketing departments at

universities play an essential role in boosting enrollment in each of these programs during their initial sales presentation at marketing events. An example of marketing includes fair events held yearly at high schools, community colleges, and community-organized events. In a recent survey, 54 educators (66.7% of those surveyed) stated external selling or events assisted in enrollment in their school's program (Spiller et al., 2020). Other student populations (33.3%) are derived from location, hierarchy, reputation, affordability, acceptance, specialization, or friend association.

Transitional programs support the adult learner in seeking the college education they desire. These programs support adult learners and find it essential to understand their experiences, perspectives on education, and self-perception (Karmelita, 2018). In Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Cross, 1991), a study noted experiences of five adult learners in a similar transitional program, which created support systems that were essential to the adult learners. They depended on these programs as a support system. The study indicated that a formed relationship created a framework to highlight barriers such as technology difficulty. These support programs enhance students' self-confidence with training classes (Karmelita, 2018).

Theories

The theories associated with nontraditional adult learners and can fit into various levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This theory focuses on career pathways on five distinct levels. Similarly, Maslow's hierarchy of needs includes five levels: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Schulte, 2018). The theories that best describes the nontraditional adult learner can embark on career pathways in five diverse levels. Maslow's Hierarchy Theory is based on these five levels of needs, but studies compare and analyze career

pathways based on similar concepts associated with the pyramid. The pyramid from basic to a complex is (1) physiological needs, (2) safety needs, (3) love and belonging, (4) esteem, and (5) self-actualization. These five levels fulfill basic needs from the bottom, proceeding upward in complexity, which suggest needs will dwindle as the individual accomplishes each level. The research pathway begins with completing high school diploma program or the general education diploma (GED). During an individual's lifetime, a person may change jobs for varied reasons, including to achieve a better work environment or pay increase, because of a change in geographical location, or to change to a career pathway that provides better work opportunities or promotions that will require higher credentials (Schulte, 2018). Within the pyramid framework in level 3 (love and belonging), the feeling for the individual of achievement will be the best beneficial course for that individual. Adult learners can fit into any of these levels from a most basic level to proceeding upward.

The Dialogical Self Theory (DST) is a theory that has two notions of self and dialogue together to build a bridge between individuals and society. This theory refers to the internal processes of an individual's mind and impacts of individuals on society, allowing adult learners to study self as a society of 'I-positions' to consider population stimulated and renewed by an individual student (Meijer & Hermans, 2018).

The DST represents a Self-Confrontation Method that ask individuals what they found essential and meaningful to themselves person in the expected future. This method plays an explicit influential role in conception of DST, which assumes self conceives a "society of mind" or embodies the I-position relationships and can shift or contrast from situations or positions within a cooperative relationship (Wijsen & Hermans, 2020). The theory projects that individuals add value to their self and surrounding society, developing interconnections, with their

experiences contributing to a common conceptual framework by including information from those experiences.

Another theory that can attribute to nontraditional learners is self-determination theory. This theory is essential in education constructs of individuals that pursue personal acquired motives and incorporates psychological needs that are population mined. With competence and relatedness of a theory, marketers have found an association with adult learners and essential needs to pursue educational endeavors (Bernhardt, 2018). Nontraditional students have a desire to achieve a substantial education to increase their opportunities in workplaces. Theories associated with describing this desire are based on theories researched. To be successful, adult learners must understand reasons for pursuing their education later in life. Certain behaviors and target marketing can have a direct impact on society (Padelford, 2017).

This research includes effects within societal communities and university classrooms. Marketing is responsible for products, advertisements, and services. With target marketing, the marketer chooses to direct marketing techniques. Self-determination theory combines an individual's personality with their motivation and identifies their psychological needs. This inherent initiative-taking tendency evolves, and dominant roles of intrinsic motivational individual behavior become their focus (Wang et al., 2019).

Constructs

The mitigating constructs include that using a selected marketing population produces a lower university enrollment. Insufficient enrollment automatically makes an increase in competitive challenges. Enrollment increases lead to a building block for value proposition within universities. Marketing has a direct effect on enrollment numbers and potential differentiation of higher educational opportunities.

Colleges consider diversity as a particular ethnicity or race. However, in terms of discrimination experienced, diversity is considered within particular age groups as well. Selective colleges have a binary variable that equal one non discriminate if students are a particular race group and will equal to zero otherwise (Karikari & Dezhbakhsh, 2019). Educational programs marketing to students helps increase higher enrollment of students which increase market shares (Veletsianos et al., 2017).

Furthermore, a lack of multicultural competence in classrooms exacerbates difficulties. Expectation of understanding broader social, economic, and political context and have a cultural influence effect on a diverse student population (Weinstein et al., 2004). Therefore, lower enrollment numbers create less revenue for universities. Constructs include lower university enrollment, lower value proposition, and a less diverse classroom experience. Lower university enrollments lead to projected increased amounts of competitiveness with educational programs and services from other universities (Veletsiano et al., 2017). Direct marketing impacts enrollment of students and increases market shares (Veletsianos et al., 2017).

Higher educational markets are a basis of the college selection process. This process is attributed to timing, marketing segmentation, influential persons, geographical location, and ability level of prospective students. These attributes, correlated with high initial recruitment expense, must consider proper research relying on the primary market segmentation to target. Loss of retention and student satisfaction are significant factors to universities. Any loss of value proposition attributed to unfavorable word of mouth can impact variables of consumer behavior and socioeconomic factors that contribute to loss of revenue (Goodrich et al., 2020).

The implication for practitioners choosing and enrolling in college provides this interactive social platform (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2016). Furthermore, a lack of multicultural

competence in the classroom exacerbates difficulties. The expectation of understanding broader social, economic, and political context have a cultural influence effect on a diverse student population (Weinstein et al., 2004).

Related Studies

Recent studies have identified institutions using a measure of auditing practices to observe the performance practices of higher education departments within institutions. These studies emphasize the course selections, teacher promotional decisions, student selection, and class ratio. Problems have been observed and analyzed with the bias of class selection and courses taught. Selection bias on average evaluation scores and the courses' ranking derives the bias in the selection process. Selection characteristics imply that observed factors of prospective student grades imply that correcting the selection process is not the only solution for the problems (Goos & Salomons, 2017). Related determinants include the correction of balance in the marketing of students and the selection of bias that appear to occur during the marketing process, which is validated in these university audits.

Universities have recently developed distant learning programs to better cater to nontraditional students who have outside obligations and cannot come to campus for class. Recently, competency-based education (CBE) and equity programs have caused institutions to develop programs. The DePaul University has a CBE competency-based education program based on the ALBA (alternative learning behavior and attitude) program. ALBA program claims to be helping students into a version of "good enough" liberal education but has raised opposition (Navarre & Breathnach, 2017). These types of programs are for developing learning outcomes. However, nontraditional adult learners do not necessarily have a competency problem.

The CBE program might mean “dumbed down education” for the “Jobs for the Future” (JFF) program, which raises additional concerns also (Navarre & Breathnach, 2017, p. 1).

ALBA is not an extensive program within the United States, and students are in a range of 15% to 99% participation in higher education. Educational programs have transformed lives and changed the I-cannot mentality, to the I-can mental process (Navarre & Breathnach, 2017). Educational degrees offered are associate, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees. Students have options pertaining to a specific program they are interested in. This allows students to add valuable skills to enrich their lives and develop a self-social support initiative that also provides confidence. This program identifies critical thinking skills with applied theory of practice in understanding self and self-ability to understand others. This leads to graduates’ recognition of their skills and abilities that have developed during these programs and creates thriving, productive graduates.

Anticipated and Discovered Themes

Bias occurs in business every day within the decision-making task. These biases influence managerial decisions based on performance and complex systems that interact with completion times and are based on performance of given outcomes. Obstacles to creating enrollment for business schools includes decisions driven by completion times and suboptimal time constraints in marketing for universities, creative problem solving, and idealized performance models (Todd et al., 2019). These real-world decisions include interactions that are placed on performance of departments whose efforts are to protect prior investment. In educational aspects, this includes well-performing students. In recent studies, undergraduates assumed the roles of marketing managers, evaluating problems with originality and various attributes for ideas for funding. Complete disregard for original ideas was used and found to be

time-consuming. Apparent bias includes nontraditional students and lack of marketing techniques used in target marketing by universities (Todd et al., 2019).

University marketing departments need outreach programs and marketing tools that generate and implement viable innovative marketing programs. Individuals view marketing roles as easy positions. However, marketing positions are not the easiest way to increase enrollment. Approach marketing can produce an appeal to more experienced individuals. Bringing diversity in classrooms creates a subsequently less biased marketing solution for higher education universities. Social media marketing is an example of a discovered theme in marketing tools to capture a larger market. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), the nontraditional student population is growing fast, and over half of college students are 25 years or older. These nontraditional students are commonly financially independent, full-time employees, and have delayed college entry (Cherrstrom et al., 2019).

Universities and educators have frequently pursued developing a curriculum to create simplicity in courses by comparing other college courses for nontraditional students. Higher learning institutions also continue to create marketing, business, and sales curriculum specialization courses that introduce a different purpose, or major or minor advanced courses with higher-level specialty to reveal a broader strategy for marketing (Spiller et al., 2020). Educators care deeply about success of preparing students for an actual working world, and with rapid growth of industry, there is increased need for qualified graduates.

Lifelong learning is a continuing anticipated theme that is pursued during retirement years. In comparison, lifelong learning in academia has attained a realm of financial security or desire from individuals. More companies are demanding critical thinkers, and with changes in modern technology and distance education, an overarching realization has made both options in

career changes viable. Degree prospects are job prospects and are limitless. Business, trade, and educational communities are exploding with endless possibilities, and no longer is an adult learner bound to a rural location (Schulte, 2018).

Research Strategies

According to Badke (2021), research strategies are based on a mixed method approach. The flexible design incorporated computer assistance data analysis tools for data collection. Dialectical pluralism concepts integrate group dynamics within a small group process that operates in a position of equal power working toward solutions (Badke, 2021). This position of equal power combines construction of purposeful teams and interviewing, which consider different values and perspectives of stakeholders and disadvantage-affected individuals. The third exploration includes research from literature and pedagogical authority allowing for discussion on contemporary threats, drawing conclusions from researchers' knowledge and findings (Badke, 2021), combined with an understanding of contradiction and repetitive actions taken by nontraditional learners. This research demonstrates power of discourse and fills in knowledge gaps for new research frontiers in relation to current information and activism in higher education marketing.

Identifying Gaps in Past Studies

According to Lansing (2017), despite growing opportunities in distance learning, research in the decision process of seeking higher education for nontraditional learners is sparse. There are more factors related to decisions to attend a higher education institution for this population, and research has not examined important understandings of why nontraditional students enroll in distance education. Factors indicate a gap in literature on enrollment of collegiate degree granting programs, suggesting an increase in enrollment in postsecondary educational

institutions (Lansing, 2017). Research has identified certain characteristics of currently enrolled nontraditional students, such as work and family obligations, are greater than those of traditional student. Lansing's (2017) research seeks to bridge gaps of college choice for nontraditional learners and distance learners. Lansing (2017) identifies indicators of potential problems that exist with quality of technology availability, interaction with instructors, and academic support services. All these factors are influential indicators of college choice and decisions of potential students (Lansing, 2017). Lansing (2017) suggested and identified gaps within existing data and past research.

In this study the researcher accessed literature from JF Library's database, such as professional journals of Liberty University former dissertation students, Ex Libris Discovery, ProQuest, KEDI (Korean Educational Development Institute Journals), and books that relate to qualitative research methodology and case study research design. The scholarly peer-review consists of journal publications, including *An International Journal of Marketing*; *Journal of Business Ethics*; *Journal of Economics and Business*; *Journal of Education Technology*; *Journal of Vocational Behavior*; *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*; *International Journal of Designs for Learning*; *ProQuest Dissertations & Thesis Global*; *Journal of Direct, Data, and Digital Marketing Practice*; *Canadian Journal of Agricultural and Economics*; *Journal of Marketing Education*; *European Journal of Information Systems*; *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*; *The Central Pennsylvania Business Journal* *Christian Scholar's Review*; *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*; *Creativity Research Journal*; *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*; and *The Journal of Teacher Education*.

Keyword searches included diversity, target marketing, (ACBSP) Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs, (NALs) nontraditional adult learner, bias, and (STEM)

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. The scholarly journals review each article for reference and identity. This literature review includes references that have a publishing date within the last five years, meaning they are relevant to this research study.

Mapping the Research Ideas

Barrow, Grant, and Xu (2020) state importance of academic identities and changing times have reframed and revised roles in academia. Modern times within our society and environment have increased shifting in job positions and produced struggles within academic identity schism (Barrow et al., 2020). This identity schism in higher education leads to a reexamining of ideologies and institutional values.

Academic Identity has been changing with academic disciplines within academic identity formation, combined with disciplinary boundaries that have either collapsed or have become blurred. These disciplines established at universities have distinct divisions between professional practices and academic associations (Barrow et al., 2020). Maintaining a professional identify alongside an academic one has become difficult (Barrow et al., 2020).

Ferreira et al. (2019) defined mapping as a tool that is to be used by scholars. This tool is custom to the depth of advanced research and is known for expanding research topics that are necessary for in-depth exploration research. In considering definitions of mapping, one must consider investigative strategies that enable an individual to have thoughts flowing and display any ideas that come to memory of researcher.

Ferreira et al. (2019) state that alongside investigating background information, another crucial factor is comprehension of a phenomenon in an in-depth manner. Examples include obtaining background information authors can use to determine who are major contributors in

mortgage institutions within the United States (Ferreira et al., 2019). This information can give insight on reasons individuals default on their mortgage loans.

Zacher et al. (2018) state that comparatively with academics this type of mapping strategy can help in investigating scholarly thoughts. Writer's issues arise from original thoughts on research topics or problems within a research study (Ferreira et al., 2018). This type of mapping creates a narrow topic path, producing a monitoring system for a more predictable outcome.

Immigration Impacts Workforce

According to Vézina and Bélanger (2019), the United States has a long history of immigration. It is the OECD's (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) leading destination country, with a global immigrant inflow of about 20% (Vézina & Bélanger 2019). This inflow impacts labor force population with immigrant low-skilled workers increasing education demands by nontraditional older workforce. These immigration levels increased skill and workforce size of those between ages of 25 to 64 during the period of 2011-2016 (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019). Results of Vézina and Bélanger's (2019) study indicated volumes of immigration rates and literacy skill level heavily impacts workforce. This skill level produces an increase in educational attainment in the nontraditional learner population. As reported by OECD countries, literacy levels of immigrants are significantly lower than the average American citizen literacy levels. However, these immigrants exceed in overall higher educational levels in comparison to native born Americans (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019). This indicates that immigrants with lower skill levels are being introduced into labor markets, implying that assessments based on education levels are significantly lower (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019).

Vézina & Bélanger (2019) note which results in marketing techniques have negative future industry impacts on societal workforce. Higher volumes of immigration heavily influence job opportunities for nontraditional populations because immigration brings more workers into working environments. Therefore, higher-level skilled workers are needed (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019). Direct override of increasing competition in the work force creates additional challenges for nontraditional students. Changing environment and use of internet will impact coming decades. Higher-skilled levels are decreasing as a declining workforce is producing a more unskilled population. The fast-growing, lesser skilled young workforce does not promote a culturally diversified workforce (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019).

Changing Cultures

According to Chen (2017), traditional educational systems focus on marketing techniques that are directed to students who are in their youth-centric phase of life, and stereotypical full-time students live on university campuses. However, these traditional students are a small percentage of potential students that seek postsecondary educational programs.

Chen (2017) noted changing culture within our communities has forced academic disciplines to examine their impact on communities and their identity formation. External factors of change gradually force our educational system to continually readjust or introduce innovative programs to correspond with change in the environment, economy, and job markets (Chen, 2017). Universities continue to be a distinct division of professional practices and academic educational identity. In examining identity formation of higher education institutions, direct focus depends on marketing and branding to embrace flexibility. With flexibility comes loss of stability and cohesion of traditional university identity.

Diversity in United States universities often neglects nontraditional adult learners, and they are an essential component in staying competitive within higher educational systems (Chen, 2017). This neglected population has learning needs that traditional universities do not focus on. The invisible aspect of diversity within a university neglects the impact that adult learners have on a societal environment, competitive work world, and job market (Chen, 2017). Implications of change force universities to rebrand and market to the nontraditional population. The development of programs in colleges supports new initiatives focusing on younger individuals for college enrollment. Enrollment focuses on younger students' recent grade point averages and credit hour system, creating a challenge for nontraditional adult learners (Chen, 2017).

Programs are not designed to educate the nontraditional adult learner that competes in a competitive world. An example is credit hour system used by colleges, creating a direct barrier for entry of nontraditional population (Chen, 2017). With rapidly advancing age gaps between adult learners and high school graduates entering college, there is a direct impact on job opportunities for nontraditional adult learners with higher skill levels (Chen, 2017).

Undocumented Students

According to Yasuike (2019), undocumented high school students try to maintain a status of least resistance. These students are scared and ashamed of stigma that consequences of deportation bring. Social identity for these students enables a positive sense of academic achievement if they accomplish a higher education (Yasuike, 2019). Yasuike (2019) notes that with proper support of immigrant rights groups and other organizations that work both on and off-campus, these students participate in social justice activism through attempting to change immigration laws that put them into an unlawful alien category. Higher education provides a tool

for undocumented immigrants to resist negative assessments and stereotypes attached to social identity (Yasuike, 2019).

Target Markets

According to Goggin et al. (2016), the focus on attracting these high school students at beginning of their junior year of high school is to seek higher-grade point average student and develop them to become successful graduates and representatives of the university. A seamless transition from attending high school to their preferred university provides pathways of success to tertiary education (Goggin et al., 2016).

Competitive forces outside of academic institutions, including competition other universities project in their enrollment, create a target market directed to high school students and not nontraditional adult learners for greater enrollment margin (Goggin et al., 2016). Often within the United States, the nontraditional adult learner is neglected, and universities focus on a youth-centric lifestyle (Goggin et al., 2016). Marketing at universities is conducted with marketing strategies that adhere to university branding. The nontraditional population is slim in classrooms, and universities worldwide target high school students (Goggin et al., 2016).

Marketing Focus

According to Vézina & Bélanger (2019), in a direct override with increasing educational levels, a university's marketing department focuses on demographic areas to accumulate the highest number of sales. Assuming this continues, upcoming higher-skilled workforce will decrease due to increase in internet marketing techniques having a further outreach in surrounding communities. Rapidly growing, younger workforce does not promote a culturally diversified workforce (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019).

These results in marketing techniques have negative future industry impacts on societal workforce. Higher volume of immigration heavily influences job opportunities for adult learners because immigration brings more workers into the working environment. Therefore, higher-level skilled workers are needed (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019). Direct override of increasing competition in the work force creates additional challenges for nontraditional student. With changing environments and impacts of internet platforms in coming decades, higher-skilled workforce is decreasing, producing a more unskilled population (Vézina & Bélanger, 2019).

Technical Students

According to Tretola et al. (2019), research has viewed a blending of distinct groups and combinations of diversity, constructs, national origin, work experience, inherent worth, and the student's age identity. Tretola et al. (2019) center focus on diversity of students, particularly in high school-aged individuals. The study performed by Tretola et al. (2019) has indicated that extracurricular programs have increased levels of interest in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). This research indicated that little investigation has been performed to examine interaction of participants and the context of commitment to increasing technical skill subject areas (Tretola et al., 2019).

Tretola et al. (2019) noted little research has examined interaction of participants and the context of commitment to technical subject areas. Studies have indicated that informal extracurricular programs have increased interest in trade careers that internships and firsthand experience can accomplish. However, there has been little research examining interaction of participants and context of commitment to technical subject areas (Tretola et al., 2019).

Research is based on a neglect in marketing to nontraditional adult learners. Universities focus their marketing to high school students and do not sufficiently market to the nontraditional

population. However, according to Tretola et al. (2019), this focus suggests complex problems in different fields and programs that are typically not intriguing to high school students, indicating a need for sustaining necessary technical skills in the workforce. Students are going directly into the workforce with little to no training (Tretola et al., 2019). The importance of looking beyond needs of the younger student population and emphasizing adult learners is due to the necessity of skills and education needed for the adult learner population to be competitive.

STEM

Lane et al. (2020) states that college readiness for underserved students can be addressed in high school with intervention programs in areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). College readiness is one critical factor in indicating that a student is academically prepared for success in these areas (Lane et al., 2020).

Research suggests students that are less prepared for college will switch to a non-STEM degree. Researchers have attempted to identify cognitive skills and provide a framework that categorizes learning goals (Lane et al., 2020). These categories include create, understand, evaluate, remember, analyze, and apply, with students utilizing elevated levels of cognitive skills within their STEM courses (Lane et al., 2020).

Studies have suggested that 90% of students want to attend college; however, underserved students have unclear expectations of college (Lane et al., 2020). Lane et al. (2020) note that Black and Latino male students in New York City high schools studied 0 hours during normal weeks compared to students in their first year of college that studied 13 to 14 hours weekly. Participants did not understand or see the need to study for courses because of their participation in class by listening to their teacher, taking notes, and doing their homework (Lane et al., 2020).

Age Diversity

Crittenden et al. (2020) suggest problems within current working forces and age brackets are gaps that predict an essential element in consumer preferences and a certain expected behavior from an employee. Colleges and universities expect to educate future business leaders. These expectations include educating diverse cultural identities and increasing diverse populations. Expectations on marketing department to fill classrooms has put pressure on marketing departments to incorporate a diverse student population. Current student population is consistent with younger generation classroom designs (Crittenden et al., 2020).

Diversity is characterized in group differences, including social economic classes, age, culture, and gender, depending on differences. Opportunities for diversity in education create and incorporate experiences for students to engage in a culturally diverse classroom. Universities seek to train students entering in communities and the workforce with skills to work with diverse cultures and groups. Upon examination, diversity in schools is a fundamental process that is producing outcomes in business leaders (Crittenden et al., 2020).

Diversity issues exist today in businesses due to diverse cultures and international trades incorporated in the business world. According to research, inclusion and diversity are critical for marketers in all industries and educational institutions to compete in a global business world (Crittenden et al., 2020). Age brackets predict elements in consumer preferences and expected behaviors from an employee (Crittenden et al., 2020).

Qualifying Credits

Lerner (2018) suggests relationships after graduation from a prestigious influential college graduate program, combined with associated accreditation, reflects students' skill levels. These students graduate from colleges and universities to gain employment in the societal

workforce. According to Lerner (2018), colleges need to offer qualifying credits to adult learners for work experiences that they can bring to the classroom. A college in Saint Louis works with its marketing department to attract more adult learners with new program strategies (Collegis Education, 2018). Universities will be successful in rolling out a strategic revenue growth solution by marketing to adult learners (Collegis Education, 2018).

Electronic Media Marketing

Luu and Metcalfe (2020) note that recruitment and development of marketing advertisements and campaigns is the pivotal point to accelerating competition. Higher education functions within a competitive system that is intended to engage alumni and donors, attract students, and function as a mechanism to continue to engage marketing campaigns while creating a platform to compete with increased competition (Luu & Metcalfe, 2020). Electronic media has played a role in construction of marketing campaigns in colleges and universities that create a significant presence on social media sites. As a result, these online platforms of advertisements are objective indicators of the institution and have faced claims questioning the quality of education (Luu & Metcalfe, 2020)

Luu and Metcalfe (2020) note evidence of the institution's claims have been strategically displayed. Information presented to the public such as the accreditation, ranking data, and reputational consortia has been projected to display the legitimacy, and prestigious quality emblems put emphasis on the institution's symbolic nature of higher standards and quality (Luu & Metcalfe, 2020). Branding and web-based marketing by higher institutions has used strategic methods to convey and communicate a traditional image and values. This focus on crafting an organizational image, representative of the institution's brand, constitutes a critical perspective within higher educational branding (Luu & Metcalfe, 2020). With potential depth of quality and

institutional reputation, more empirical studies pertaining to higher educational marketing and branding have increased (Luu & Metcalfe, 2020).

Multi-Cultural Competence

When colleges examine diversity factors, they consider ethnicity or race groups one of the principal areas where bias exist (Veletsianos et al., 2017). However, diversity within an age group bracket can be considered discrimination or bias if those populations are not considered for enrollment. Selective colleges use binary variables that equal to one if that student is a particular race group. This produces a numerical number for that school. However, otherwise the student will equal a zero, depending on their race group (Karikari & Dezhbakhsh, 2019). Educational programs marketing to students help increase enrollment, therefore increasing the market share and having direct impact on target selections in marketing. The lack of a multicultural competence in classrooms exacerbates difficulties within the workplace (Veletsianos et al., 2017).

Higher Education Branding

Papadimitriou (2018) suggests marketing for colleges and universities is based on the branding of adapted external environments. The adapted environments emerge from existing, changed environments and require organizational adaptation in higher education scholarly circles. Tracing complex trends within branding and marketing of changes in environment are attributed to a set of influences (Papadimitriou, 2018, 2017). The influences consist of regionalization, internationalization, and globalization. Other factors include growing demands of accountability, with increasing privatization of higher educational institutions (Papadimitriou, 2018).

Papadimitriou (2018) suggests competition with other universities to attract students creates a phenomenon in which students are viewed as a revenue source. The phenomenon of students being a viewed revenue source, and the decreasing of public investments in the higher education organizations, compounds the move to privatization (Papadimitriou, 2018, 2017). Privatization does not exclusively suggest that all creations of private universities are linked to profit-oriented activities of public universities. However, all private higher education institutions engage in new strategies that display branding and marketing techniques to demonstrate their value to the public (Papadimitriou, 2018). Strategies such as accreditation schemes and rankings influence prospective students to pursue an institution based on accountability of quality assurance and ranking of programs offered (Papadimitriou, 2018).

Blanco Ramirez (2015) noted Mexican universities based their marketing campaign around United States accreditation and documented studies that suggest private institutions depend on tuition as a main source of revenue (Papadimitriou, 2018, 2017). These universities obtained U.S. international accreditation, creating an association with prestigious institutions for their marketing campaign (Papadimitriou, 2018).

Andragogy - Adult Learning Theory

According to proposed studies by Banks (2017), the adult learner theory is referred to as andragogy, or methods and principles used in education for adults or nontraditional learners. Andragogy means “leading man” or a self-directed learning, whereas the term “pedagogy” means “leading children” (Banks, 2017). Adult learning theory is a concept that is distinctive to learning styles and identifying the study of how adults learn. This theory was introduced in 1968 by Malcomb Knowles. Knowles was an American educator and made six assumptions of the characteristics of adult learners (Banks, 2017).

1. Self-Concept: As an individual matures, that person progresses from being a dependent personality to a self-directed individual.
2. Adult Learner Experience: This individual matures and accumulates a vast number of experiences that becomes a reservoir that is used as a resource for learning.
3. Readiness to Learn: The person progresses in maturity, leading to increasing readiness for developmental tasks such as learning and more social roles.
4. Orientation to Learning: Over the progression of maturity, individuals experience a time perspective change, from postponement phase to an immediacy of application, to a subject centeredness to focus on a particular problem.
5. Motivation to Learn: A individual matures and motivation for accomplishment leads to an internal learning desire.
6. Appreciation: The individual develops an appreciation for respect from instructors.

According to Banks (2017), these six principles remain relevant to adult learners in the 21st century and can apply to online education or e-learning because of busy lifestyles adult learners maintain.

NALs – Nontraditional Adult Learners

Chen (2017) states busy lifestyles of nontraditional adult learners increase the transition from classroom education to online education modes. This transition is not a new idea, but advancement of technology offers a difference in delivery methods and is adaptive to the adult learner's lifestyle. According to Chen (2017), nontraditional adult learners, defined as age 25 years and over, represent approximately 38.2 % of the United States postsecondary population. Included in that number are those students that are under 25 years, who are working full-time, are financially independent, are a single parent, and have delayed enrollment in higher education

or did not complete the regular high school graduation. Students enrolled full-time directly after high school graduation and living on campus are traditional students. Chen (2017) states that most resources and attention of colleges strategic plans are directed to these traditional students.

Institute Technical Education

According to Sin (2017), The Institute of Technical Education (ITE) is a vocational training institution that offers the nontraditional population an online education, providing diverse educational degrees. Universities considered ITE a last resort for an adult learner (Sin, 2017). However, this educational institution is expanding with new number of adult learners sent back to school to upgrade their skills (Sin, 2017). Adult learners have varied reasons for delaying college, and the nontraditional returning student faces the same individual deterrents.

Sin (2017) stated ITE produces polytechnic students and university graduates, attracting degree holders who need to sharpen their skill set for different industries such as engineering fields (Sin, 2017). Institutions recognizes the value of technical skills and support for lifelong learners and plan to take on bigger roles in the Skills Future movement (Sin, 2017). With the disruptive technology, combined with changing economic paradigms, ITE's niche is having the ability to respond quickly to industry needs and help adult learners continually learn, ensuring training and education for a specific skill, such as online marketing and other programs like business analytics, offered in combination with firsthand learning (Sin, 2017).

Barriers for NALs – Nontraditional Adult Learners

According to Hunter and Johnson (2017), studies confirm nontraditional adult learners face unique barriers that differ from the traditional student. In their study, NAL students are asked to put in priority order a list of influential barriers that have a major influence or have prevented the nontraditional adult learner from seeking a higher education degree (Hunter &

Johnson, 2017). Emergent barriers for the NAL student included financial challenges, support systems, work balance, time management, psychosocial challenges, and institutional barriers (Hunter & Johnson, 2017).

Financial

Moore et al. (2020) noted sources have reported increased financial stress in students 25 years and older compared to the traditional college student (Moore et al., 2020). Approximately 85% of NAL students agree that financial stress is the main barrier preventing them from continuing their education (Moore et al., 2020). College counseling departments noted behaviors directly associated with financial stress (Moore et al., 2020).

Behaviors of anxiety are in a direct relationship with poorer academic functioning in nontraditional adult learners (Moore et al., 2020). Assumptions are that the financial stress stems from greater responsibilities and employment. Academic counseling practitioners seek to help this population of students with enhanced referral networks such as financial aid, tutoring, and counseling center staff support (Moore et al., 2020). Nontraditional students minimize financial stress by exploring career adjustment, student loans, and increasing marital and family support.

Support Systems

Steinhauer and Lovell (2021) note that nontraditional students' support system acts as an advantageous success tool for both on and off campus. Studies have noted the more mature NAL student relied on sources of support from their spouse/partner, child, and work related non-familial sources (Steinhauer & Lovell, 2021). The potential retention rate increases for the nontraditional student if individual perceptions of support are higher (Steinhauer & Lovell, 2021). Support for the individual student will determine the psychological outcome. More

specifically, a difference has been noticed in motivation of their academic pursuit (Steinhauer & Lovell, 2021).

Work/Balance

Gopalan (2019) notes difficulties nontraditional adult learners are challenged with and confirms the self-determination these students must have to overcome barriers. Studies have shown that social support at these students' place of employment has a significant positive impact on the challenge of managing multiple roles (Gopalan et al., 2019). Support from both supervisors and coworkers has a positive influence on nontraditional students' job satisfaction. Literature documented the related demands within the school of business, and the value of the curriculum demonstrated to students through the relevance of the applied topics, produces a desired determination and helps students gain a better understanding of academic content (Gopalan et al., 2019).

Time Management

According to Waldron (2020), adversities in pursuing an education for nontraditional students often revolve around time management. Time management involves actions taken by students when structuring their use of time to accomplish a particular assessment (Waldron, 2020). Waldron (2020) states time management focuses on the needs assessment related to the self-efficacy scale, which uses assessments in comparison to the online learning environment. Students with a GPA below 3.00 had significantly lower perceptions of their own need for time management compared to students with a GPA above 3.00 (Waldron, 2020).

Psychosocial Challenges

Research by Sheridan et al. (2020) noted that research participation determines psychosocial factors, including an individual or students' cognitions and their behaviors. Social

influences include family opinions and how others value primary studies. Challenges for nontraditional students include feelings of loneliness, lack of self-ability, and feeling of not fitting into the classroom experience due to their age (Sheridan et al., 2020).

Institutional Barriers

Shelton (2021) states that institutional barriers for the nontraditional student are obstacles that are administrative in nature, suggesting that barriers are preventable. Guidelines have prevented nontraditional adult learners from participation in activities and enrollment in courses. These barriers include a lack of financial aid provided to working students and little availability of evening and weekend courses (Shelton, 2021). Nontraditional adult learners may need remedial classes, meaning these students may be academically unprepared to enroll in a program. Barriers also include the credit hour-based system that easily transfers from high school earned credits but neglects to give appropriate earned credits for previous work experience (Shelton, 2021).

Discrimination Laws

According to Smith (2020), older adults remain in the workforce if able. The U. S. Board of Labor Statistics (n.d.) states employees between the age of 65 to 75 years have faster rates of growth annually in the labor force than other ages. Predictions between the years of 2014 and 2024 show the workforce between ages of 65 to 74 years old expected to make up 55% of the labor force's rate of growth (Smith, 2020).

In the labor force, a customary practice of employers is to replace older employees with younger prospective candidates who have recently graduated with updated skills (Smith, 2020). However, younger candidates lack the skill from years of experience that older employees have (Smith, 2020). Older individuals, to keep themselves marketable, must continue to improve skills

and seek additional education to stay competitive with younger generations. University campuses are not prepared for nontraditional adult learners and their complex needs (Smith, 2020).

AFU - Age Friendly Universities

According to Pstross et al. (2017), a current initiative program has gained momentum internationally. This initiative promotes inclusivity for older individuals to obtain a higher education on university campuses (Pstross et al., 2017). The program aims to address the youth-dominant culture in colleges and universities and has captured attention from the inception of the Age-Friendly Universities (AFU) initiative (Pstross et al., 2017).

AFU is an age friendly university, and the culture of the college depends on enrollment and on accessibility for older populations (Pstross et al., 2017). There were only three of these universities at the time of this data collection. These universities are the Dublin City University in Ireland, University of Strathclyde in Scotland, and Arizona State University in the United States (Pstross et al., 2017). A team of educators, researchers, and policy makers identified ten principles of age friendly universities (Pstross et al., 2017).

1. To encourage the participation of older adults in all the core activities of the university, including educational and research programs.
2. To promote personal and career development in the second half of life and to support those who wish to pursue second careers.
3. To recognize the range of educational needs of older adults (from those who were early school-leavers through to those who wish to pursue a master's or Ph.D. qualifications).
4. To promote intergenerational learning to facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages.

5. To widen access to online educational opportunities for older adults to ensure a diversity of routes to participation.
 6. To ensure that the university's research agenda are informed by the needs of an ageing society and to promote public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults.
 7. To increase the understanding of students of the longevity dividend and the increasing complexity and richness that ageing brings to our society.
 8. To enhance access for older adults to the university's range of health and wellness programs and its arts and cultural activities.
 9. To engage actively with the university's own retired community.
 10. To ensure regular dialogue with organizations representing the interests of the ageing population.
- (Pstross et al., 2017)

Psychographic Segmentation

Lin and Wang (2018) write that psychographic segmentation breaks down how consumer (student) behavior aligns with their characteristics and reasoning for their choices. Marketers should consider individual goals of the student and what motivates prospective students. Students' educational goals and self-value are associated with the way prospective students see themselves or their self-image (Lin & Wang, 2018). Three components determined students' projected accomplishment to finish out their educational goal: motivation, self-values (concepts or lifestyles), and self-concept (conception or image) of themselves (Lin & Wang, 2018). These components are in context with the Maslow's Self Actualization Theory, Dialogical Self theory, and the Self Determination Theory.

Schulte (2018) notes that Maslow's Self Actualization Theory is a motivation theory in which a person sets personal goals based on how their needs meet their individual self-image (Schulte, 2018). Individuals are motivated to reach ultimate goals within a pyramid. The base of the pyramid consists of basic needs and self-actualization can be found at the top of the pyramid (Schulte, 2018).

Meijer and Hermans (2018) note that Dialogical Self Theory (DST) is based on an individual's self and dialogue within their self-image (Meijer & Hermans, 2018). This theory states that the individual sees their actions as a bridge or their individual self to the society in which they play a role (Meijer & Hermans, 2018).

Bernhardt (2018) notes that Self Determination is associated with motivation of the adult learner and their education, including the drive to pursue a personal motive while satisfying a psychological need. Nontraditional adult learners take initiative in their learning needs and formulate a goal that helps implement appropriate learning strategies, and identify resources needed to accomplish their purpose by creating a motivational action (Bernhardt, 2018).

Student Engagement

Chance (2017) states that a nontraditional student's engagement has an impact on retention rates and persistence, and this differs between nontraditional adult learners and traditional students. Engagement is a unique challenge for the adult learner (Chase, 2017). Concepts that traditional student used from recent high school experiences the nontraditional student must familiarize themselves with for the first time. These concepts may include skills, such as being receptive to feedback from faculty, collaborative problem solving, tolerating ambiguity, working with diverse backgrounds and views, or managing complex problems (Chance, 2017). Additionally, nontraditional adult learners can have difficulty with online

learning and understanding the navigation process within online technology platforms. However, research shows older distance or online adult students are more engaged in a higher thinking level during interactive activities such as problem solving and working in groups (Chance, 2017). Pittaway's engagement framework includes supportive faculty, students recognizing their responsibility for learning, maintaining respectful relationships, and communicating clear expectations, allowing students to connect in the classroom experience (Chance, 2017).

Value Proposition

According to Croasmun (2020), value proposition is the importance of marketing the total benefits of promise of the service (Croasmun, 2020). In higher education, school reputation is the foundational building block of the institution's quality (Croasmun, 2020). Marketing departments consist of conveying the value of service when targeting customers or interested students. Universities compete for the same group of individuals, and prospective students perceive value associated with the reputation of the institution (Croasmun, 2020).

Croasmun (2020) states nonprofit private institutions have relied heavily on endowments and tuitions to continue to maintain their financial strength. However, with the continued rise of distance education programs, there is a need for new strategic initiatives to combat the reduced endowments (Croasmun, 2020). Nonprofit private higher education institutions have focused on three key initiatives: students' personal development, administrator and faculty satisfaction, and the professional development of the faculty to promote growth perspectives (Croasmun, 2020). Higher education institutions can find useful a cost benefit analysis on target marketing to nontraditional students to examine the value proposition adult learners bring.

Benchmarking in Higher Education

Caeiro et al. (2020) state that higher education institutions can enable a sustainability maturity curve if, in accordance with a whole school approach, agents engage in a change and transformation (Caeiro et al., 2020). Pressure mounts for higher education institutions to achieve sustainability and partner with organizations to work collaboratively to create and implement societal transformations (Caeiro et al., 2020). Developed assessments and benchmarks should consider a whole school integration approach directed to sustainable development in management (Caeiro et al., 2020). The importance of examining programs, such as widening participation agenda, has influenced enrollment of nontraditional students and the perception of higher education consists of outdated students' perception of enabling programs (McCall et al., 2020).

Marketing Accountability

Goodrich et al. (2020) claim that in higher education the marketing process is the basis of the college selection. Attributes are correlated with marketing, including the timing, influential persons, geographical location, marketing segmentation, and the prospective student ability level (Goodrich et al., 2020). Recruitment expenses are considered when the primary market segmentation produces a high recruitment expense. Therefore, when loss of retention and poor student satisfaction is an issue, universities realize these are significant factors to address (Goodrich et al., 2020). Furthermore, if there is a lack of multicultural competence experience in the classroom, problems exacerbate (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2016).

Higher educational institutions expect to understand a broader social forum, with political context that affects a diverse student population, while considering the economic impact that graduates represent (Weinstein et al., 2004). Higher education is associated with a market driven

orientation that places focus on satisfying student needs. Target marketing focuses on a more exclusive consumer group. This type of marketing has been criticized and considered unethical within marketing strategies (Smith & Cooper-Martin, 1997). The university's target market is high school students, therefore neglecting sufficient marketing to nontraditional adult learners, creating lower enrollment and less class diversity (Banks, 2017).

Summary

To summarize target marketing, it is a selective process of a particular group of individuals. Universities target market is high school students, neglecting adult learners and thereby reducing enrollment and diversity (Chen, 2017). Nontraditional Adult Learners (NALs) are considered a charity case and ignorant by colleges, and university campuses are a rescue from ignorance for this older population of students (Chen, 2017). This biased status is problematic for adult learners. Adult learners are limited to progress in their educational needs. The neglected components are distinctive issues of the invisible existing problems. Patronizing atmosphere experiences are offensive and demonstrate the importance of this research and the exploration of the value and significance of teaching approaches at colleges and universities (Chen, 2017). The diversity issue and the ability to provide academic achievement to both a traditional and nontraditional population is a distinctive component of the neglect in America's higher educational systems.

According to Jepson and Tobolowsky (2020), Degree Completion Programs (DCPs) are continuing to grow at a slow rate. However, graduation rates have not reported increases, and research reports that 64% of nontraditional adult students at 4-year universities are less likely to graduate (Jepson & Tobolowsky, 2020). Therefore, institutions should pose this question: are

career pathways contributing to nontraditional students' challenges and delaying academic success or supporting these students' endeavors?

Summary of the Literature Review.

This literature review provides a comprehensive look at ongoing research surrounding nontraditional students and universities' marketing techniques. In conclusion, direct marketing to high school seniors seems to produce more of a desirable outcome; however, this can be counterproductive to classroom diversity and universal diversity on universities campus. If direct marketing is to adult learners, these potential students can be beneficial to post-secondary educational system. Key points include a loss in enrollment of a population market, loss in value proposition within educational facilities, and loss of classroom diversity. The nontraditional student has more challenges to handle if a delay in education occurs. These mitigating factors of bias are key to lower target marketing to potential nontraditional students. However, this is an unknown for the marketer. Focus research topics are universities target markets are directed to high school students and do not sufficiently market to the nontraditional population. This topic looks at outcomes of marketing techniques that are directed to high school students and neglect the need for university classrooms to have diversity, including a varied age bracket in classrooms. Therefore, coercive structures of marketing need to strengthen arguments for foundational marketing techniques and identify larger community needs (Patterson, 2017).

Discovered themes found within this population group were in direct correlation with the theories associated with nontraditional adult learners. The emergent themes and patterns discovered relating to this study are related to the research questions. Individual perspectives, and the specifications regarding the reasoning of decisions made by this population group, produced patterns of three distinct discovered themes. One was the Dialogical Self Theory,

represented by the I-position from the participant to serve others. Another was the Maslow's Need Theory, which produced themes in relation to the students self-fulfilling level five on the hierarchy chart, producing a trust level regarding leadership of other individuals. The last theme correlates with the Self-Directed Learner Theory (SDL), which takes place within the nontraditional adult learner to self-manage in being initiative-taking within their educational endeavors. The themes and patterns are in reference to the research questions.

Studies have identified bias practices in higher education marketing departments and observed performance problems within student selection and evaluation scores. These biases can withhold valuable learning experiences older student can provide in learning environments. With a rise in nontraditional students going back to seek a degree at higher educational institutions, decision-making focus for marketing departments should incorporate nontraditional students. These students are goal driven, financially independent, and are the fastest growing population with over half of universities students today being over 25 years old (Patterson, 2017). The nontraditional adult learner has challenges the traditional student does not encounter. This study revealed challenges for this population group. Data provided the graduation rate, retention rates, and the drop-out rates from two post-secondary higher education institutions for this current student population group. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic introduced additional challenges for this group that were encountered during this study and that created a need for additional research for this population group in higher educational endeavors.

Summary of Section 1 and Transition

Data verifies challenges to consider for the nontraditional adult learner compared to the typical high school student. Adult learners have desires to further their education, while university marketing departments focus on marketing directly to high school students with fewer

obstacles before entering schools of their choosing. Different theories list and examine reasons adult learners can overcome challenges. However, direct target marketing to high school seniors produces more students that have fewer hurdles to overcome than adult learners. Marketing is a necessary component to encourage high school seniors to apply to a particular university. Universities depend on marketing departments to entice prospective students to attend universities. Repercussions of universities missing a segment of the population include lower value proposition and reduced innovative programs being introduced for adult learners. Target marketing impacts future workforce by selecting students targeted, graduates produced from post-secondary educational institutions for workplace in communities. Therefore, coercive marketing structures need to strengthen arguments for foundational marketing techniques and identities within larger community (Patterson, 2017). Adult learners can be beneficial for enrollment in higher educational systems. Key points by not addressing adult learners in target marketing are lower enrollments, loss in value proposition for universities, and loss of classroom diversity. Nontraditional students have more challenges to deal with if they do not go directly into another education system after high school graduation (Patterson, 2017). A mitigating factor is that marketers overlook additional enrollments that a nontraditional adult learner brings to universities. This research looked at outcomes of marketing techniques to high school seniors and bias in neglecting nontraditional populations that can be included for diversity within different age brackets. Graduation rates examined students in comparison to active workforce markets, with less experienced individuals seeking employment leading to a less skilled workforce.

The next section of this dissertation provides an outline of research for this study. Researchers looked at primary and secondary data within research, which included research

methods and appropriateness of triangulation of research. It included participants, population, and sampling methods. Research discussed sample size, and an analysis of data collection was performed. Interviewing methods were determined and questionnaires created that examined and provided reliability and validity. Data analysis looked at emergent ideas. Both primary and secondary data were collected. The researchers' role was to explain the process of addressing confidentiality and coding of participants. The IRB process has been addressed to attain submission approval and was granted. Lastly, a presentation was created and displayed data.

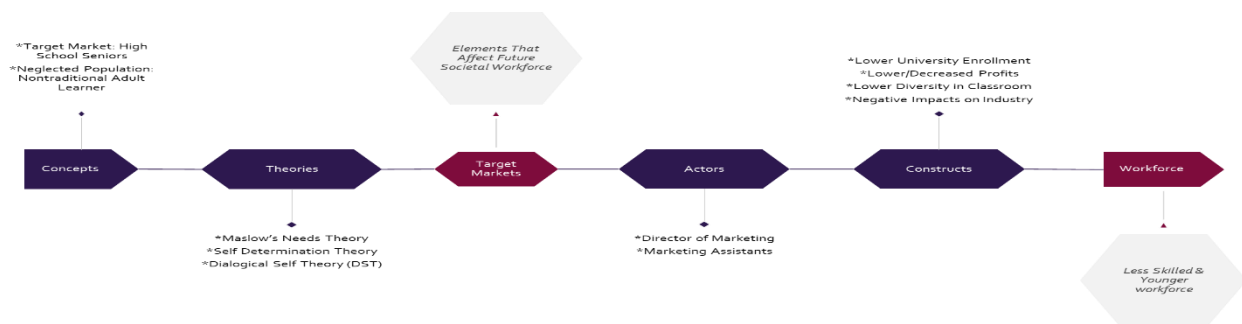


Figure 2. Framework diagram.

Section 2: The Project

The primary purpose for this research is to explore marketing of post-secondary educational institutions. Target marketing impacts value proposition on potential nontraditional student populations. The desired student enrollment is often reflected by target marketing. Post-secondary schools pursue high enrollment and invest substantial financial resources to enhance enrollment numbers. Universities rely on high school students' interest in their university to project higher enrollment numbers. This research reflects potential influence on the nontraditional student population and how marketing impacts the decision to pursue higher education for nontraditional students.

Individuals argue the value of adult education, and claim education is “too much about work, skills, and instrumental learning” and has “a defined learning task and measurable competencies” (Fleming, 2012, p.134). This literature is focused on adult learners, examining their competencies, and is associated with ethical and moral concerns. Challenges with the framework include advances of teaching and research existing in cultivated judgment of routine and non-routine circumstances within a classroom (Nicolaidis & Marsick, 2016). Critical questions explore new development of distance technologies and the evolving context of adult education debates.

Curriculum providing a correlation between adult learners and their work creates a source for producing a direct focal point for adult learners grasping ideas developed within a class for nontraditional students to understand class work involvement (Suzuki, 2017). This research leads to improved marketing techniques directed towards lifelong learners. The secondary data leads to unequal marketing techniques associated with adult learners and their representation and engagement practices for organizational learning (Lundvall & Rasmussen, 2016).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of using a flexible design in a single exploration case study was to add and expand understanding of beneficial factors involving value proposition and the target markets of traditional and nontraditional adult learners, understanding the effect it has on enrollment rates, classroom diversity, and competitiveness of marketing techniques used. This research enhanced marketing programs in colleges and business schools by adding to the body of knowledge for marketing departments (Oken-Tatum, 2019). A flexible design in a single case study method was used for evaluation and understanding in qualitative study form. One primary focus of research was to measure marketing techniques used by post-secondary marketing departments directed to

adult learners. Examining beneficial relationships of private university business schools marketing departments with primary and secondary data provided strategies put in place for a particular student population. This research examined nontraditional population challenges and provided primary data, bringing additional knowledge of the challenges a population may encounter. Research was derived from private universities in and around the Charlotte Mecklenburg areas of North Carolina. According to Hennink, existing sample size is based on saturation. Saturation is common when used in qualitative research in advanced data collection, aiming to “assess the saturation and identify parameters,” depending on the range of developing issues or code saturation from the participants (Hennink et al., 2019). Comprehensive understanding of the participants’ issues was identified within each participating university. Sample groups were derived from a minimum of two colleges and a maximum of five depending on saturation. This research explored neglect of target marketing to the nontraditional student population through an in-depth study of challenges faced by adult learners and a combination of immigration compared to a diversity factor focusing on students’ age identity. Focus on diversity of students was centered on participant age.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was used as the primary instrument by conducting interviews and performing a review process of the documents. The researcher was the instrument of choice during the interviewing portion of data collection and was used in the development of the questionnaire process including the open-ended questions. The researcher used as the primary instrument performed analysis of specific information within the research study, ensuring the participants’ responses used as data was that of a reliable and valid source. This data was associated with the detection of reoccurring themes and patterns. The researcher acting as an

instrument examined the adult learners' educational processes and the reasons they avoided furthering their education immediately after high school graduation. This data provided direct information from universities to produce relevance and results within private liberal art colleges. After receiving approval, this researcher gathered information from marketing directors of private universities, as well as current students, faculty, and staff. Information included data gathered through observation, existing surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Data examination was used for research purposes only. Historical and current data was collected to obtain updated information on the marketing techniques universities were currently using to attract potential students. Collected data included student retention, websites, college catalogs, and public program evaluations to be considered in current marketing plans.

Stufflebeam's CIPP model's evaluation consists of four areas: context, input, process, and product. Stufflebeam's CIPP model has a goal of efficiently evaluating a process using visual information within a context of product by evaluations. Stufflebeam and his associates developed the CIPP model in the 1960s (Stufflebeam & Zhang, 2017). An alternative evaluation identifies critical features within a diversity of these participants.

Bracketing

Bracketing are unacknowledged preconceptions of the researcher related to the research. To avoid these preconceptions the research looked for alternative explanations within the answer of the questionnaire presented to the participants. The researcher had the participants validate the data results to ensure accurate information, and the use of multiple data sources were verified in the analysis of this study. The researcher involved reflexivity or examination of their own judgments to identify any personal beliefs that could affect the research. In reducing the chance of personal bias, the researcher acknowledged as the instrument during the interview process

jotted notes and comments to include the researcher's thoughts as side notes. Continually editing and documenting memos during the developing data process also contributed to reflexivity. To avoid personal bias this researcher retained autonomy. By coding, the researcher asked pre-determined interview questions and evaluated study participants to ensure they also avoided personal bias. To avoid revealing any personal information about the participants, this evaluator referred to them as informants and used the participants' individual degree program for generic identification. A group of 15 participants was chosen from each university with a minimum of 15 participants from selected universities until saturation occurred. This saturation was acquired from a maximum of up to five universities or 40 participants, chosen randomly within an age bracket, from a total population of 15 individuals from each participating university. The researcher interviewed the informants individually to avoid any influence from other participants. These interviews took place in a live real-time interviewing process on campus, such as a classroom or office. Open-ended questions were used to assess and obtain information for a rich narrative. The open-ended questions allowed the informant freedom to share experiences. These experiences were coded as personal issues and all personal issues were a qualifiable experience without bias being interjected by the researcher. This freedom of communication promoted participants to be transposed into the role of an expert on the topic of reasoning for educational delays, instead of the interviewee searching for correct answers, thereby removing any undue pressure on the interviewee.

Summary

This research was an exploratory single case study investigating outcomes with a qualitative design. This case study, *Exploring Target Marketing at Private Universities Directed to Nontraditional Student Population*, investigated target marketing of private universities and

the relationship between the marketing mix that included the seven Ps of marketing: place, price, product, promotion, people, process, and physical environment. This research concluded with a discussion of the value proposition relationship of nontraditional adult learners and their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding decisions to delay their higher education endeavors. This researcher's design and process guided an exploratory study using evaluation tools, existing surveys, questionnaires, and interviews.

Research Methodology

A research paradigm is a representation of a researcher's worldview and overall understanding of literature and problems. These paradigms of representation are divided into three primary representation groups: reflective, intentional, and constitutive. Pragmatism is focused on a problem, rather than a view of reality, and understanding with emphasis on shared meanings. This research continually expects possible joint actions based on a belief that a combination of theories can be used in a contextual or generalizable situation (Tran, 2017).

A pragmatic approach was the best method for this study. This approach relied on abductive reasoning to move between induction and deduction to connect theory and data. A qualitative method of deductive reasoning provided results allowing for potential conclusions and data viewed as incompatible data (Tran, 2017). Research using a pragmatic approach is a building block for action and change, providing a reasonable basis of intervention for a problem and not just observing a problem and hoping for change, and building facts and combinations of interventions within an organization to provide an essential framework with a pragmatic approach. A pragmatic paradigm research methodological framework consists of three orientations: aiming for explanation and prediction, aiming for interpretation and understanding,

and aiming for intervention and change, known as action and change-oriented research (Goldkuhl, 2017).

A pragmatic approach is used for understanding diverse types of information gathered and used by universities marketing departments to collect data. This approach allowed the researcher to gather reasons why university marketing departments would not target adult learners. Research questions sought to provide answers to specific questions that would be a basis of reasoning as to why university education marketers fail to target adult learners. These research questions investigated different marketing strategies used for nontraditional learners and regular high school marketing strategies. Developing answers to these questions related to a marketing mix element for investigative purposes. Information gained from these questions aided in discovering marketing elements aimed at adult learners and how they might persuade an adult learner to further their education.

These questions brought attention to marketing departments' leadership strategies within private universities. Data gathered can be an asset for post-secondary universities as competitors seeking potential students. Open-ended questions provided suggestions for marketing leadership at universities so they might sufficiently market to nontraditional adult learners without bias. This research brought attention to evolving design processes and essential findings that administrators and educators need in order to work with adult students.

Discussion of Flexible Design

This research was conducted with a qualitative (flexible) design method. Specifically, a single case study design was used. This brought a qualitative method approach for research concerning adult learners and allowed for exploration in educational fields, including schematics with diagrams to aid in understanding key issues and concepts (Hackley, 2020). A qualitative

method approach helped with abstract concepts that were encountered during the single case study. This method was helpful in providing clear interactions of nontraditional students and main techniques used with traditional students for interpretations of qualitative data. A qualitative research structure helped bring qualitative marketing research into a discovery and understanding phase for researchers. Research information assisted universities with value proposition examination needed to maintain current data, with an understanding of attitudes and challenges of this adult learner population (Maison et al., 2019). A qualitative research design permitted a natural setting, allowing researchers to be a key instrument in data collection. Complex reasoning requiring a thorough inductive and deductive logic within patterns and categories concluded that a qualitative design was approximate research (Maison et al., 2019).

A single case study is the most appropriate choice for this research because it helped incorporate a practical and accessible interpretive method while doing so in qualitative research. A structural analysis brought concepts together in a comprehensive pragmatic approach, bridging gaps between traditional marketing techniques directed to nontraditional adult learners (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These interpretive methods utilized a unique pragmatic approach bringing an exploration into marketing fields and improving pedagogy with exposition of key issues and concepts (Hackley, 2020). A single case study was helpful in accumulating meaningful evidence and helped researchers engage in more applied research for details in an in-depth accumulation of data. A single case method was beneficial with descriptions of individual's experiences, events that happen, or activities that occurred (Ledford & Gast, 2018). Parallels within research produced time constraints for documentation; therefore, a solitary case study best aligned with this research method and did not hinder time constraint factors and produced an investigative analysis to draw findings and conclusions. Using a flexible design allowed for data collection

with ability to intervene during collection, reduce any sensitivity of personal topics encountered within a research phase, and ensured the researcher was able to adapt during emerging results.

Discussion of Triangulation

Triangulation within a flexible design included research concepts based on literature relating to this study. Triangulation is working with a flexible design in a qualitative research method focusing on multiple concepts. This triangulation of data collection considers time constraints. Research aided with a framework for interviewing multiple participants, allowing for a supply of multiple levels for aggregate, interactive interviews, and collectivity of data to produce concrete data information. Strategies for data examination included audio recordings, interviews, existing surveys, and questionnaires. Documentation of data was collected from universities based upon age of enrolled students to examine validity of information pointing to target marketing (Rooshenas et al., 2019).

Summary of Research Methodology

The research conducted examined marketing techniques used by universities that target high school seniors and do not sufficiently market to nontraditional adult learners. The problem had the necessary amount of information needed to provide conclusions, primarily with a qualitative method approach. Data collected during research was confidential and produced new, uncharted information using specific methods to produce a conclusive summation to information gathered within a case study method. This solitary case study method permitted an analysis, enabling researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of situations and meanings that engage in a population (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Information gleaned from this case study can have a direct impact and influence on administration's policies and procedures, university branding, and produce future research within post-secondary marketing departments.

This methodology provided useful information embedding data within a case study aiming to describe features and phenomena that individuals experience. This study endorsed key components of value proposition, including human and environmental changes, to be included with marketing strategies at universities. A direct informational source includes primary data drawn from confidential matters affecting certain population groups and their ability to share information, in combination with obtaining permission for collection from a variety of different informational sources (Pauluzzo, 2020). Research was drawn from a pragmatic standpoint and was studied using a flexible design case study method.

Collected information drew recommendations from research questions created and included findings from an examination of the problem statement as to why universities target market high school seniors, and do not sufficiently market to nontraditional adult learners. In the research collected, the main information obtained brought attention to key concepts of neglecting certain population groups by universities' marketing departments and brought consideration to nontraditional adult learners within educational systems. A change in marketing techniques to specific individuals can directly impact marketing departments, addressing bias issues with a direct effect on enrollment and value proposition shared by loss of a student population by neglecting to market a nontraditional student population group.

Participants

Eligible individuals to be included in this study were identified as key informants with valuable information relating to the complex social phenomena related to this study. Namely, these informants were nontraditional students, academic advisors, admissions representatives, chief marketing administration, and faculty. The main potential participants are the students that met the criteria and provided the primary data; secondary data was provided by the

administration of each institution. These are individuals who did not attend a post-secondary institution after high school graduation or did not complete high school by traditional high school graduation requirement. These individuals provided valuable information to explain why a delayed enrollment may occur, resulting in later additional education after completion of high school or a general education diploma (GED). Information gathered from traditional college students can provide information on how college fairs provided in high school impacted their decision to choose to attend a college or university. High school guidance counselors can provide data on students seeking college enrollment compared to students seeking a career and technical education (CTE). University academic advisors are a direct link to potential college bound students and provided information on college requirements for enrollment. Participants from post-secondary institutions providing primary data include chief marketing administrators directly involved with university branding and target marketing groups. These participants can provide reasons for selection of a certain group. University admissions representatives can provide data on enrolled students' ages, grade point averages and selected programs in comparison to age brackets. Research also included collecting information from faculty, which can provide information on learning differences of nontraditional adult learners compared to a younger student population entering college directly after high school graduation.

This researcher was solely responsible for ethical procedures conducted on human subjects in this study. This research ensured a consent form was received from each participant and informed participants of details of this research. Privacy and anonymity of all research participants and data collected took precedence in all research obtained. Participants were able to withdraw from this study at any stage and were informed that data collected was on a voluntary basis.

Population and Sampling

Population and sampling within this case study were performed within the basis of overlapping of individual participants at different points. An example would be an informant may also be employed at the university and had acquired their degree as a nontraditional student. This study includes interviewing participants, consisting of 15 participants originating from each institution. This researcher had real-time live interviews with thirty informants and four other experts representing their respective sector. Sampling was an objective method which specified participants. The interviewing process was a live interview with predeveloped open-ended questions that promoted in-depth discussion to obtain detailed data allowing for a question-and-answer interview. This data collection was from the nontraditional student population. Identification of participants was not revealed and was coded by individual program. An existing questionnaire was performed with other participants to include additional data on educational strategies and involvement with effective factors. To address time constraints, this research was with two private universities and a maximum of five geographically close in proximity if saturation was not obtained.

Discussion of Population.

Higher educational institutions are increasingly adopting a modern-day business-like model for their operations due to rising pressure from stakeholders and governing boards (Molina, 2019). Universities can access large pools of data which can be difficult to translate. With help from their employees, this data was used to obtain actionable information for this study. There are approximately three thousand programs and over four hundred thirty campuses around the world (Conrad, 2018). The ACBSP (Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs) focuses on smaller private schools which concentrate on teaching rather than

emphasizing the research aspect of outcomes (Conrad, 2018). Regionally accredited higher education private institutions within the state of North Carolina have earned an ACBSP or AACSB (Association of Advance Collegiate School of Business) in their school of business programs (Conrad, 2018). Two of these institutions were used in this research for population purposes. Population participants were selected from private universities within the state of North Carolina. This study consisted of thirty total participants from the universities, consisting of a minimum of two universities and a maximum of five, or until saturation occurred.

Discussion of Sampling

Discussion of Sampling Method

Purposeful sampling is often used in case studies and is used in different areas to define characteristics typicality or atypicality. This strategy identified patterns related to a phenomenon. Sample size for a qualitative case study is considered an estimate and therefore cannot be a predetermined amount (Gentles & Vilches, 2017). Purposeful sampling was used in this research. However, a goal of this research was to number samples of participants and reveal patterns within research findings. This case study involved interpretation and specific observation for data analysis. Purposeful sampling provided identity between traditional and nontraditional students and provided a selection process of a phenomenon of interest, including research criteria from accredited private institutions of post-secondary educational institutions.

All thirty participants were selected for information and expertise that their competency of position could provide. Eight participants, chosen randomly, were made up of four nontraditional learners and four traditional students. Each sub-group of students added valuable information in a decision-making process of delaying their education or beginning their educational goals directly after high school graduation. Two chief marketing offices, one from

each university, provided data on university branding and strategies for target marketing and hopes of accomplishment in marketing techniques used. Also included in the sampling are four college academic representatives, two faculty personnel, two admissions officers, and two high school counselors. Data was collected in a semi structured interview and consisted of a researcher-made Professional Competence Questionnaire. The researcher focused on characteristics of students and marketing strategies with valuable goals determining a focused approach in marketing and effective factors.

Discussion of Sample Frame

This researcher used a purposeful sampling method to identify useful information. This strategy related to a solitary case study of a phenomenon of interest, and participants met certain predetermined criteria, including an exhibited pattern of information to be discovered. To clarify all units within this research, the information was collected from people, organizations, and existing documents. Primary data was collected from student participants considered to be nontraditional learners. These students are in an age bracket from 25 years and older that did not start their higher education journey immediately after high school. The higher educational colleges were private institutions in North Carolina. Secondary data was collected from existing documents and records from these institutions.

Discussion of Sample and Sample Size

This research study population included two private universities offering baccalaureate and graduate degrees. There was potential for community colleges to be included if research found a need for additional information or participants. A sample size of thirty participants provided primary and secondary data within this current period without duplication of information. Questions allowed for examination of similar characteristics of participants and

gathered appropriate information from individuals allowing recommendations from this research. These colleges were in the state of North Carolina. Gathered data determined an outcome providing a framework conclusion from saturation of sample group participants. This saturation was accomplished from data collected and information gathered from these participants.

Departmental permission was obtained prior to this research being presented to participants. An informational letter was given to all administration and participants explaining research and confidentiality involved with projected outcomes from research. Included with this letter was a signature page stating permission granted for this research. This letter was presented during a real-time meeting with each department dean for additional clarification on research. After permission was received and research concluded, a thank you letter was mailed to each participant and dean for allowing or participating in this research.

Summary of Population and Sampling

The population for this research included two regionally accredited schools of post-secondary higher educational institutions. Five of those six were selected for this study; however, if permission was not granted, this research was then to be presented to the other of the six remaining universities. This researcher used a purposeful sampling strategy which provided identity and a selection process of phenomenon of interest, including research criteria from accredited private colleges of post-secondary educational institutions. Information collected included retention rates, graduation rates, progressive tracks of nontraditional students, and institution marketing techniques. Collaboration was key and provided an advantage within service sectors of participating universities within educational institutions. A purposeful sampling method was used, with primary and secondary data collected from thirty participants. Saturation was accomplished from this sample size to avoid gathering repetitive information.

Access was gained by presenting e-mails and/or letters to appropriate administrative staff and participants for permission, including additional real-time interviews.

Data Collection & Organization

Research was conducted to examine marketing techniques to offer recommendations to baccalaureate and graduate degree programs. Enhanced marketing techniques for post-secondary institutions were developed without collection of primary and secondary data. Research was not completed without proper collection of data to draw a conclusive objective outcome. This research utilized collected researchers' conclusions to develop solid recommendations. This researcher reviewed data and information obtained to allow for developed understanding of value creation methods within marketing department in post-secondary institutions.

Data Collection Plan

This researcher sent an e-mail to institutions being considered for participation in this study. This e-mail served as an introduction letter, introducing this researcher and the research being conducted. The researcher attached a consent form requiring approval from a dean or primary administrator of each institution, allowing the researcher to conduct interviews for collection of primary and secondary data from institutions. Participating universities' faculty, current/potential nontraditional and traditional student population, and director/administrative staff were included in this data collection. A questionnaire was presented to participants for credibility and consistency in data.

Data collection consisted of a multivariate study using primary and secondary data. This data depicted a basic structure of participants' phenomenon experiences, with associated past graduation outcomes from other nontraditional population graduates. This researcher did compile information from participants varying in age, gender, and socioeconomic groups. Primary data

was collected from participants using a private individual interviewing method, with a combination of individual open-ended interviews fostering an understanding of a phenomenological type of approach within in-depth interviews. Main objectives for this approach were to study participants' feelings and to observe behavior related to research questions. An audio recording of interviews served as confirmation of reliability of data collected during interviewing and collection of field notes recorded.

A complete packet of data collected was provided to each institution and individuals participating in this research. Any informal conversations between researcher and participant during interviewing was documented and field notes for each institution relating to research were documented and included in a packet. Collection of documentation was included with assessments and the recommendations provided additional insight into influential gains of value proposition with marketing techniques provided.

Member Checking

Member checking interviews with student participants were conducted individually for accuracy in documented information collected. These individual member checking interviews consisted of participants examining recorded data presented in this study. This examination helped check for any necessary changes before this study was distributed. After review, participants verbally affirmed agreement with the information on a data sheet.

Follow Up

If any new questions arose from responses to initial interview questions, these questions were addressed at this time for documentation and clarification. The additional in-depth examination of information and potential new interview questions arising from responses from initial interviews was recorded and documented. The new document was presented to another

member to check for saturation. This helped avoid conflict after outlining data for final documentation of information.

Additional member checking and follow up interviews were conducted with staff and administration for accuracy of represented data recorded. After a review of information of primary and secondary data was validated, the validation of responses was dictated and included in this study. Key stakeholders from each institution participated in this follow up validation process. Data collection in this multipart data collection process was utilized to provide multiple strategies to understand this complexity of content.

Instruments

This research used a four-step approach from a research guide by Rashid et al. (2019). This approach consisted of preparation, exploration, specification, and integration (PESI), providing an empirical material interpretation for qualitative studies. A PESI approach is a systematic and organized way of interpretation (Rashid et al., 2019). The first step is preparation, including familiarization with these institutions and how secondary data was collected. This step included interviewing, field notes, and organizing and reviewing documents. Secondly, the exploration process included interviews and collecting primary data from a nontraditional student population, staff, faculty, and administration. The third stage is specification and included searching collected data information and interpretation of this information. Lastly, integration consisted of producing findings and providing recommendations to institutions. This research used a MAXQDA system or another qualitative analysis software system in development of a frame for research questions in order of (1) nature value realized, (2) resources and actors, (3) value proposition creation, and (4) nature of interactions to existing programs and interactions (Rashid et al., 2019). This frame provided an approach to focus on interpretation of

information gathered. Questions in relationship to this frame were within a screening of answers to research questions. This first question related to investigation in marketing techniques and learning platforms for this nontraditional population. The second question addressed challenges this population encounters when continuing their education. Question three investigated support offered to nontraditional populations from institutions. Lastly, the final question investigated administration and faculty and the impact to this population. This researcher examined raw empirical material significant to understanding a marketing process associated with value proposition for a post-secondary educational institution, and interpretation of transforming understood context from research questions and data collected.

This researcher served as a primary instrument used during research by conducting interviews for data purposes. For purposes of this interview portion, data collection for research included an interview questionnaire (Appendix A), allowing for a collection of accurate information using consistent questions. The questionnaire included open-ended questions associated with experiences encountered by nontraditional students. A variety of inquiries of value propositions in marketing for this population was investigated. To improve collection of specific information within this study, a questionnaire was provided for reliable and valid structure in detection of emerging and reoccurring phenomenon themes associated with programs of this study.

This research investigated deep levels of meaning of subjects' feelings, experiences, and observations. The existing survey being used provided reliable and consistent trustworthiness of research findings. These exit survey questions were in response to interview questions and beneficial factors in which they are presented. To ensure appropriate process, a validation of participants' responses was performed for accuracy within this focus. These exit survey

questions also provided proof of permission to use this interviewing process as a tool, and data collection was approved by permission of these participants without force or undue pressure.

Archival Data

Archive data or secondary data collected from staff and/or administration was used in assessment of programs entered. Data also included student basic age of graduation, with a request of collection of gender in each program corresponding to age range. Secondary data was retrieved from an admission representative to include registrar, chief marketing administration, and academic advisors. Social economic status is not considered an influential performance indicator or perspective. However, influences affecting the nontraditional population's decision on pursuing an education was noted, such as parent education, parent career field, guidance counselor perceptions and recommendation from academic advisors, with ethnicity and other factors pertaining to student's background context with socioeconomic status. The data collected from achieved data was in correlation with graduation success.

Data Organization Plan

After collection of data, this researcher performed an inductive analysis to look for any information categorizing an emergent pattern or theme. This researcher did not identify any errors for correction. Data was analyzed for clarification, utilizing information to rule out any groupthink challenges. Contents were passively and ethically organized to maintain descriptive and identity attributes for this interpretive phase of research. This researcher used a MAXQDA case analysis software program to acknowledge developed themes within data presented. This case study was made up of multiple incidents that are aggregated, known as categorical aggregations (Creswell & Poth, 2019). After organization of recorded participants with

identification of generating qualitative data and reviewing for accuracy, the assignment of coding process occurred.

Summary of Data Collection & Organization

While using a qualitative inquiry method, a review of institutional documentation regarding this research consisted of interviews with key stakeholders of nontraditional student populations. Secondary data was also collected from institutions and included prior nontraditional student graduation rates, age, gender, and program selection. This exploration did depict value proposition of marketing departments and direct student selection of marketing purposes. This study helped develop a better understanding of influences on nontraditional student experiences, perceptions, and causes of delaying pursuit of post-secondary education. After collected research and an empirical finding, recommendations were presented to each institution and participant. These recommendations depicted influences of marketing departments to a specific student population.

Data Analysis

The data collection process consisted of an inductive analysis to determine any patterns or emergent themes that formed. This research case included an individual case analyzation from a purposeful population sampling. The individual interviewing process analyzed each sample and categorized collected data from participants for accuracy. This researcher analyzed themes or ideas in large clusters within data for specific aggregating information providing details within this data to support findings (Creswell & Poth, 2019). This data collection engaged in a real-life contemporary context and settings with recordings from the investigator (Potter, 2020).

Emergent Ideas

Emergent themes arose during the process of coding. These ideas were derived from research data from participants and was linked to a conceptual analytical context. Identification of emergent themes was accomplished by re-reading data and passively listening to recordings of interviews conducted with participants. Experiences noted by participants were documented. Research documentation and incorporated open-ended responses from interview questions presented brought interpretive insight of patterns noted from empirical process.

Coding Themes

This researcher coded aggregating information into sections and small categories to label information with the goal of assigning an organized procedure with data collected. The researcher used a computer software program MAXQDA or an equivalent qualitative analysis package for assistance in the coding process. Subcategories were created for analysis such as students, administrators, and staff. These subcategories labeled individuals by coded context number given by the researcher. Programs were used for area of study, gender was not noted for classification, and age was examined for bracketing and bias. Any patterns were noted to be analyzed for recurrent themes and comparisons.

Interpretations

Collection of empirical material data and interpretation depended on material collected and reporting (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Considerations to be noted were the structure of this research and crucial data to produce key points of application of this research. These key points in case study research began with this case description, participant descriptions, relationship descriptions, and details of field protocols of examination of patterns and emergent themes, and

empirical material interpretation and analysis to form conclusions and make valid interpretation and recommendations (Rashid et al., 2019).

Data Representation

This study was in line with Elliott's (2018) recommendations of starting with naming participants with a short word or short phrase. This is a precise way to categorize descriptive code, using basic labels including students, administration, and staff. This process was intimately related to research questions, and the main principle had a conceptual and structural unity (Elliot, 2018). These codes were labeled, and additional subcategories were added if needed. Based on individual experiences, shared short words or tenses were not added for the protection of participant and respect for information shared. Emergent themes and patterns were noted. This researcher entered data into a private database to ensure privacy and used MAXQDA or another data analysis program to maintain confidentiality of information and participants.

Analysis for Triangulation

Triangulation for this research used a qualitative analysis method. Qualitative methods use information that represent emergent ideas, and in the data analysis phase these ideas stemmed from notes, recordings from interviews, and secondary data collected (Elliot, 2018). Quantitative data analysis used a numerical analysis system to determine outcomes of basic integrated research. This method used direct yes and no answers to questions posed to participants, unlike the qualitative method based on exploratory questions. Triangulation in this research was determined by data from investigative interviewing recordings and sources provided from secondary data of age groups enrolled in programs (Creswell & Poth, 2019). Academic advisors were subjective to the amount of advertising directed to the nontraditional population. The credibility came from the source of position held within marketing departments

and target marketing engagements. Naturalistic research looked for results that were subject to change or were changeable (Creswell & Poth, 2019).

Summary of Data Analysis

This qualitative approach allowed the researcher to analyze data from samplings in a case study method. Data analysis used an inductive approach with information collected from secondary data from institutions and interviews, nontraditional students, administration, and staff. Focus was on the value proposition of marketing departments. This allowed for discovery in commonalities and general patterns existing in multiple institutions in this study. This researcher improved the reliability of this case study with assistance of using existing questionnaires by participants.

Reliability and Validity

Authenticity of this study was ensured with necessary efforts from the researcher. A researcher must be aware of any personal bias influencing data collected and be responsible for necessary steps to ensure reliability with ethical responsibility. Qualitative research methods were designed to incorporate phenomenological events and real-life experiences within collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2019). This research incorporated methodological strategies aimed to establish trustworthiness from the participants and ensure sufficient relevance in the data collection.

Reliability.

In this qualitative study, this researcher did ensure authenticity of the study results by maintaining confidentiality of participants. Interviews did take place in a nondisclosed setting with controlled atmosphere and controlled surroundings. This researcher did conduct a standardized procedure to reflect consistency within entire research. Eligibility is based on the

assurance of confidentiality and the creation of good analysis and process observation during data collection. This process and conclusions differed depending on participant, and observation entailed reaction of stimulus of the act of measurement. This process was accomplished by recording conversations for accountability within the spoken context. Notes taken during all observations and data collected are to be kept in a locked container for a period of seven years and then destroyed. According to Kluge (2019), research involves investigating real life problems and searching roles of knowledge using different strategies, and intuition and expertise of the researcher is critical. Reliability used assessments by consistency of secondary data acquired from existing university records. By using past university records in the nontraditional student population group, this comprehensive data created a refutational analysis for reliability. The transferability of past performance from this group of graduates posed as a confirmability of findings worth noting in value proposition for the university marketing department.

Validity.

Validity within this research had to ensure integrity of application in which methods undertaken by this researcher for accurate findings were reflected in data. Data collected used both note taking and audio recordings to utilize accurate current information collected. The researcher had participants with diverse experiences and perspectives. Validity was ensured using member-checking and follow up interviews. These interviews were conducted with participants to establish validity, and correct understanding in data was recorded.

Triangulation within this study enhanced this research rigor and allowed for a complete portrayal of related phenomena (Moon, 2019). Interviewing processes included the broadest possible perspectives to interpret evidence by using multiple data sources to achieve a convergence of evidence. Triangulation supported reality-based phenomena that nontraditional

student populations experience. Triangulation included senior leadership and supervisors to incorporate scholarship and to minimize any biases.

Saturation was accomplished when repetition of data collected occurred. Participants reviewed information collected to identify any error and for clarification on context. This allowed for feedback to ensure accuracy to reflect phenomena researched. Final themes and patterns created were investigated to establish credibility in these semi-structured interviews.

Bracketing.

To address unacknowledged preconceptions of the researcher related to the research, alternative explanations were considered within the answers to the pre-determined questions presented to the participants. Participants reviewed the data results to ensure accurate information, and the use of multiple data sources verified the analysis of this study. The researcher performed an examination of their own judgments to identify any personal beliefs that could create a bias to the answers presented. The researcher acknowledged the role as an instrument being used during the interview process and took notes and made comments including researcher's thoughts for reference and clarity. Editing and taking notes developed a data recording process contributing to reflexivity.

Research using preliminary field notes and recordings can contain methodological issues arriving from physical and emotional vulnerability (Gregory, 2019). The use of audio recordings and field notes was significant in preventing research bias. Secondary data also projected adequate information to strongly provide structure in objectivity. Spontaneous motivators of emotional involvement are counterproductive in a critical factor of non-involvement or personal bias. Participants provided feedback with review of data from interviews (Janak, 2018). Bracketing can present cumulative loss over time, and evidence suggests information is ignored

when strategic decisions are based on experience (Chaudhry et al., 2020). This research provided feedback which characterizes underlying broad bracketing effects. These experiences functioned as a strong drive for a change in marketing techniques or a compatible value proposition with marketing used by institutions with no bias emphasized.

Summary of Reliability and Validity.

This qualitative case study incorporated strategies establishing an ethical trustworthiness reflecting validity of findings. It incorporated protocols for successful consistent research, such as field notes, interviewing, and institutional secondary data. This researcher established validity in an ethical application of methods by accurately recording interviews to ensure correct depiction of experience, behavior, and information from participants and their commitments to share. Allowing participants to examine documentation on interviews for corrections or comments established validity. With meticulous record keeping and participant reviews, these research findings accurately reflected reliability and validity.

Summary of Section 2 and Transition

For this researcher to establish integrity and validity, an application of meticulous steps was accomplished. This study intended to utilize a qualitative case study to explore value proposition in marketing departments at post-secondary institutions. The population in this study included nontraditional students within post-secondary higher education system. This study used a structured interviewing process with primary and secondary data collected from two post-secondary private institutions. Research incorporated multiple data sources and methods, with triangulation of data promoting validity of findings.

A primary objective of this researcher in this case study was to present reliable information by using analyzed procedures and application from professional collected data, with

anticipated themes collected for further study and for future actions pertaining to marketing to nontraditional populations. Using a case study protocol structure of collected research questions, as well seeking and obtaining permission with all ethical considerations and reliability and validity measures taken, ensured this interpretation process to be accurate, with an appropriate criterion in place for assessment to produced recommendations for value proposition within a nontraditional population.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Overview of the Study

The overall success of an institution is dependent upon their marketing, and how much the institution relies on value proposition relies on marketing to reach enrollment goals. Institutions must recognize that their marketability impacts their survival and ability to increase in enrollments. The implementation of programs is utilized by resources and programs offered. Resources come from different sources, such as endowments, donations, grants, and tuition fees. Institutions understand that more than half of all the undergraduate students are part time students and 80% work a full-time job while enrolled in college (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). A significant number of these students are nontraditional students over the age of 25 years old. These students have an impact on higher education institutions by increasing enrollment, increasing value proposition, and adding diversity to the school. A basic pattern varied by income of student and intentions are shifted to a behavior and experience of each individual student. The nontraditional student who did not enroll in college immediately after graduation from high school is financially independent and has major responsibilities and outside roles that normally compete with their school studies. These responsibilities are complex life situations that may include parenting, community involvement, working a full-time job, caregiving, and financial obligations, and these students may lack the standard requirements for admission to a program (Dreznick, 2022).

This research explores the nontraditional student 25 years of age or older that did not enter college directly after high school. Nontraditional students represent a portion of the population in higher education from small private institutions. However, some institutions may be better suited to nontraditional students than others by offering additional programs to serve

these students' needs. The research data was collected from two small private theology institutions, which attract many nontraditional students. Two institutions participated in the study and conclusions were drawn by reaching a saturation point of 50 percent of repetitive themes and patterns. The study interviewed active college students that met the criteria noted. The interview conducted consisted of four open-ended broad questions asked of the participants. Transcriptions of the interviews were reviewed, and an inductive approach was taken in the input of answers for analyzing them. These questions were put into a generalized coded area within a qualitative analysis software system known as MAXQDA. The codes are derived from the questions and simplified by four areas which include: challenges, marketing, support, and additional help for the student. Statements were coded with themes and pattern frequency for the saturation point. Analysis revealed that students were satisfied with their institution and marketing derived from word of mouth by pastors and friends. The research also determined that the academic support received was effective; however, more technology could be actively improving the quality of education. Future research could be beneficial in the student retention rate and graduation rate. COVID-19 impacted the institutions and the number of classes offered, correlating with the enrollment numbers. The nontraditional students' main challenges related to limited time for outside assignments and the life-work-school balance. Because many nontraditional students have multifaceted lives, they may require different services from the institution. Value proposition by marketing did not impact these institutions, and the focus of these institutions did not interfere with the administration setting class accomplishment; however, enrollment was impacted by the pandemic and had a direct impact on the number of classes offered as well as faculty and staff employment. Therefore, less classes were offered to the nontraditional student and prolonged the graduation requirement.

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the marketing techniques and the impact of the nontraditional adult learners on the value proposition within two small private institutions within the state of North Carolina. This research examined methods used in attracting the prospective nontraditional adult learner and the impact these students have in the classroom, impacting the value propositions this population can bring to post-secondary institutions. This study adds to the body of knowledge on utilizing target marketing for the nontraditional adult learners, gaining insight for the institution on value proposition to market to this nontraditional population. The overall marketing strategy of post-secondary institutions highlights offered programs of study specific to each individual institution. Competition puts universities under greater pressure to continue advancing innovative learning experiences into the educational system. This competitive pressure increases the multimodality and customized learning experiences offered. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, higher educational systems operated using modes of face-to-face classroom learning experiences. However, the pandemic has affected the multimodality of learning presented to students, thereby affecting the value proposition of higher education institutions (Rof et al., 2022).

The impacts of COVID-19 regarding teaching modalities increased the online learning students' enrollments. The different modes of learning methods create opportunities and challenges for the nontraditional adult learner. The pandemic has created a forced digital learning classroom approach. These new digital innovational approaches of hybrid and completely online learning modes have been necessary during emergency situations. However, whether these styles of learning are considered a threat or a great opportunity is determined by the results they produce (Dietrich et al., 2020). Current research has labeled these initial stages of learning in the

ongoing pandemic as the “new normality” in the educational systems (Nandy et al., 2021; Tesar, 2020). This forced digitalized learning has triggered gaps for students and narrowed opportunities for students who have challenges with these channels of multimodal learning approaches. The varying degree of different learning results and the online learning activities increase the value propositions for the post-secondary higher educational institutions. Regarding the staff and faculty, teaching has transformed from synchronous learning with instructors and other students gathering at the same location to asynchronous learning where students learn at their own pace and interact with other students over longer periods of time. This changes the nature of the relationship during the learning process but has opened opportunities by the flexibility it allows the student (Marinoni et al., 2020). The delivery modalities, including more video conferences and more digital tools, increase an invested opportunity in cloud services and working processes for the administrative procedures, creating a remote working opportunity and promoting lifelong learners.

Themes Discovered

The themes and patterns discovered relating to this study were directly in relation to the research questions, including the individual perspectives from interviewees regarding the program studied, the specifications of the program, and marketing technique outcomes associated with marketing for the nontraditional student population. The themes and patterns were also in reference to the research questions. Patterns in data were noted after data was organized and analyzed. Upon analysis of the emergent themes discovered, one noted by administration was laziness of students resulting in noncompletion of assignments and homework, which produced a lower retention rate. This emergent theme represented in an interpreting or discovering meaning of information is associated with stress within the family

home life and is regarded as a generalization regarding the researched topic on the nontraditional student population.

Interpretation of the Themes

Themes identified related from the research questions due to the different marketing that introduced the student to the institution they attend. The perspective student is interested in the benefits and the differences between each institution. The outcomes are associated with programs offered and cost. The relationship that occurred within the themes/patterns also occurred with the reputation of the college and the graduation rates. Students did their own investigation on the different colleges, seeking information on programs offered, cost, and length of programs. Reviews and person to person communication were also a factor in the branding of the college and the marketing of the programs for this student population. The outcomes associated with these factors are decision factors for the student seeking additional education with the college or another college.

Theme 1: Increased psychological development develops an increased empowerment practice to change belief systems of individuals.

A theme that continued from the interviewed participants (P5, P8, P9) continued to emphasize the importance of changing societal belief systems and having influence in the community (P5, P8, P9, P10, P11, P17, P22). This change includes giving the community a positive solution in the conception of their internal belief system with understanding more biblical beliefs by giving information on acceptance of taught bible studies. Theme one, The Dialogical Self Theory refers to the internal thoughts inside individuals' minds that narrate their lives, displaying the I-position thought process held. Participant coded as P4 expressed the importance of internal consequences in the intra-conception of self. This is displayed by

statements made from the individual interviewee such as “the knowledge I gained in aspects to needing to learn about subjects regarding the bible are necessary.” This statement is a basis of a continuous theme throughout the interviewing process coded by (P4, P5, P8, P9, P10, P11, P17, P18, P22, P25, P27), who found culture and society importance from teaching the community of biblical knowledge to have a positive impact in the area shared. The interviewee’s listed above who share and practice their learned educational knowledge have empowered their self-obtaining ability to change one’s belief system of self and cultural beliefs impacting future generations.

Theme 2: Special trust and benefit to individuals generates a leadership relationship.

Participants P13, P4, P23, P30 continually spoke of learning about the programs they are attending by learning from their pastor or friend (P13, P12, P10, P11, P4, P8, P9, P6, P1, P2, P3, P23, P24, P25, P29, P30, P26). This word-of-mouth marketing had a large impact on the enlistment of their program and the furthering of studies for these nontraditional students. Research found individuals in leadership positions marketed by word of mouth for programs offered by different institutions. Maslow’s Need Theory in the level of self-actualization refers to the person’s potential, and the self-fulfillment of personal growth and the realization of personal experiences in life. The theory can be applied from the students and generate leaders within the community developing a relationship with a diverse population. In many church congregations the pastor holds a leadership position and is held at a higher esteemed level. This self-actualization level in the Maslow Needs Theory is a direct motivator to the potential nontraditional student seeking a self-fulfilling attainment. An example from one of the interviewee’s (P8) is held within their statement: “one of the faculty members is my pastor and he provides information about the institution and understands the demands of the work life

balance and time it takes to complete assignments.” Another student said, “my pastor spoke of the school during the beginning of the semester.” This statement is in direct correlation with the word-of-mouth marketing that exist within these studied programs. The pastor is in a leadership role or position and directly impacts the individuals under his biblical training or within his congregation. This increases a higher self-esteem and stewardship and guidance, as faculty is to students. Students felt the need to produce a positive leadership guidance within their personal life and community, producing a positive leadership guidance being beneficial for the community. These participants are coded (P13, P12, P10, P11, P4, P8, P9, P6, P1, P2, P3, P23, P25, P29, P30, P26).

Theme 3: Decision making to further education increases by perceptive marketing.

When interviewees sought information about returning for additional education, word of mouth played a significant role in their decision on the institution they chose. Students perceived they would increase their overall knowledge by increasing biblical knowledge at these institutions. The prospective student had to decide where they would invest their time, money, and educational skills while continuing their education. This decision making corresponds with the Self-Directed Theory (SDL) also known as the Self-Directed Learner. Examples of these decisions are stated from the students (P8) by these examples, “Since class now is only one night per week, this makes time through the week to do the work it is a lot easier.” Another student (P3) stated, “absorbing all the information that is being taught is hard; I recorded audio for the questions for the next class to be answered.” These statements are consistent with the time contributions made for continuing their education. All interviewed students are included in the Self-Directed Theory coded (P1-P30). Themes associated with these findings are within the self-management and self-directed (SDL) theory. These statements flow with the concept that adults

self-manage their actions and decisions. The nontraditional adult learner takes the initiative in understanding and acts on what is needed to learn, increasing the self-directed self-management shared between students and leadership. A brief comprehensive analysis proposed that nontraditional learners become increasingly self-directed as they continue to be in an independent studier and a lifelong learner. The pandemic imposed additional challenges to the nontraditional adult learner.

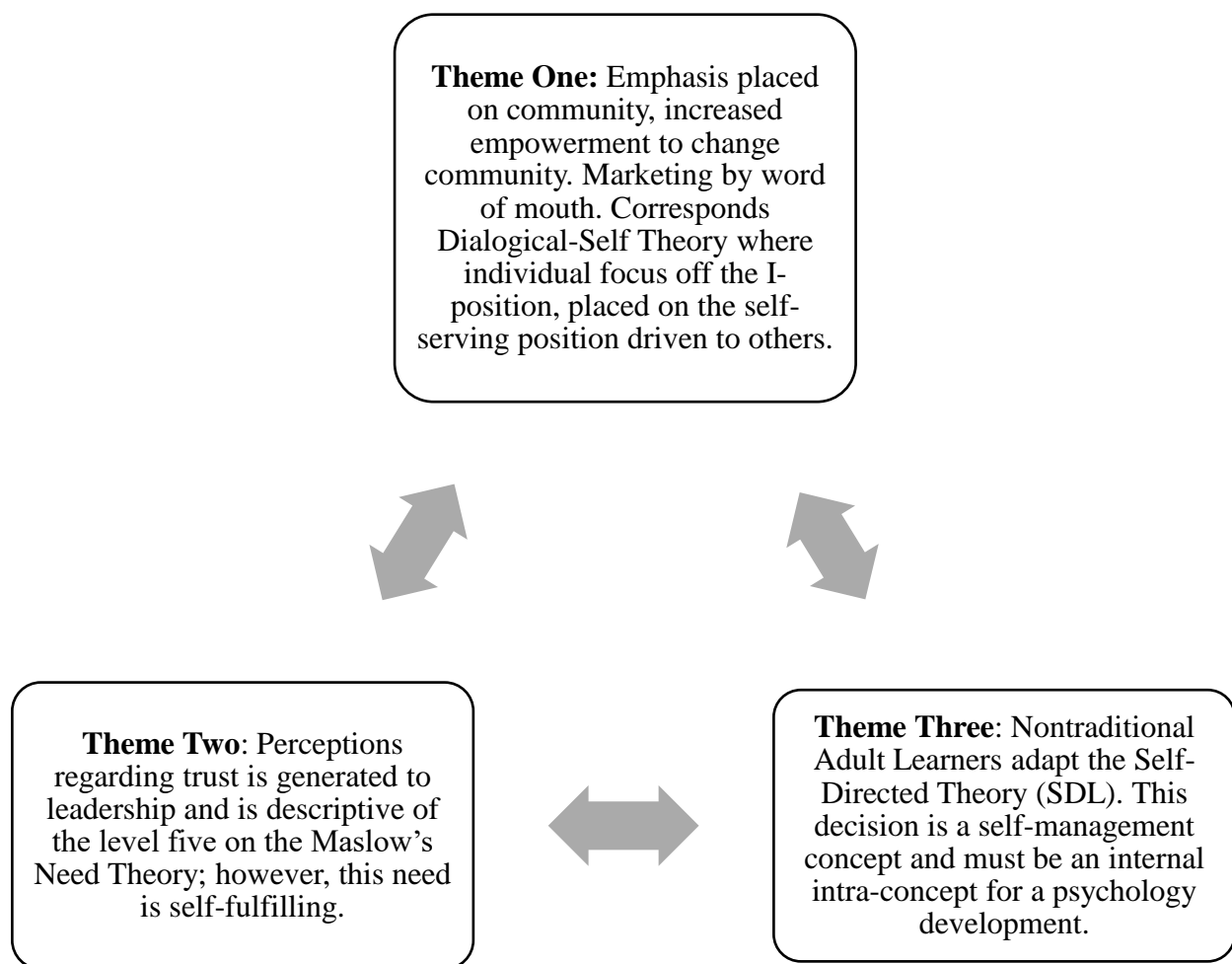


Figure 3. Thematic map demonstrating the connection between themes.

Representation and Visualization of the Data

This research study produced an approximate percentage to represent the nontraditional adult learner population within the limits this research presented. All research was approved by the human subject review board and IRB board at Liberty University. At different locations, the Nontraditional Adult Learner is considered a student of continuing education or associated with a separate program identity at different colleges.

Within the MAXQDA program in the concept map, the researcher used the visual tools from the Document Portrait, Code Relations Browser, and the Code Matrix Browser. The Document Portrait assessed the categories discussed or mentioned in the answers given by interviewees. These participants were given a number for identification purposes and codes were given colors for each question to create a word tree within the Visual Tools application to describe the learning text used by students. These numbers and colors corresponded with answers to form a similarity of patterns. The tree (Figure 5) involved all the students' discourse in the data driven category. The organization of categories was based on the order of questions asked in the interviews and the order in which the answers were given to each question. The word tree compared words and statements to form patterns originating from those duplicated words. Patterns and sum frequencies from using the Code Relations Browser produced an assessment from the qualitative content analysis. Accountability is noted as a pattern from the assignment expectation from students with the outside requirement for the class. The analysis searched for a consecutive sentence with a common meaning. The interactions were defined and found to be a confirmation of descriptive data in consistency from the categories. This representation allowed for visualize the categories of the coded segment coverage indicating patterns of stress experienced by participants (P4, P11, P5, P8, P7, P12, P13, P21, P25, P26, P27,

P29) from the transition to online classes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The codes separated the groups into three groups, those groups being Expert 1, Expert 2, and the students. Analysis information indicated how many times the word represented by a number displayed the times a pattern was introduced into the interview discussion. The Code Matrix Browser coded segments in the document so the frequency displayed indicators of the contrast of the question and the answers from students. This display allowed the researcher to recognize the differences between the different categories from the students answers from the expert (administrative) answers. The MAXQDA software system is a qualitative content analysis using a systemic process throughout the data. However, organizing all the data into three different documents allowed for some difficulties in assessing the consistency of the data when putting all the answers in one single document. All answers are combined instead of allowance of comparisons based on personal experience and information review. The researcher found it challenging to rearrange the organization of the data after data became set as a document.

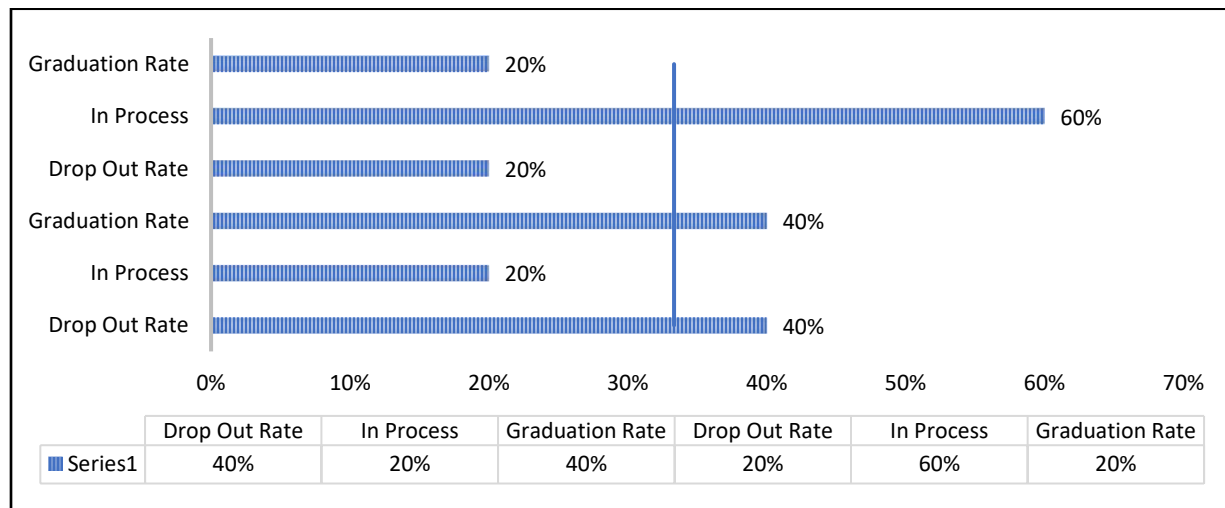


Figure 4. Chart comparing two institutions for graduation, in process, and dropout rates.

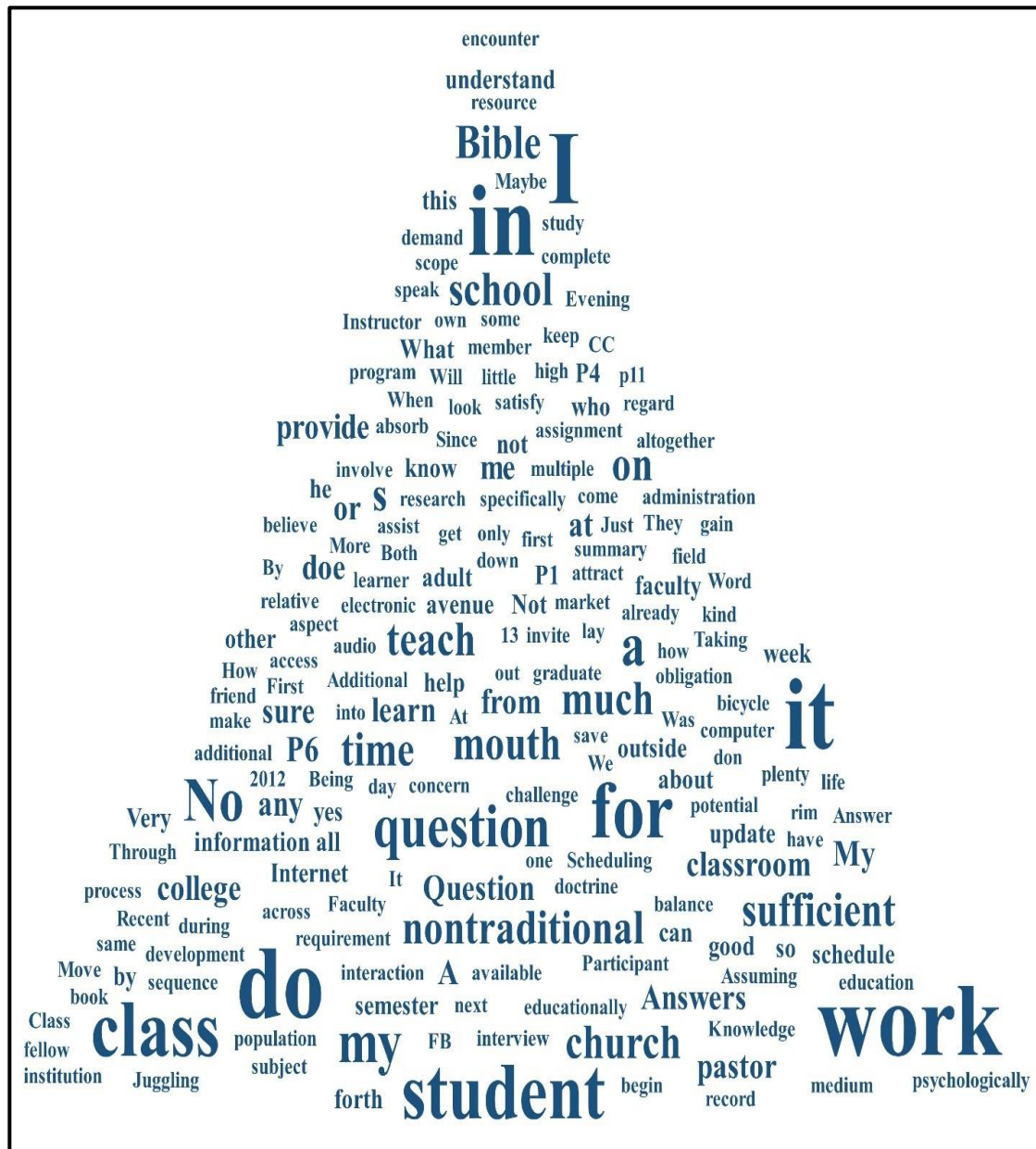


Figure 5. MAXQDA word tree.

The word tree shows frequently used words to navigate individual branches to visualize word patterns and themes in context. Phrases within the data were interactively linked to view words and phrases to produce saturation point in Document Browser to support keywords in context analysis.

Data Analysis

The analysis process in this study used the standard analysis methods for qualitative interviews. Additional functions within MAXQDA developed specifically for this type of qualitative research were used to form the outcome of the data. All primary data was collected from live real-time interviews conducted using a questionnaire. Answers were transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word documents using the Dictate microphone capability with the Lenovo – YOGA laptop computer system. The single person (labeled participant) transcription of each participant's answer was imported in to the MAXQDA project with an assigned number by answer. The transcriptions were imported together as the same class into an individual document labeled questions and answers for the questions asked. Organization of the information was put into two different documents, one for answers and one for questions. The focus was not to compare but to determine a pattern or theme of consistency of data. Consequently, a labeling system consisting of "Expert 1" and "Expert 2" was also used for confidently purposes for the secondary data collected from each institution. Document memos described information concerning the context of information collected.

Discoveries found in the primary data collection from two sources are supported with the secondary data collection. The primary data collected from real-live interviews showed COVID-19 put additional stress on the nontraditional student. Questionnaires also revealed a high rate of students were influenced by word-of-mouth marketing techniques from their friends and pastoral leadership. Internet marketing from these institutions produced few results in acquiring additional enrollment prospects. These findings were validated by the secondary data collected from administration that lower enrollment has resulted in a lower number of classes offered. This

secondary data reflected these results in a lower percentage of graduation rates and higher drop-out rates.

The three types of data collected is used to reinforce the outcome of the secondary data from the past 3 to 5 years of prior graduation rates, retention (in process), and dropout rates. The secondary data was provided by the registrar at each institution. The first form of data collection was the questionnaire that allowed the student to collect their thoughts and write information they felt was important within the questionnaire. After the questionnaire was returned, the researcher conducted a live real-time interview with the participants to expound on answers given and explore any additional information that might need to be included. The second primary data was collected by live real-time interviews. Live real-time interviews were conducted when many of the students continued with a delivery method of an online platform by the institutions. Fotheringham et al. (2022) note poor leadership from state central governments combined with the time it takes to successfully make operational changes effectively, and corresponding lag time in announcements leaves college officials late at developing policies for immediate guidance during and after the pandemic. Therefore, recommendations by the institutions were to interview the students by live real-time interviews. These live real-time interviews allowed the researcher and interviewee to expound on the questions, giving the interviewee an opportunity for clarification of any answer that may need correction or better understanding of the context. With both the live real-time interviews and the questionnaire, all data was followed up with clear understanding of the meaning of data from any of the students. This clarification of understanding allowed for follow-up examination for accuracy and validity of data. The third data collected was the secondary data. This secondary data was given in a real-time interview from the researcher to the registrar from each of the participating institutions. This data can be

used in comparison with other data prior to COVID-19 pandemic and in future research studies. The researcher also asked for an e-mail from both institutions with the percentage rates to ensure accuracy and validity of the data and to maintain record keeping. To validate the data presented in this research study, data was collected from 30 participants from two small private institutions for a qualitative research study, with small samples collected in an interview-based study. The researcher asked the same four direct questions to collect primary data from the interviewed students. This data included transposed code names put into MAXQDA for a qualitative data analysis. The software was designed for qualitative analysis in a computer assisted format. In the recommendation of Creswell & Poth (2018), the six step research data analysis was used. The first step consisted of the research and the interviewees within the case study to organize collected data and prepare for entering data into MAXQDA qualitative software analysis system. The second step consisted of entering the data in the secure database confidential system. After collected data was entered into the data analysis program, the software system allowed for organization of keywords and phrases repeating throughout the text entered. Patterns noted within the collected data were analyzed for themes and patterns to determine any of the recurrent themes and categories by comparisons in the separate case studies. The third step involved noting these found themes that emerged into a percentage, and this concluded the collection of data at a 50 percent point of reoccurring repeated answers given. This analysis process allowed the researcher in the fourth step to discovered patterns in the data generating a description of interpreting, with a fifth step of discovering the meaning of all the information. The final interpretive sixth step allowed the research to compile and discover the meaning of all information and include the applied generalizations regarding the topics discovered. Value

proposition for the colleges was included in the analysis for the final interpretive documentation for the institution.

The analysis findings supported the previous findings in prior literature, noted by Sutton (2022), that students during the COVID-19 pandemic face additional challenges including anxiety, sickness, and transitioning to online learning. These challenges are coupled with time constraints, work-life balance, and the life experiences this population has encountered. The analysis used questionnaires and real live interviews to develop understanding of the data shared by the student. The researcher committed to reading and rereading statements from the live real-time interviews and the questionnaire answers after they were transcribed. This examination and secondary examination purposefully suspended the researchers' own perceptions and focused on the narratives emerging from the phenomena shared by the students. Significance of developing themes combined with the developed descriptions of the experiences of the interviewees successfully developed meaningful descriptions of the experiences and conditions the nontraditional student population experiences.

Three themes were found prevalent within the study. These themes are the Dialogical Self Theory, the Maslow's Hierarchy Need Theory, and the Self-Directed Theory also known as the Self Direct Learner (SDL) theory. As stated in prior literature, the first theme placed emphasis on community outreach and benefiting other individuals. The literature notes individuals have a self-worth in promoting an increasing change in the community and placing oneself in a self-serving position or the I-position. The second theme found to correspond with prior literature is the Maslow's Hierarchy Need Theory. Research has noted higher education institutions are responsible for the training of students and transforming them into valuable resources (Abbas, 2020). This is associated with a self-gratification level of achievement.

Maslow's Hierarchy Theory relates to research on the fifth level or top level of the pyramid. The fifth level is a self-gratification level in which the individual has perceptions regarding trust generated to leadership and this need is a self-fulfilling need. The final theory is the Self-Directed Theory or Self-Directed Learner (SDL). Research found that all participants were in this theory category. All the students in the research study are considered an SDL; however, this prospectively can be associated with the age of the interviewed students. Being a nontraditional adult learner has an associated older age than the traditional college student; therefore, these students take responsibility for their own financial situations, have families, and conduct work outside of educational responsibilities. The nontraditional adult learner adapts to becoming a self-directed learner, and the self-management concept is an internal intra-concept that is developed within the individuals own psychological growth. Prior studied literature has noted that self-directedness provides and explains the changing patterns of individuals' behaviors and attitudes related to their choices made (Siren et al., 2021). These themes are in direct association with the prior literature researched and are linked directly to the findings of the study. The research study interviewed nontraditional adult learners and the marketing relationship to the institution they were attending.

This sample size of 30 participants were all 25 years of age or older and considered a nontraditional adult learner. The gender distribution is 98% male and 2% female. Pastors are typically male in gender in the researched area, and requirement for attendance stipulates that students have a high school diploma or a general education diploma (GED). There are three andragogy assumptions purposed from patterns and themes that arose from collected data. Students received a four-item questionnaire and were asked to give complete answers to the best of their ability. These questions reflected open-ended broad-based terms to produce an

elaboration of discussion answers from the students. After collection of the questionnaire, live real-time interviewing was conducted for clarification and exploratory findings. The responses supported data input within the MAXQDA software system, and findings supported clear foundational assumptions that suggest practical significance of the representation reliability of the data. Primary data collected by the live real-time interviewing process and with a written questionnaire of four questions was also given to the students. Research students questioned were in different collegiate levels obtaining their bachelor's and master's degrees from two private colleges within the state of North Carolina. Each student was given the instruction and guidance on the research study and information on what the data would be used for. After all information as collected, the data was entered into the MAXQDA system, looking for themes or patterns in data that reached a 50% saturation point. When saturation of 50% was reached, analyses of transcripts revealed duplicating patterns of the answers to the identical question. Additional transcripts revealed there were no new themes or patterns from collected data. Primary collected data was from a 98% male and 2% female population, the programs researched being a male dominated institution. Different programs were included within this research study pathway. The programs studied consisted of Bachelor of Theology, Church Administration, and Master of Theology. The researcher increased validity during record keeping, ensuring transparent and consistent interpretations of researched data, and throughout the documentation until saturation occurred (Long & Johnson, 2000).

Saturation Point

The perceptions of influence were expressed by the students that were deemed to be essential or significant responses to the question, 'How do university marketers fail to target the nontraditional student population?' The respondents significantly reached the saturation point

with the duplicated answer ‘by word-of-mouth associated with marketing.’ Upon further questioning of the answer, respondents expressed learning about the institution they attended by the leadership at their church. The influential factor of students being from 30 responses and of that information received identified at 100 percent. Duplication was identified at 22, which confirms saturation and identifies over the 50 percent saturation point. This was reached at 15 duplicate answers. The question ‘What challenges do university marketers encounter when marketing to the potential nontraditional student?’ created the next point of saturation. Common responses identifying significant challenges were the lack of ‘time’ participation, at 100%, and duplicating responses being at 26 marking saturation greater than 50% or half of participants. The third question was ‘How do post-secondary education institutions provide support to the nontraditional students’ either educationally or psychologically?’ Many respondents wrote terminology such as ‘the institution is supportive in both areas,’ and ‘helpful knowledge gained and questions are answered.’ Seven participants responded with no answer and identified as first semester new students (P1, P10, P2, P12, P13, P23, P27). The last question was ‘What more can administration or faculty do at post-secondary educational institutions to help the nontraditional adult learner be successful?’ Seven respondents with no answer were identified as new students in their first semester, and 15 responded with ‘computer help,’ ‘need more webinars,’ and ‘technology assistance.’ The additional 8 responded gave other answers, such as better scheduling, additional books, better syllabus, question and answer study sheets, and more time for questions after class. The redundancy in the data collected at the 50% repetitiveness in answers given signaled saturation point within the research study.

Triangulation

Data resources used to find triangulation consisted of four focus points for validity. These focus points included data from primary live real-time interviewing, answers from a questionnaire, and secondary data collection sources. Primary data was collected by student interviews in live real-time and by providing a four-question questionnaire using identical questions for each participant. The secondary data was collected by gathering data from higher administration registrars at each institution on graduation rates and drop-out rates from the prior three to five years. Information was read and reread by the researcher, verified by students to ensure validity of understanding, numerically coded, and then transcribed and uploaded in the MAXQDA qualitative software system. Interpretation was another focus point within this triangulation. This interpretation was found in the form of themes and patterns during the analysis process. Themes and patterns were discovered by word frequencies and repetitive statements. The word frequencies solidified saturation point at the 50% mark of repetitiveness. Data collected by the research combined with the MAXQDA analysis allowed the researcher to draw interpretive conclusions. Theories have been associated with student answers to verify the nontraditional adult student behavior. The methodology used an exploratory approach with the investigative case study combined with an interruptive phenomenon analysis (IPA) approach of what the students experience with the meaning.

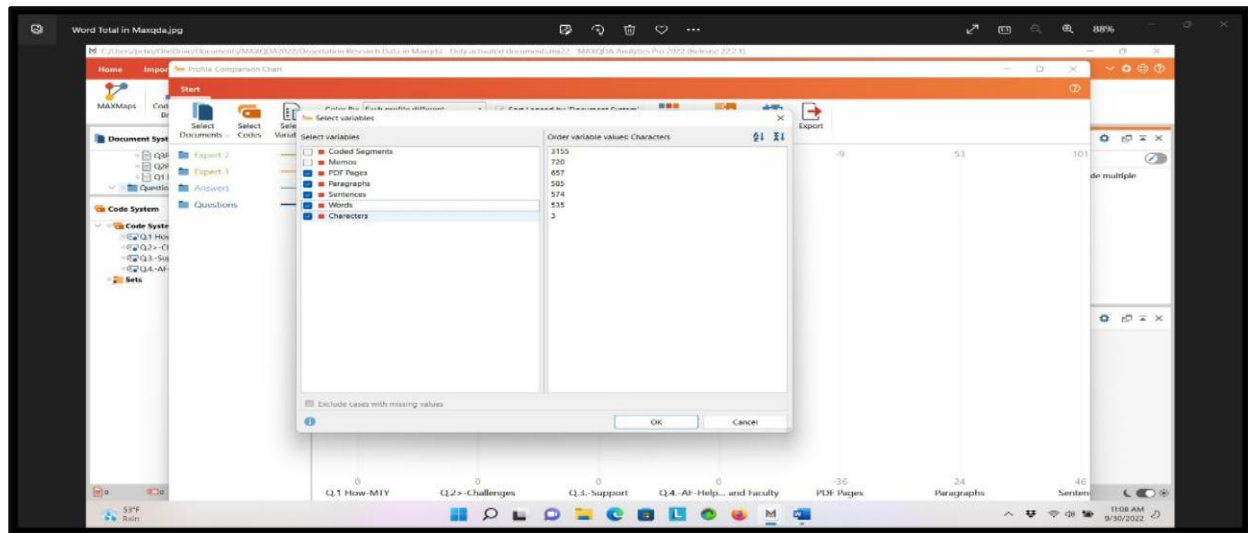


Figure 6. Words and sentences used in analysis to reach the saturation point.

Coding

The research explores experiences and concepts within a phenomenon approach in the methodology, allowing focus on descriptions, explanations, and perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the concepts in the assessment.

The case included two institutions and looked at a maximum of variation within the participants to be interviewed. In this research, students heavily favored one gender over another mainly because in the geographical area the study was conducted, the predominate gender for a pastoral position held is male; therefore, gender was not a factor in this research. However, the participants are considered a nontraditional student by not attending college directly after high school graduation and being 25 years of age and a current student.

The data was gathered by single person interviews by live real-time conversations and questionnaires with the approximate duration of 45 minutes each. The interviewee was asked not to put their name on the question sheet; however, each questionnaire was coded by a numerical number with a P placed at the beginning of each code for participant, such as P1, P2, P3, and

continued to completion until all the questionnaire answers were enter into the MAXQDA system. This numerical method allowed for confidentiality of the student within the documentation. The codes were created from the four questions asked of each participant.

The codes are labeled with key words included from the questions (Figure 6) and asked to identify the corresponding question that was entered in the memo section of the coded system. The four assessment topics in codes are (Q.1) - How - MTY, (Q.2) - Challenges, (Q.3) - Support, (Q.4) - AF - Help More from Admin. and Faculty. These codes are developed with an attached memo with the full question for complete understanding of the material being asked. The objective is to collect data from students' experiences and beliefs for an assessment rather than to reach a consensus for all nontraditional student populations. The focus of questioning was informative.

Questionnaire	Question Codes	Question Memo's
Question 1	(Q.1) How – MTY	Program Marketed (You)
Question 2	(Q.2) – Challenges	Experienced Challenges
Question 3	(Q.3) – Support	Support Experienced
Question 4	(Q.4) – AF – Help	How Admin./Faculty Help

Figure 7. Coded questions 1-4 in the code matrix browser.

Codes were created to represent the difference between the students and the administration (Experts 1 & 2). These codes are created to maintain confidentiality for the individual participants. The students are coded P1, P2, P3 and so forth in a numerical order, and the administration is known as Expert 1 and Expert 2.

Relationship of the Findings

This study directed to “Exploring marketing at universities directed to the nontraditional student population” was impacted by the societal health pandemic the country recently experienced and is still experiencing on a smaller scale. The relationship of the research findings relates to factors within the workforce, environment, and economic influences that drive the nontraditional learner to pursue additional education. COVID-19 changed the way our educational system addresses health challenges. The identified findings are indirect characteristics of the nontraditional students that associate outcomes with pursuing additional education after waiting a longer time period after leaving the educational system.

The crisis changed nontraditional students’ participation in the higher education institutions by forcing a comprehensive curriculum in an online format. Investigation explored student outcomes, satisfaction involved in the teaching method, and learning satisfaction by six factors. These factors that correlated with the nontraditional learner’s quality of learning are system quality, learner-instructor interaction, learner-content, course design, self-discipline, and learner-learner interaction. All these factors influenced student satisfaction within the online format during the COVID-19 epidemic. Determinants of learning outcomes involved in online curriculums are non-learner-instructor interaction and learner-content interactions (Su & Guo, 2021). Critical factors that have been noted in the exploration of relevant variables that have affected nontraditional students’ perception of learning and their satisfaction with online learning are the characteristics of the student and the tools provided by the school. Major factors are the information technology available to the student, the e-learning environment, and the technological skill the student possess. Assistance, self-discipline, and collaboration play an

important part in the students' perception of satisfaction with the online learning format (Swanson et al., 2022).

As the COVID-19 pandemic created a nationwide lockdown with students under shelter-in-place mandatory orders, a rapid educational switch transitioned students to the online learning format. Huckins et al. (2020), noted that in a recent survey nontraditional students experienced a behavior change. Nontraditional students already have challenges to consider, including mental health issues such as spikes in depression and anxiety associated with student stress. Students that contracted COVID-19 either suffered from the virus or experienced lingering effects that impacted their mental health concerns.

Self-discipline combined with perseverance with future goal accomplishment tasks seems to be the main faction within this population. The nontraditional student has an impulse driven goal with a considerable amount of commitment and determination, demonstrating that self-discipline makes a strong predictor in their academic performance. A greater responsibility for these learners' involvement compared to the traditional students have experiencing the face-to-face teaching. Nontraditional students face external temptations and interference within their progress relating to the learner involvement. Self-discipline has a direct positive effect with the satisfaction and outcome of the learning process. With all the challenges the nontraditional population is dealing with, and additional challenge is the pandemic that changed the working conditions for these students and changed their educational learning experience. These changes and transitions this population have experienced has resulted in feelings of anxiety, disconnection, frustration, loneliness, and increased stress levels (Swanson et al., 2022). In addition to these added challenges, they are worried about contracting the virus and suffer from poor mental health due to the disruption of the regular academic routine and college closures

(Stuart et al., 2021). On top of the poor mental health symptoms, students identified four additional barriers that include lack of high-speed internet, distractions within the home, poor motivation, and lack of access to research labs (Swanson et al., 2022).

Research suggests shadowing or partnering a nontraditional student with another nontraditional student was successful in the class or program, creating a relaxed atmosphere for this population group. This process creates a tutoring scenario giving the nontraditional student a friend that has gone before them and has the experience and understanding of the challenges this adult learner is experiencing. This can be an opportunity for a mentoring of the student and can be accomplished in three different ways. Participants P11, P8, P5, and P13 suggested either group mentoring within a cohort, the traditional one-on-one mentoring matched from similar programs by the school, or mentoring by phone or internet if students are in different locations.

The COVID-19 pandemic quickly became a worldwide crisis affecting everyone, especially college students. Research noted the pandemic heavily affected all industries and had a negative impact both personally and financially (Babb et al., 2022). This has negative effects on students, impeding college access and the success of students. Nontraditional learners have been heavily affected by subsequent closures depending on the type of job they had and if they had a direct contact with the public. The research study implications suggest the pandemic has negatively affected college students by disturbances in mental health and well-being. Nontraditional students showed associations with higher levels of resilience.

In conclusion, substantial examination supported in this study suggests enhanced support is necessary to help the nontraditional student overcome challenges at the present time and in the future. This student population successfully adjusted to college life and persevered when involved with programs designed with this population considered. Preparation to employ

programs and additional support for future online learning will ensure an increase of retention rate and graduation rate. Therefore, COVID-19 did impact the value proposition of these institutions by lowering the retention rates. However, increased marketing with new plans to incorporate additional marketing avenues will increase the knowledge of the programs offered and increase enrollment. Increased enrollment allows for additional diversity in the classroom for both face-to-face and online learning. Value proposition can be increased with new marketing techniques. With increased value proposition, reinvestment in producing an updated program, and more competitive programs, enrollment will increase.

The Research Questions

This study explored the influence marketing has on the nontraditional student population and the loss of the instruction's value proposition by target marketing specific groups not including the nontraditional learner. The individual students were asked the same questions in a similar environment with no incentives given or pressure on the individual not to answer questions openly and honestly. These questions were exploratory in nature to support the discussion. These research questions examined elements that create a collective deterrent of college enrollment by adult learners. These research questions provide information to administrators at universities exploring additional marketing to a nontraditional population. Nontraditional students learn about college programs from family members, through word of mouth, and from colleagues. Upon survey findings, recruitment strategies need improvement for the adult learner population and tailor marketing to their intent (Ashford, 2019).

RQ1. How do university marketers fail to target the nontraditional student population?

Higher education has faced notable challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, including financial pressures from the decreased funding (Barton, 2021). Colleges and universities have had to develop innovative ways to stay competitive in the educational field. Educational institutions are subjected to pressure in finding a marketing niche to address the shifting trends of the wants and needs of the student population. New marketing initiatives perceived to combat the declining enrollment and meet the demand in online classes thus increasing student enrollment and address the increasing rise in competition for students (Barton, 2021).

The researcher conducted a study by interviewing current students from the nontraditional population at two private institutions in the state of North Carolina. These interviews produced primary data that in comparison to secondary data collected from the records of past graduation rates, programs studied, and retention rates of the 25-year-old student indicated most students made a self-directed effort to seek information on programs offered at two private schools. These students did not pursue a higher educational endeavor directly after graduation of high school and the students had to accept full time employment and had other responsibilities that made seeking additional education difficult.

RQ2. What challenges do university marketers encounter when marketing to the potential nontraditional student?

Marketing environments have experienced a challenge that has evolved around the COVID-19 pandemic and the new consumer behaviors. The needs and wants of the nontraditional population have changed over time. This suggests that marketing management

should identify the needs and wants of the future consumers (Goldsmith & Moutinho, 2017). In these changing times, marketing has focused on the internet to create a marketing niche to attract potential students. In efforts to increase student enrollment and the competition that exists between universities and colleges, the niche in marketing must create the uniqueness of the college (Shepherd, 2015).

Research found from the nontraditional adult learning population suggests individuals must be encountered from public forums such as at community college fairs, community festivals, and public advertising such as billboards or news articles.

RQ3. How do post-secondary education institutions provide support to the nontraditional students either educationally or psychologically?

The main support noted in the research collected from all data showed a continual emphasis put on psychological support. This support came in academic counselors, advisors, and faculty. With online classes being the predominate educational method, the support given was by phone conversations. However, discussion boards do provide an educational path for questions and examples from other students. COVID-19 has made online classes the primary educational path for this population group. Therefore, the interaction between the faculty, staff, and student has changed, and support has been interrupted for programs such as library services, face to face tutoring, or academic or psychological counseling.

RQ4. What more can administration or faculty do at post-secondary educational institutions to help the nontraditional adult learner be successful?

The nontraditional student populations represent a large portion of the educational total; however, not all colleges are suited to serve their needs. Due to the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced to educational systems, schools have had to take an inductive approach

to serve students. The general helpful services would include a welcoming environment, good relations between the nontraditional and traditional students, social support, and helpful services offered by the colleges. The characteristics of the nontraditional student population and the aged student population are defined differently within colleges. According to Barton (2021), “post-traditional” students, defined as student that are 25 years or older, are financially independent, are parents, are employed, and did not enroll immediately after high school. Age diversity is categorized as the nontraditional student’s prominent characteristic making up this population. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (n.d.), of the 19.6 million students enrolled in post-secondary educational institutions in 2018, 40 percent are over the age of 24. Evidence shows the nontraditional student continues to represent a large percentage of the academic institutions’ environment (Jepson & Tovolowsky, 2020).

The Conceptual Framework

Concepts

The research examined the concepts of target marketing high school seniors that are still in high school. In addition, the neglected population are the nontraditional adult learners at the age of 25 years of age or older who did not enter college immediately following high school graduation. The research found distinctive differences depending on the type of college, target market, and programs offered.

Consideration must be given to the student that did not complete a traditional high school graduation, completing a general education diploma known as a GED. This group of individuals would need to complete the requirements and pass the exam before consideration of entrance to regular college programs. For this research study, these individuals are not considered within the group of nontraditional adult learners until after obtaining their GED.

Research has found traditional universities do target market high school age young adults for their traditional bachelor's degree programs. This does eliminate the students considered the nontraditional student by age. However, universities' separate marketing to the nontraditional student by specialty of an academic recovery program or programs help with the transition of academics for a successful college career. Nontraditional college students that transition to college classes present different challenges within the class and outside the classroom.

Expectations from the student to do well academically see themselves falling short of their goals. Performance measures examined to identify these students that did not achieve good academic status. Support services are offered for these students having trouble within their first semester. These support services provide the nontraditional student with appropriate resources and support to meet performance expectations and the student receives guidance to develop self-directed behaviors to improve their college success. The components are designed to work closely with the students and address their individual strengths and personal challenges, in addition to addressing their class attendance if necessary. These expectations to perform well academically are necessary, along with maintaining a work-life balance while under the duress of stress from the most recent Covid pandemic.

Theories

The original theories of this research study connected the Maslow's Need Theory, the Self-Determination Theory, and the Dialogical Self Theory (DST). These theories all have a collaborating similarity with the inner self-understanding. Self-directed learning (SDL) has long been of interest in adult and lifelong learning. Research has targeted predictive factors with core learning phenomenon being associated with adulthood (Tekkol & Demirel, 2018). Self-Directed

Learning (SDL) is a personal attribute of the learning process and listed are the seven assumptions of the phenomenon of Self-Directed Learners (Elias & Merriam 2004).

The seven assumptions of the Self-Directed Learner are the adult learner has a choice to freely make decisions for themselves without any interference by the environment and societal pressures. This theory also includes the individual could solve their own problems being an adult. This theory also assumes human nature is inherently good therefore, adding additional education will enhance the community and be beneficial for society. Self-directed learners also strive to reach their full potential in life with each person having a unique self-concept, which affects their development. The last two attributes include people have a responsibility to themselves and to others, and perceptions is the only reality that matters (Elias & Merriam, 2004). Participants in this research are 25 years of age or older; therefore, these perceptions do apply to this nontraditional population. This age group does have the freedom to make choices pertaining to furthering their education. Individuals in this age group are self-directed and have reached the self-concepts to have the responsibility to make these decisions of self-management. In 1936, Carl Rogers first applied these assumptions to education by arguing in “*Freedom to Learn*” that meaningful learning is self-initiated. This had tremendous influence on the SDL interpretations within the adult education area. However, self-regulated learning must merge with the cognitive science, and comprehensive understanding develops superior learning for the self-directed learner (Roessger et al., 2022).

Research collected from students 25 years of age or older demonstrates that the significant body of students has a philosophical foundation of self-directed learning. The functional contextualism of the norms of scientific focus of cognitivism for this age group required to provide self-guided learning strategies. One theory noted in the initial suggested

theories is Abraham Maslow's theory of a hierarchy of needs that suggested that individuals fulfil their basic needs and the psychologic need by seeking the self-actualize need of self-satisfaction of educational goals. However, adult learning has distinct parallels and assumptions of both conceptually and empirically (Roessger et al., 2022). This research study produced findings that drew parallels to the Self-Directed Learner (SDL). Research shows the nontraditional student population take primary charge to continuing their education, evaluating their responsibilities based on learning experiences and planning. This theory is directly opposed to the traditional content practice of systematical education.

Actors

The major actors in this research study where the registrar of the college. The registrar supplied the secondary data from past performance of the college, including retention rates and graduation rates. Classes went completely online when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. These classes remained online at the time the research was conducted. The secondary data produced a retention rate of 40 percent, and the graduation rate produced from past data is 40 percent.

The marketing manager was responsible for all marketing and advertising of the college. Marketing is conducted by radio advertisement announcements, online advertisements, printed materials, and word of mouth by faculty and students. Research found the marketing manager is responsible for online advertisements and all printed marketing materials.

Main participants in the study are the students that supplied primary data by way of answering four main questions. These questions consisted of the college marketing, support offered by the college, and the challenges faced by the nontraditional student. Primary and secondary data collected was transposed into coded labels and identified as "Informants" and

“Experts.” The “Informants” are students that participated in the collection of primary data and the “Experts” are those individuals that contributed to the collection of the secondary data.

The college administrator also identified as the registrar at another college in the research. This administration supplied secondary data and information on this college and accredited the low retention rate of 20 percent and the graduation rate of 20 percent to a combination of three contributing factors. One of those factors is associated with the COVID-19 pandemic that continued for years within the entire country. COVID-19 placed a burden on attending classes in a face-to-face format. Another contributing factor noted related to family issues, such as jobs, sickness, and family obligations. The final relating factor the administration noted was student laziness that contributed to increased dropout rate. The administration noted that study time and homework assignments outside of class identified as additional reasons for a level of accountability that the student did not want to be committed.

The main marketing this college relied on was a word-of-mouth, person to person contact, and advertisement of the school and the programs offered. The school also did additional marketing online with a web page that explained the educational institution and the programs offered. No student noted a financial hardship from any of the colleges from which research was collected. Both colleges provide financial aid and funding for any hardship additional education would have placed on the student. Value proposition was not a consideration for the colleges in their offered programs.

Constructs

Research noted constructs in this research considered marketing had a direct impact on value proposition at the college. The initial constructs examined were the marketing impacting lower enrollment, less class diversity, lower or decreased profits, and negative impacts on

industry. All these constructs impact the value proposition of the college at different levels of profitability. Different levels of profitability would include impacts on the external environments such as social, political, or the work force that seeks to employ a student with a particular degree. Successful institutions consider the value proposition and the beneficial societal impact. Key stake holders provide an achievable quality offered for the expectation of the college. The focus on marketing is beneficial to exceed expectations. Marketing increases value proposition within the institution and, if not achieved, the college will eventually be nonexistent.

Research indicated value proposition has attributes that correlate with higher initial recruitment expense not invested into the program. Loss of student retention and lower student satisfaction are significant factors with the volume of graduation rates, retention rates, and value proposition. The value propositions are a strategic tool used to communicate the organizations value in delivering a unique and differentiated benefit to the student and community. Benefits are established receiving continuous feedback and successful graduation outcomes.

Anticipated Themes

The anticipated themes for the nontraditional adult learner are the obligations outside of the program of study. These obligations include work, family, and financial stress that require additional time outside of the required time for schoolwork, study time, and student instructor interaction. A repetitive pattern within the nontraditional student challenges aligned with the expectations of the college and the stress of outside obligations.

An unanticipated theme that was identified and repeatedly recurred in the interviewing process was program loyalty. A dominant theme emerged from the research conducted showed nontraditional adult learners are loyal and determined to complete their program of study. This determination stems from self-conception of a missed opportunity to attend college at a younger

age. The determining factor found during the study originated with the student having to seek employment immediately after high school graduation or before the completion of high school.

Research has noted that in the lens of the adult learner the theory of andragogy had an impact on the nontraditional adult population. The andragogy theory investigated with theses combined two distinct strands within the research to collect the outcome data. These strands consisted of administering questionnaires and qualitative interviews with 30 nontraditional student interviewees. The study's examination determined seven principles of the andragogy theory to have a major influence. The surveyed students noted all seven principles had an impact within the nontraditional adult learners' online learning; however, the interviewed participants stated some but not all the principles had a major influence within the online learning educational process (Braxton, 2020).

The Literature

Similarities

Prior literature researched placed focus on adult learning theories in a distinct inventory: instructional process elements of setting objectives, designed curriculum of the learning needs, diagnoses of the actual learning needs of the adult learner, mutual planning, objective setting, climate setting, and the learning experience. These learning experiences had a less likely effect on the major influence of the persistence of the online courses (Braxton, 2020). The similarities to the nontraditional student receiving additional education remained the same as prior research stated, with the continual work-related obligations other than college work, stress, family issues, time constraints, financial stress, and little student/instructor interaction. A constant similarity can demonstrate the comparison of performance rates of those students enrolled in online classes compared to students in a face-to-face classroom. Students enrolled in face-to-face classes tend

to excel in questions that require in an analytical skill. Research has noted students pay more attention and retain more in face-to-face classrooms. This is consistent with communication interaction from both fellow students and instructors, which reinforces their learning experience (Ashley, 2022). However, the number of online courses offered have increased, and students seem to demand more courses offered online by universities. While online courses offer an enormous amount of flexibility in scheduling and provide a diverse range of learners, the nontraditional adult learner prefers classes face-to-face with educational communication being a learning tool for this population (Ashley, 2022).

Differences

Nontraditional learners have faced additional challenges since the COVID-19 pandemic, and these challenges have marginalized adult learners at institutions. Sutton (2022) listed some of the newer challenges the nontraditional student has noted in research. Students experienced problems with accessing technology by lost access to resources they previously had, mobility restrictions, shoddy internet, older computers, and no capability to connect to Zoom, which hampered the ability to meet other students virtually. Students also noted they did not like the textbook option being an e-book. They had a hard time concentrating and focusing to remember the material. Another challenge experienced from students was a lack of understanding from the instructor. They stated the “instructors are reluctant to accommodate adult learners with specific needs in the emergency change to virtual.”

The students also needed a space to focus on their assignments and homework, students need a working space that are unencumbered by the home responsibilities. Adult learners also noted they experienced feelings of being alone in the online class. The nontraditional student needs communication with other students for the learning process. Online learning produced

feelings of loneliness. These experiences are associated with the nontraditional adult learner in the lack of face-to-face classroom. Some of the students P13, P8, P10, P1, P9 noted they would call each other or meet at other locations to talk about assignments instead of doing it in an online format.

Marginalized Adult Learners

Marginalized adult learners noted it was hard to focus on their studies with their children and other individuals in the home needing care from the student. The nontraditional adult learner spent excessive time researching and googling information to make sure they understood the assignment. The student also stated they felt they were “paying the institution to teach me, but it isn’t teaching me” (Sutton, 2022). Research noted the adult learner students expressed the administrators at colleges were not thinking about how these students would access resources on campus, or that these are students struggle daily to be a part of the programs of the college.

Major differences noted with the marginalized adult learner population were additional concerns around mental and physical health. The transition from face-to-face to online created more stress on the family and student. Nontraditional students are first generation population college students and from a low socioeconomic background, which is associated with a higher risk of catching COVID-19. Within this higher risk group comes a greater fear of catching COVID-19, which creates a mental toll on the students. The students stated they did not have health insurance and if sickness occurred due to COVID-19 restrictions they would not be able to work and would have no income, stated by Royce Ann Collins, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Adult Learning and Leadership at Kansas State University (Sutton, 2022). All challenges/stressors noted are from students in the higher educational pathway and notice from their higher educational institution (Sutton, 2022). Additional differences noted to produce

mental and physical stress are death of a family member or a loved one, and this marginalized adult learner group reported more deaths in their immediate family compared to other groups studied. This created fear of allowing children to return to school, necessitating virtual schooling and additional childcare from home. Stress from work was also noted from students that work in the healthcare/nursing home field who experience increased exposure to COVID-19, with people not wanting to leave their home. Mental health concerns showed greater incidence of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder with the nontraditional adult learner within the single parent homes, and lack of motivation from this group increased. Racism was noted by students interviewed in the Asian-American focus group, noting the increase in hate crimes and attacks on the Asian population which hindered their ability to focus on assignments (Sutton, 2022).

The Problem

The general problem addressed is the loss of value proposition by the lack of marketing to the nontraditional student population, resulting in lower enrollment, a less diverse education experience, and a less productive competitive marketing strategy. According to (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 9) to be able to make an informed decision and to choose the best fit for the individuals research, the researcher should focus on the tools best fits reaches the goal to make an informed decision. In developing the data and achieving a core understanding of the qualitative research, incorporating feedback will improve the integration of the data management.

The nontraditional adult learner population is differentiated from the traditional educational student. This population group has experienced a level of social exchange that differs from the younger college student. The performance of this educational generation experiences different challenges the traditional student does not. Theories that are associated to this

population group is the Self Determination Theory (SDT), which deals directly with the decision-making process and self-management. This group has a direct relationship with the developed attitudes and behaviors of the population. Marketing develops value proposition for the higher educational institutions. Research differentiates between the nontraditional student and the value proposition incorporated within the cultivated relationships with the nontraditional adult learner population. The findings confirmed that in specific programs within two private institutions the cultural norm of the program is not to achieve value proposition from the programs offered. Decision making process is a skill of the nontraditional adult learner population and perceptions on the influence decisions for this group of students 25 years old or older has a direct link to the perceptions of differentiated empowerment to have a positive impact on society and community. Research findings constituted students' perceptions on individual performance, challenges, and the impact from the latest COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary of the findings.

The findings developed from this research study consist of analyzing the problems that exist and building a foundation to examine possible solutions for future marketing and expounding on the research already provided updated with the current situation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research examined different scenarios and accumulated information from an interviewing process received from the nontraditional student. This research monitors performance and achievement from the retention rates and graduation rates of this population. The interviews provided open ended questions to encourage clear communication between the researcher and the participant.

An overview of the problem is to analyze data relating to the nontraditional population in two private institutions. The purpose of this research study was to examine the general problem

of loss of value proposition from lack of marketing to the nontraditional population. Results from lack of marketing to this population include lower enrollment, less competitive marketing strategy, and lack of diverse education experience. The researcher used a live real-time interviewing process and a written questionnaire process to collect primary data using these questions:

1. How do university marketers fail to target the nontraditional student population?
2. What challenges do university marketers encounter when marketing to the potential nontraditional student?
3. How do post-secondary education institutions provide support to the nontraditional students either educationally or psychologically?
4. What more can administration or faculty do at post-secondary educational institutions to help the nontraditional adult learner be successful?

This research maintained a clear focus on the nontraditional student population and the challenges they encountered, as well as the marketing of their programs. The interviews and questionnaire provided primary data, and the retrieved secondary data was provided by past performance records. This research utilized the student's treatment and systemically gained a better understanding of their perspective within the nontraditional student population. Research data was examined to detect cycles and patterns of basic evidence of practices within the marketing techniques, administrative recordings of past data, and challenges faced by this population. The focus of this study was placed on solutions, to address realistic goals, and future marketing practices.

Conclusions

Ongoing research gives educational institutions a documented research reference guide for strategic planning for future post-secondary institutions to enhance value propositions within the higher educational systems. Specifically, this research examined the college experiences of nontraditional students and developed outcomes producing purposeful actions and interactions in the marketing departments of colleges. The results look at the aspirations of students from a nontraditional population coupled with the challenges of earning an educational degree. Understanding institutional interactions with this student population can result in easier technological formats and assist with the growing number of the nontraditional student population.

Value proposition is communicated as an organization's value to the community and the outcomes of those who graduate the program and use their education to meet the need of the community and to maintain a continuous improvement of community needs and services. In these programs value proposition cannot be associated with a profit or focus on a monetary degree. Value proposition must be examined by focusing on the benefits that exceed the expectation of the success of the process based on the highest level of achievement within the service offered.

The assessment is crucial for improving the learning process. Therefore, it is important to understand the interactions and challenges the nontraditional student experiences. This study is particularly associated with marketing and the nontraditional student population to perceive the different conceptions of the assessment by an investigative approach in the data collection. The study sought to explore the phenomenological approach while collecting data from the nontraditional student population in an investigative single case study approach. MAXQDA is a

qualitative software program designed to computer assist with data and text when doing an analysis on data.

Findings

Four findings include three of the related conclusions of the anticipated theories that are related to this population group. These findings are impacted by economic factors and the pandemic just experience by the world. Higher educational administration noted this study should be updated when complete normalcy returns to these institutions.

The first related conclusion from the theory was Maslow's Needs Theory. This theory examines the self-actualization of why one would seek the continuation of higher education when it is not necessary for monetary purposes. This empowerment level is related to a sub-conscience level in fulfilling the anticipated leadership levels of motivation and performance outcomes. Research has determined that depending on the program studied, this theory is prominent within two private institutions. Self-actualization at the need level has a basis of servanthood instead of placing a monetary value on positions obtained. The nontraditional student seeks personal growth and self-fulfillment. This desire can be attributed from past experiences they have encountered prior to seeking higher education.

The second finding is the Dialogical Self Theory and correlates with the nontraditional adult learner population's examined answers for a repetitive pattern. This theory is in relation to the I-position; however, findings from the highest enrollment number in one program is based on the servanthood of the participant. The transfer of attributes from oneself to others is an increased empowerment within the individual. These findings are consistent with an increased psychological development to rescue a society in need of knowledge for helping themselves.

Self Determination Theory is the third descriptive finding of this population group. The nontraditional adult learner is considered an older population to seek higher education. Considering the maturity development that occurs from the traditional student's age of 18 to the nontraditional student's age of 25, the development rate of maturity is noted with the self-determination theory on the responsibility these students must have. Challenges are faced by this age group when they make the decision to return to higher education, and the decision is not without sacrifice. Decision making increases perceptions for the need to obtain additional education and "juggle" work and the home-life balance. These obligations with the additional assignments from college links this theory to the motivation the nontraditional student must have with the decision-making endeavors of education.

The fourth finding is the impact that COVID-19 had on students and higher education. Research has determined that the pandemic has decreased the enrollment numbers and educational platforms. These changes have left a negative impact on the institutions in terms of enrollment numbers. Registrars stated at the institutions during the time this research studied was conducted that enrollment had decreased, less face-to-face classes were offered, and there was less diversity in classes. This is indicated by the percentage ratio in male and female enrollment, the female being significantly lower than male. Students in this study learned about the program by word of mouth from their pastor or a friend, with a few learning about it from the internet. Therefore, marketing has had an impact; however, higher-level administration attributed lower enrollment numbers to the pandemic. Value proposition is varied depending on the size of the institution. This study was directed to two small private Christian institutions. Registrars noted much of the value proposition was affected by marketing from environmental and economic situations. Administration noted that after the pandemic was over and a stable economy was back

in place, another study would give more accurate results. The programs are three-year programs and turnover is represented in the dropout rate and the graduation rate.

Research is consistent in suggesting more support services are needed during and after the pandemic. The nontraditional students hopefully will return to previous stress levels. The limitation to this study is the sample small size due to time constraints, and the research is not a representation of all college students. Future studies should examine the wellbeing and mental health associated with depression and post onset stress levels. Limitations also include the nontraditional student population should investigate how the pandemic affects grades, retention, graduation, attrition, and career goals. Resilience and coping skills come with the experience, and this older population of students have them better than the traditional student. Research has found that institutions need to be more flexible with support services and offer virtual counseling and additional after-hours time allotments for advisor appointments. Incorporating these extra support services will increase success when managing the already stressful lifestyles the nontraditional student experiences.

Application to Professional Practice

Nontraditional students have a different lifestyle than traditional students. Nontraditional students live multifaceted lives with complex distractions that interfere with furthering their education endeavors. The nontraditional population may require different connections with the institution than the average traditional student. This population faces challenges with work-life balance and distractions from their other obligations to focus on academic responsibilities. Research explored the value proposition this population brings to academic institutions, the challenges this population face, and the marketing techniques and benefits to the higher education spectrum and the community.

Improving General Business Practice

The results of this study can result in the improvement of marketing departments in all higher educational institutions. The purpose of this single case study in a qualitative exploration was to investigate the value proposition on academic institutions and the marketing directed to the nontraditional student. Value proposition can offer benefits to the college and departments within the institution. Specific programs within the institution offer academic programs and degrees that can be beneficial to the individual and the community.

Nontraditional students are different from the traditional student and may require different academic services offered. An educational institution has an overall marketing strategy which creates individual value proposition within the university and can highlight the school's programs of study. Marketing can increase and enhance the value proposition indirectly relating to the institution. The response from institutions to the different individual disciplines specific to the nontraditional adult learner can engage in continuous improvement and higher quality standards by integrating easier formats for this population. The components to enhancing the learning techniques for this population group will result in a change in the marketing strategies.

As part of the university setting, beneficial university settings can be offered to the nontraditional adult learner, creating an influential marketing strategy to this population. This research study can highlight challenges experienced by the population group and capture attention to the attention dedicated to all individual's regardless of age. The results of this study can improve enrollment at institutions by continuous improvement and quality standards within specific programs. Additional services could be offered to nontraditional students. These services can provide students who believe a support system is not helpful a connection with other social channels, and research suggest the nontraditional student might be receptive to other

nontraditional students and engage with them more easily. Institutions found nontraditional students frequently interacted with instructors but experienced hesitation and distance when interacting with fellow traditional classmates (Dreznick, 2022).

Challenges such as childcare facilities on campus can be addressed by higher administration in a comparison cost to beneficial analysis for future optional upgrades. Another challenge the nontraditional student has is technological issues and problems within the online format. Allowance for study centers with computer tutors and help outside of the library would allow for a support service that the adult learner could rely on when technological help is needed. Understanding some of the challenges the nontraditional learner faces is the beginning to finding solutions for this population group, enabling them to think about furthering their education. Higher education and marketing departments can use this valuable information when deciding a strategic plan for upcoming decisions dealing with enrollment and the needs of the community.

The data collected can be used to improve target marketing and put specific emphasis on a population important in business functions. The backbone to any successful business or organization or institutions is the marketing program. The marketing program communicates the value of the organization as well as the educational institution. Marketing programs should be able to identify, communicate, create, and deliver value to the potential customer or student. This research studies the potential status and process that differentiates marketing to the traditional student and the nontraditional adult learner. This information can communicate desires of this population group and provide valuable feedback from potential students. This can be achieved by accessing the value proposition and ways university administrators can be an influence in the benefits associated with the nontraditional adult learner. Critical steps in a school are having the ability to distinguish clear differentiation within the offerings to the targeted customer.

Potential Application Strategies

Organizations can use the information found within this study as leverage in the strategies used to build strength within the continuing educational learning process itself. Higher education continually looks for ways to stay competitive and be successful with marketing strategies. With the pursuit of prospective students and continual resources being invested in high school education programs offered, many businesses schools search for ways to utilize marketing programs that will increase their value proposition.

Partnerships between high school and community colleges have created a smoother transition upon graduation from high school and acceptance into college. With the new investments, high school teachers have credentials that qualify them with advance graduate coursework to successfully bridge gaps between high schools and universities that existed in prior years. This collaboration significantly better prepares students for entering college. The goal of the College Credit Plus (CCP) program is to improve the high school graduation rates and increase the transition to post-secondary higher education (Kasturiarachi, 2022). Students who take advantage of these program have dual credit offered to them, including high school credit and college coursework credit. Multiple strategies have targeted the students to increase professional certification in performance-based funding formulas that were developed in an overhaul of developmental education in Ohio (Kasturiarachi, 2022).

The new redesigned courses offered in high schools increase enrollment; however, this does not include the nontraditional adult learner that needs sustainability in the workforce. Attempts to include this population need to emerge within the marketing design, and with the emerging technological state of the job market, higher education should provide a transformation within the educational departments to ensure sustainability and remain competitive. Analyzing

developments in marketing to this population pose the question as to the challenges that exist to these potential students. With emerging technological innovation occurring in industry, manufacturing, education, and healthcare, higher education needs to remain competitive by ensuring sustainability for all population groups, including the nontraditional adult learner. This study attempts to provide valuable information and helpful insights on the challenges this population group faces in the emerging economy. Researching emerging markets and business strategies more specifically for this population group will provide the post-secondary institution information on how to maintain competitive marketing with challenges facing emerging markets in all fields (Perez, 2020, 2019). Different marketing strategies will be addressed by higher education with the rapid change occurring in the socio-economic composition of universities. Minority groups, low-income groups, and women have increased exponentially in universities, creating major changes in campus culture. Changes in curriculum, student activities, and campus culture will be in demand by diverse populations in the 21st century (Berg & Venis, 2020). Universities are at a pivotal reference source and the specific focus is growing on providing vital research to a more diverse population of students. Topics such as nontraditional adult learning, a growing population of women at the university, and mid-career changes with reentry students promote an understanding of the need for broader education access. Key intersections for policymakers, provosts, deans, and directors combat departmental budgets with modern advancements and achievement gaps with topics such as adult learning in higher educational systems (Berg & Venis 2020).

Summary of Application to Professional Practice

The research findings indicated within this research study did not have a direct connection to the value propositions to these institutions. Value proposition is used as a strategic

tool to invest in the institution and aims to provide beneficial learning material. Findings included that value proposition is only effective if aligned with organizations' expectations of the key stakeholders and is beneficial to the consumer or student in a format differentiated from other competitors in the same program studied. Value offered was attributed to the servanthood provided to the surround community, and the processes created in private schools, churches, or administrative positions that are beneficial from the program offered.

The nontraditional adult learner population face challenges that the traditional student does not. The challenges and obligations make a unique need for the target market within this population to be addressed by the university to supply resources needed for a specific platform for learning by these students. The backbone to success for this population is communication, delivery method, financial support, and the ability to identify one personal level of satisfaction correlating with the need for the knowledge gained. The unexpected COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted the dropout, retention, and graduation rates for these institutions, and the findings affected the differentiation of the educational market during this time. Within the higher education politics, the alignment with the overall quality expected was provided. However, student perceptions of both the expected and unexpected benefits indicated that the outcomes of graduation were associated with a longer period due to lower enrollment and the cancelation of classes due to the pandemic.

Recommendations for Further Study

The scope of this research study is limited to the nontraditional adult learner and marketing to this population, as well as the unique impact on the value propositions this group provides to the post-secondary educational institutions. The focus on the nontraditional student population was brought to the front of the study and developed a broader understanding of the

role of the marketing department. Further study is needed in value proposition specific to the program studied. At the private institutions this study was conducted, research did not identify value proposition as an influential factor. Most students in this study were affiliated with the theology program, and the institutions did not consider value proposition a factor from student enrollment. Therefore, further study is needed to do exploration in the formation of value proposition and other factors associated with the institution's increase in the value proposition from enrollment.

Further recommendations would include additional studies post COVID-19 in the areas of marketing to the nontraditional student and their challenges with campus culture. Online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic created a failed attempt to credit a status in campus culture and the challenges the nontraditional adult learner faces. Future studies should be performed with the inclusion of institutional key stake holders, as this would clarify the various perspectives of other institutions in correlation to programs offered to this population group.

Reflections

A thorough understanding of the participants' challenges would increase the quality assurance implementation and continuous improvement for this population group. However, this study was limited because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects on the students and the institution. The overall effectiveness of this study was apparent to the researcher, including the relationship between the nontraditional adult learner and the need to further investigate the marketing techniques to this population in higher education. The findings and contributions are deemed directly from the participants to indirectly be in correlation to the overall success of the study. Therefore, the results were overall limited in determining the comprehensive influence institutions have on the implementation of marketing strategies to the adult learner.

Personal & Professional Growth

During this research study, I identified a combination of influential reasons the nontraditional population is not directly marketed to in the same way as the high school student. This research allowed the investigation of certain populations directly to marketing. The research broadens focus on the student over the age of 24 years and the challenges these students face. I am in that category of being a student over 25, and this research allowed a view of the administration and marketing departments and the challenges of staying competitive in the academic world. Although academia is strictly perceived as implementing education to society, administration realizes that without departmental budgets, operations would not be successful. In one aspect an institution is a learning facility but can be identified as an operational educational business. Whether the educational business is for profit or nonprofit, the business still needs structure and to implement standards of operation to include the key stake holders. This research study has brought awareness of the impact of a society pandemic on not just private businesses but private educational institutions. The focus on value proposition in individual departments did not always make an influential association with business schools' programs of study or theological programs at certain private institutions. The impact of the pandemic influenced programs offered and had impact on key decisions made by institutions. Professional growth is being associated on an administrative level of those key decisions to remain open or close the organization. The study brought to light those decisions made by internal stakeholders and external stakeholders within the program and institution, not always based on value proposition but on societal safety. The findings indicate a significant contribution from the administration at higher educational institutions as they serve as a catalyst for the financial decisions made that impact budgeting, marketing, safety of staff and students, and overall branding of the institution.

Biblical Perspective

The focus of this qualitative single case study was to explore the marketing of two private post-secondary higher educational institutions, and the impact of the nontraditional adult learners that bring value proposition to the school. The findings are quite different depending on the program studied. This study consisted of the collection of data from two private institutions with their main programs being in theology. Theological education consists of a collection of historical events and previous times in history. The main contributors and participants in the study focus on pastoral positions after graduation. A significant consideration are resources and the examples from the worship spaces that launched a marketing plan for the institutions by word of mouth for the program. This marketing occurred from pastors in leadership positions, although a deep personal belief of importance must be included in those decisions made for the participant to devote such time and study in the elective administration, educational, music, and theological programs. The relationship is an expression of personal beliefs that will impact society and reflect a relationship between God and the wide range of artistic religious expression.

The Christian worldview and the study relate to integration of societal relationship with decisions made in business and throughout all decisions made in life. Those decisions are based on an ethical basis of doing the right thing or being accountable to God. World views bring different beliefs that are the main driver of decisions individuals make. This is included in the managing of the business world. When a Christian worldview affirms the teaching of God, our sovereign and almighty Lord, then the approach the businessperson takes is based around this worldview. Spiritual parallels have developed within the leadership of many organizations, and any characteristics of religion is described as “general absence” (Franklin, 2021). Today society has launched a noninvolvement association with any decision or expression reflective of a

biblical connotation. However, in God's word it relates the goals of individuals and work with doing what is good. Titus 2:7 states "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: In doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, and show sincerity." The Christian in all things should strive to show this behavior to everyone they are in contact with in business, school, or family. The Bible talks about working diligently in Proverbs 12:24 & 14:23. Proverbs 12:24 states, "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule; but the slothful shall be under tribute." The individual who is diligent in all they do will be in a leadership position or a ruling position. This statement correlates with Proverbs 14:23 that states, "In all labor there is profit: but the talk of the lips tended only to penury." The child of God has direct commands on his or her behavior and how to address their relationship with work, individuals, and business decisions.

The Christian can use any situation to be a witness for God in his or her behavior, and the world looks to notice how individuals manage situations and decision they are in charge of. Another scripture that references fruitfulness is Titus 3:14, which states, "And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful." Individuals must devote themselves to what is good and place their focus on finding solutions to problems, to be identified with higher levels of performance and outcomes. God's purpose for business on this earth is to play a significant role in advancing His kingdom. In Colossians 3:23-24, it states, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." This statement provides a guide to work for the glorification of God, and this can be accomplished through being a servant to others. Furthermore, Colossians, 3:24 follows up with the statement of "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." The Christian's reward will be given to him or her in heaven, the reward of inheritance.

Summary of Section 3

Programs offered by higher educational institutions must demonstrate a relevancy and courses that are marketable. These institutions must have focus on the needs of the community and quality performance to be able to maintain marketability (Johnson & Stage, 2018). Programs need to be marketable, and marketability is dependent on the institution's ability to provide learning material that is relevant to their study field and is program specific to the intended program requirements. These institutions placed their focus on the learning materials of theology and church servitude.

According to the data collected from this research, the findings concurred with prior studies that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the institutions; enrollment and increased the challenges the nontraditional adult learner faced. Challenges found for this population group influenced implications of enrollment. The higher-level challenges were work/life balance, sickness, outside assignments such as homework, related transitional issues to transitioning to online learning, and stress. Findings revealed that personal independence combined with self-confidence was beneficial in a program involving community service. Personal responsibility for the students' own learning was directly in correlation with findings in the analysis of the thematic theme of the Self-Directed Theory or (SDL) self-directed learner. The overall impact on classroom learning and the transition to online learning has been linked to students' college persistence and the completion of the program for the nontraditional learner.

The students' individual backgrounds played an understanding of the characteristics display from the adult learner. These characteristics connected the institutional variables with the association with dropout rates and graduation rates. Marketing was found to be higher by word of mouth from leaders within the student's individual community and church leadership.

Financial obligations associated with these institutions did not impact practices with college enrollment and graduation rates. Therefore, value proposition and key stakeholders utilized gains relevant to required tuition to re-invest back into the institutions. This study was an attempt to research the connection between value proposition and the marketing of the nontraditional student. Uncontrollable variables from the pandemic had direct implications on the outcome findings. It is highly recommended to collect additional data after the pandemic does not have a direct impact on the institutions.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Post-secondary higher education must maintain a focus on being a sustainable marketable institution. The institutions' marketability is dependent on the ability to assure stakeholders and the material to be relevant in their different fields of study. The student upon graduation must be prepared to proceed in leadership roles and perform duties their degree represents (Conrad, 2018). Data that is relevant to requirements need feedback from the students to gain information. This information is necessary to maintain and improve the organizations' ability to focus on the continuous improvement process and marketing sustainability. The primary focus of this research study was on examining the proposed marketing to the nontraditional adult learner and the value proposition this population group would provide higher educational institutions.

The current study recommends future studies examining this population growth in relationship with the higher education sector. Future research affecting marketing to the nontraditional student population is expected to clarify and provide more validation of value propositions this group brings to higher education. The study identified three main driving forces which were noted as themes in relationship to the student. These are noted as the Maslow's Need

Theory, The Dialogical Theory, and the Self-Directed Learner (SDL) Theory. The study noted information sharing to be classified as a marketing delivering method. This word-of-mouth marketing was prevalent and contributed to the service marketing. The literature validated the student challenges within the nontraditional adult learner population group with significant outside influence for the student. Those challenges were work-life balance, time constraints, and associated stress to COVID-19. The student retention rate, graduation rate, and dropout rate had a transaction-oriented decrease shift during the pandemic and is noted within these rates. Student experienced an adaption to online learning during this period that was regarded as a stressful transition while learning this new technological learning platform. Results vary depending on the normative continuance of commitment which refers to the feelings regarding the relationship of commitment and obligation (John & De Villiers, 2022).

The qualitative study required a minimum of 30 live real time interviews with nontraditional students aged 25 or older to reach saturation. The saturation point of 50% of repetitive themes and patterns was the main indicator that saturation was reached. Therefore, the study respondents' answers were sufficient for the qualitative analysis in the MAXQDA software system. The interviews were used for a primary data source, and the influence of these students had no impact on the value proposition for these private institutions. Recommendation is that future research on the nontraditional student after the COVID-19 pandemic no longer impacts enrollment would be beneficial for marketing implications of the study.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Questions below were used within post-secondary institutional interviews with students.

1. Where do university marketing programs for nontraditional learners (media, workplace, or internet) attract potential students, and do they provide multiple sufficient learning avenues for this population?
2. What challenges for a nontraditional student do you encounter at school?
3. What kind of support do higher education institutions provide to nontraditional student needs, educationally or psychologically?
4. How could college administration or faculty do more to help nontraditional adult learners in and outside of their classroom?

Appendix B: Interviewing Guide

Partial copy from Case study method: A step-by-step guide for business researchers.

Authors: Rashid, Y., Rashid, A., Warraich, M. A., Sabir, S. S., & Waseem, A. (2019).

Field Phase a. Contact can be clarified with the example of authors' case study in which empirical material collection was done through in-depth interviews. Authors arranged three interviews with project manager (vendor—Interviewee 1), database designer (vendor—Interviewee 2), and organization supports manager (client—Interviewee 3). Observation of meetings and review of documents such as meeting notes and project reports were also taken into consideration to strengthen arguments. The objective of conducting interviews with participants was to discuss the process of software development. The interviews conducted revolved around experiences, motives, International Journal of Qualitative Methods process, learning, and outcomes of collaboration. Questions were not asked in a predefined structure. However, authors prepared a list of issues that were needed to be discussed. For instance, during this pilot study, authors conducted the discussion in a way that participants were able to explain the key issues surrounding the discussion pointers given in Table 2. b. Interact Designing of field protocols is always time-consuming. Literature provides a list of reading material that assists researchers to use empirical material collection method. It is always a good practice to develop clarity and justification before using each source of evidence. Table 3 is shown as an example from authors' case study that identified the processes of value cocreation between vendor and client. Reporting Phase if. Case descriptions Case in the case study should be selected very carefully and presented in an easy-to-read format. For example, if the study is about the process of collaboration among vendor and clients, then it should clearly be showed as shown in the Table 4. ii. Participant

descriptions Description of participants along with their working and involvement level in the case under study should also be reported clearly. Sometimes, detailed description is not possible due to ethical considerations. However, a brief overview must be added to give the reader an idea about actors involved. Table 4, extracted from the authors' case study research, describes a short profile of participants. Besides this, authors have also explained in detail about the professional profile of each actor involved in the project and how he or she is creating value in the system under study.

iii. Relationship descriptions Relationship among participants should also be observed carefully and reported accordingly. In the authors' case study research, there was an established relationship between actors. Both main actors have worked on ICT projects previously. Personal and firm level connections were observed during empirical material collection. Furthermore, it was also observed that participants knew each other before starting the ICT project.

iv. Details of field protocols This section of the report presents the step-by-step guide that was used during the execution of case study. It aims to highlight the key procedures planned before conducting the case study. It provides an overview of research questions, scope of research, and the focus of the study. Issues related to empirical material collection and step-by-step process including preparation of empirical material collection and preparation of interview guide are discussed. The later part of the section maps out and discusses the interpretation strategy used for the generation of results and findings.

v. Empirical material interpretation and analysis Themes generation and coding is the most recognized data analysis method in qualitative empirical material. The authors interpreted the raw data for case studies with the help of a four-step interpretation process (PESI). Raw empirical material, in the form of texts from interviews, field notes of meetings, and observation and project reports, was arranged and sorted in MAXQDA. Since the empirical material from interviews was rich in nature as

compared to other sources, an in-depth interpretation of text was first done on interviews. The interpretation process started with initial coding of sub concepts, main Table 2. Empirical Material Discussion Pointers. Focus (Research Questions) What I Was Looking for?

Components of the value cocreation process of collaboration during the project Process of the idea generation, transfer, and execution Nature of value realized Value definition Collaboration outcome Organizational vs. personal achievement Resources utilization and integration Resource types of Level of resources and its impact on cocreation process Networks involvement Who is involved? How important is the involvement? Does involvement matter? Communication Language of cocreation Table 3. Sources of Evidence and Focus. Source of Evidence Focus

Participant Interviews Discussions were based on role, contribution, interaction with other actors, and process of feedback during the project. Meeting observations Various aspects such as experience, interaction, participants learning, were observed, and analyzed to map out the value cocreation process. Project reports Project reports were key to provide an overview of the whole project, team members' details and history, and the operations of the project. End user feedback documents the feedback itself is not key, but the process of achieving the feedback and transferring it to other actors is important. Meeting notes Meeting notes were used to make sure nothing is missed during meeting, and it also helped to support field notes taken during meeting observation. Rashid et al. nine concepts, and finally the development of categories. The categories developed from interviews were then triangulated with observation of field notes and documents. The outcome of empirical material interpretation is presented in the form of few frames. Figure 1 provides an overview of the empirical material interpretation process followed by the authors' case studies. vi. Conclusion The last part of the report is comprised of conclusion, which should be written in a way that could give the reader a comprehensive view

about the exploration of focal issue of the case study and how the researcher progresses toward meeting the research objectives. Conclusion is the summary of the case profile, facts, and resolution of the problem under study. Discussion and Conclusion This article is written with a specific purpose to provide a case study guide to research students of business and management disciplines specifically. Authors share their experiences that they gained while conducting case studies. The issues and challenges that were faced by the authors are pointed out in the form of practical solutions. By providing specific examples and experience-based recommendations, a comprehensive checklist has been presented. Each phase of the checklist includes specific issues that need addressing. A thorough understanding of the issues pertaining to each, and every phase of the checklist is necessary for effective completion of a case study research. The first phase is the foundation phase of the case in which the researcher needs to work on the philosophical assumption. A comprehensive understanding of the research concepts as well as the purpose of the case study to be conducted is essential for the effective and efficient completion of a case study research. The basic research philosophy and its thorough understanding enables the researcher to decide which path to follow for the achievement of goals set by the researcher. Hence, it is important for the researcher to have a clear understanding of the problem/issue at hand and the results a researcher wants to achieve from conducting research. This understanding of the process is vital for the case study researcher to decide what to look for, how to look, and where to look for the required information. The researcher must have a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the study while approaching the participants, and the whole processing of engaging the participants should be designed very carefully with the intent of getting the desired information out of them. Foundation phase also includes research inquiry techniques based on the philosophical stance formed earlier. Positivist research is commonly

linked to quantitative research methods, whereas interpretive research is commonly linked to qualitative Figure 1. Empirical material interpretation process. Table 4. Case Description. Case Description Location Participants CRM software project A CRM software project between an American owned Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services provider in Auckland and its client. Client is a service providing firm with business- and consumer-level customers. Vendor developed a CRM software for client, based on the specification given by client. The client was using an older version of CRM software developed by same ICT service provider, and the relationship between firms was established. This project included updates, complete interface overhaul, database security improvements, and feature additions. Auckland, New Zealand. All participants involved in the ICT project representing vendor and client were treated as social actors for the purpose of this research. It included low-, medium-, and high-level employees. 10 International Journal of Qualitative Methods research methods. The last part of the foundation phase is based on research logic consideration. Induction and deduction research logics are commonly used in the field of social sciences as compared to a third logic called abduction. The second phase of the checklist is pre field phase, which comprised of a step-by-step research protocol guide that highlights the key procedures designed before conducting the case study. It is based on designing research questions, research method, ethical considerations, gathering of evidence, empirical material interpretation, analysis. The third phase is the field phase where actual contact and interaction with the participants is managed. Based on abduction strategy, this step is the most crucial step, as it enables the researcher to explore and understand a social phenomenon through the eyes of social actors. The research protocol guide designed in the second phase of the checklist ensures that participants are aware about their contribution in the research. Moreover, it helps in protecting the rights of participants and maintaining the firms'

confidentiality. The last phase of the checklist is the reporting phase, where the description of cases and participants is presented. It also documents the details of research protocols, empirical material interpretation, and analysis. At the end, the report is concluded with the summary of case profile, facts, and resolution of the problem under study. The checklist provided in this article helps the future researchers in deciding the starting point for their research. It is like pulling the loose end of the complexly and intricately woven fabric, which then unfolds the whole fabric bit by bit. Once the researcher is capable to decide which path to take for the research, further stages set their own path for the researcher to follow. After reading this article, research students should be able to conduct and complete a quality case study project in a well-defined manner. Extant literature available on case study method should be used in conjunction with this article to develop a superior quality case study research (Rashid, et al., 2019).

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