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EXPLORING THE IMPACTS OF MARKETING STRUCTURE
ON ENROLLMENT YIELD IN HIGHER EDUCATION

MARK D. GIBSON

190 Pages

The ever-expanding role of marketing and its increasing influence as a primary driver for colleges and universities to grow awareness and consideration, invite applications, and deliver enrollment yield is more critical and relied on than ever. The marketing function's rise to prominence in higher education is fueled by many external forces, including declining federal and state funding, rapid technological advances, changing student expectations, the precipitous reduction in numbers of potential college-aged students, and what this study refers to as the four Cs facing higher education. These include consumerism, commoditization, commercialism, and corporatization, each with its own set of unique challenges and opportunities from which marketing is viewed as a primary solution. In this research, a bounded case study approach is employed to look intently at the critical aspects of marketing structure, alignment, roles, strategic focus, tactical execution, and the brand management principles that have assisted a comprehensive, Carnegie-classified R2 (High Research Activity), doctoral-granting national public four-year university in growing enrollment yield in light of ever-changing marketplace challenges, many of those unmasked during the recent pandemic. The study findings highlight how the alignment of roles and responsibilities within a structure, an operative environment that is reflective of the institution's culture and allows for the illumination of the brand's core personality, tone, attributes, and dimensions, can create a powerful asset to combat the external

marketplace dynamics. This study offers an emergent framework as a unique model for colleges and universities to assess and analyze their marketing structure, operative environment, role, and responsibility stratification, and how the consistent articulation and purposeful management of the institution's brand can be optimized for competitive advantage.

KEYWORDS: Higher education marketing, integrated marketing communications, brand management, marketing structure and alignment

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EXPLORING THE IMPACTS OF MARKETING STRUCTURE
ON ENROLLMENT YIELD IN HIGHER EDUCATION

MARK D. GIBSON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Education Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2024

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EXPLORING THE IMPACTS OF MARKETING STRUCTURE
ON ENROLLMENT YIELD IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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“If you take no risks, you will suffer no defeats. But if you take no risks, you suffer no victories.”

Richard M. Nixon, 37th President of the United States

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CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Colleges and universities have offered courses and programs in marketing for over a century. However, applying marketing principles and formalizing marketing structures in higher education has a much shorter history. In the 21st century, marketing has emerged as a vital and indispensable function (King, 2013). At the same time, new marketing approaches and frameworks have been employed to keep pace with rapidly changing information needs, technological advances, and consumer preferences.

The marketing function in higher education has experienced exponential growth over the past several decades. In the 1960s, as mass media platforms grew more prevalent, marketing gained an even stronger foothold in higher education, assisting enrollment management and in shaping, positioning, and differentiating the academy's brand (Tams, 2015). As marketing matured within higher education, the refinement of marketing models in the business world during the 1970s allowed higher education to explore and experiment with different structural approaches (Higgins, 2017; Morris, 2003). The concept of integrated marketing communications, also known as IMC, was introduced in the 1980s as a model for organizations to align and coordinate several different yet interrelated marketing functions (Schultz, 1992). This approach soon became popular in higher education to coalesce the various functions of marketing (public relations and promotion, art and graphic design, advertising, publications, audio and visual services, internal communications, and public and governmental affairs) into a more cohesive, directed function to support and assist the institution in meeting its core mission (Kotler, 1995; Schultz & Schultz, 2004).

Beginning in the 1990s and continuing into the first two decades of the 21st century, the adoption of the internet as a primary source of information coupled with the pervasive use of

social media as an interaction medium has complicated the role of marketing, creating a burning platform for college and universities to strengthen and modify the marketing model and structure (Tams, 2015). Institutions of higher education were forced to look at the new ways their primary consumers and customers (potential and current students, parents, high school guidance counselors, and alumni) were consuming information about colleges and universities as well as how the institutions themselves were adopting these technologies and platforms to make marketing and curriculum choices (Nguyen et al., 2019; Polec, 2019). Traditional media and marketing approaches were inadequate to capture the attention of critical audiences via their ever-expanding choices of social, mobile, and digital media platforms.

Additionally, several variables are currently complicating marketing in higher education. Students and families face rapidly escalating tuition, fees, and housing costs as well as the desire to seek value and a return on their investment (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). Furthermore, marketing to prospective students is exacerbated by the lingering impacts of the coronavirus pandemic as consumers evaluate new options and modalities for learning and living the college experience (King, 2013; Polec, 2019).

Current literature and research are inadequate in addressing two important questions: How does the structural alignment and organization of the marketing function impact measurable marketing outcomes and how is the actual marketing function in higher education adding value in distinguishing institutional brand? Today, marketing in higher education is focused on enrollment yield, and the influence marketing structure has on brand awareness via internal management, perception, and portrayal of the institutional brand to critical in reaching those goals.

Problem Statement

Universities are under immense pressure to recruit and enroll students to maintain their brand relevance and economic viability. These pressures include intense competition, the lingering effects of the pandemic, changing student expectations, meaningful value creation, and differentiating themselves from rival institutions (Pulsipher, 2020). Marketing strategies and tactics carry the heavy burden of generating leads and viable candidates willing to consider, apply and enroll at any given institution. To reach them, universities must execute marketing campaigns and spend large amounts of money across various content and contact platform, adding to student acquisition costs (Friga, 2021; Marcus, 2021). While thinly stretched teams scramble to fill application and enrollment goals, a central question surfaces; how does the alignment and structure of marketing within higher education impact critical fiscal measures such as enrollment yield?

While limited studies have explored the role, importance, leadership, and alignment of marketing in higher education, research linking the impact of marketing structure on applications, enrollment yield, and brand management is lacking. Current research in higher education primarily focuses on the growing role of marketing, understanding how leadership advocacy and the concept of *a dominant coalition* can be a predictor of acceptance and the impact of marketing (Mulnix, 1996; Tams, 2015) and how various marketing models and theories influence marketing activities and structures (DePerro, 2006; Edmiston-Strasser, 2007; Higgins, 2017). Moreover, escalating costs in higher education place increased importance on the role and efficacy of marketing in higher education in driving fiscal outcomes, brand relevance, and return-on-marketing-investment (King, 2013; Sackstein, 2019).

Integrated marketing communications as a practice and function in higher education has become an operational imperative rather than an option. Instead, institutions view marketing as an essential function to position themselves to prospective students, families, donors, and faculty and manage their branded identity to meet a myriad of academic, enrollment, research, retention, and financial goals (DePerro, 2006). Managing these various marketing operational demands has been explored to assist in driving efficiency, efficacy, and oversight (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007).

As pointed out by Judson et al. (2009), in addition to branding and marketing externally, universities and colleges have also focused on the importance of creating brand identities and focused marketing campaigns internally, consistently coordinating and expressing their culture within the institution's walls. Establishing and solidifying brand identity through intentional marketing-related activities within the academy became a priority to help bolster employee, alumni, student, and faculty identification with the institution of higher education (Judson et al., 2009). Utilizing marketing and branding concepts serves a critical function in aligning the history, artifacts, stories, and symbols of the university into a cohesive, meaningful framework that creates continuity and, in the best of cases, aligns with the institution's mission and vision (Chapleo, 2005; Judson et al., 2009).

As consumers have more choices and more access to information than ever, colleges and universities are constantly assessing the role marketing plays and how the function is organized (Morris, 2003). The emphasis and expectations placed upon marketing to assist the institution's desire to meet academic, enrollment, financial, and recruitment goals present several options for organizing, managing, aligning, and allocating marketing activities and resources within the overall framework of the university (King, 2013).

Chyr (2017) argues one outcome of the marriage between marketing strategy and structure in higher education is the intentionality around branding and brand representation. Positioning and differentiating themselves among a vast array of choices, colleges, and universities have carved out specific niches in both the offerings of curriculum, the delivery of education, the quality of student life, location, affiliation, and the expression of the institution's brand and identity (Chyr, 2017; Higgins, 2017). These combine to create a brand persona, becoming a marketable element to help drive institutional goals (Judson et al., 2009). Therefore, the role of today's marketing in higher education is not merely one of the disassociated functions attempting to meet current and short-term needs as seen in the past; instead, it has evolved into a critically vital role that touches all parts of the academy. It is crucial in delivering a holistic portrayal of the university's brand on various platforms with tailored communications developed to reach multiple target audiences (Chapleo, 2005; Horrigan, 2007; Missaghian & Pizarro Milian, 2019). Marketing is also expected to adapt as conditions warrant and create measurements and dashboards to check the efficacy and impact of marketing strategies and tactics and use those learnings, retool, redeploy, and change efforts (King, 2013).

Although the studies referenced review the importance of marketing, its advocacy, and the rapidly changing environment in which it operates, little research or literature was explicitly conducted on the impact of the marketing structure and the intentional, strategic coordination of marketing functions within institutions. Consequently, this lack of literature and research has provided little to no insights into how colleges and universities can align marketing structure, strategies, and tactics to maximize applications, drive enrollment yield, and enhance brand management. As higher education moves toward more uncertainty fueled by the coronavirus pandemic, the forecast enrollment cliff, and ongoing revenue and expense pressures, careful

calibration, and organization of the marketing function in colleges and universities will benefit from this research.

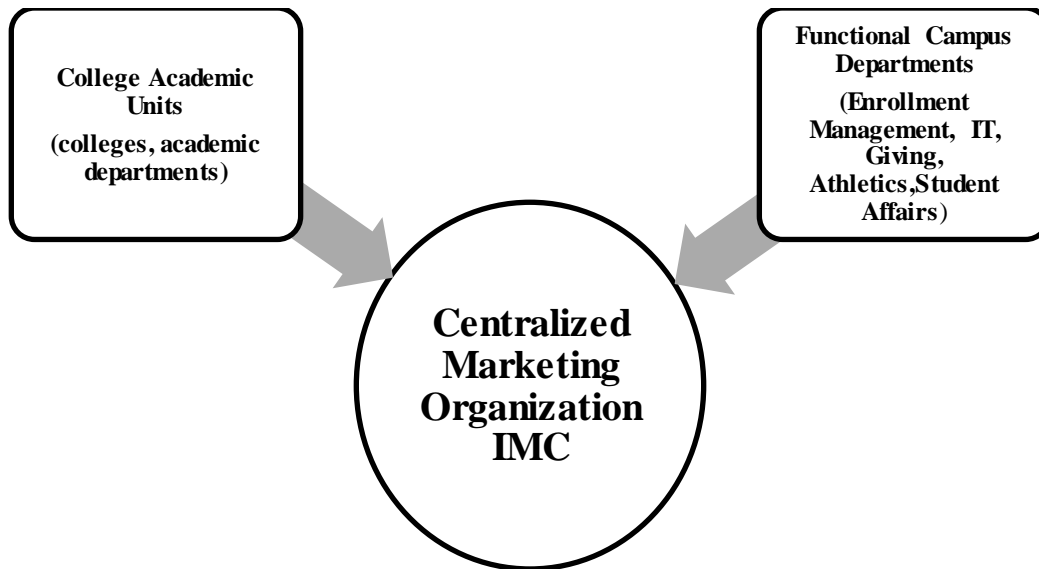
Purpose Statement

This study uses a case study methodology to explore the practical application of the marketing structure used by a successful comprehensive, Carnegie-classified R2 (High Research Activity) doctoral granting four-year national public university that increased its enrollment by 12.4% in the aftermath of the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Public national and regional universities are, by some measures, considered among the most vulnerable to enrollment variances, often receiving less funding than land-grant schools, being less selective, and offering less financial assistance, making them an ideal subject for study (McClure & Fryar, 2020).

As a backdrop for this research, two primary organizational frameworks are used in higher education, identified as centralized and decentralized structures, shown in Figures 1 and 2 below. These two models provide the foundational anchor of this research as they are the most common structural, organizational approach reported by institutions (*Carnegie*, 2020). An analysis of marketing in higher education commences with these common structures to frame the practical deployment of the function.

Figure 1

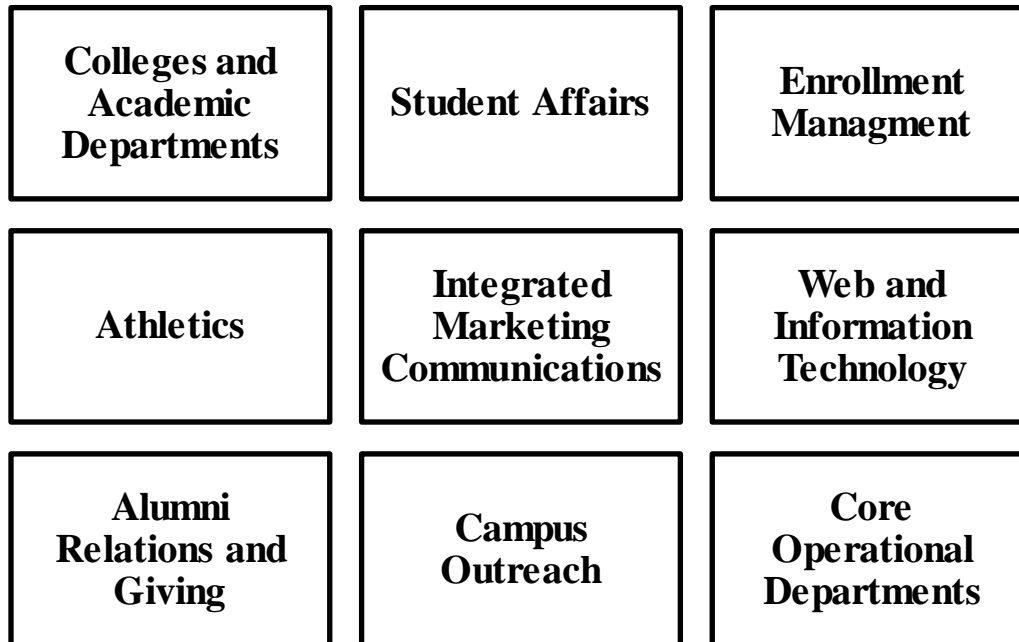
Centralized Marketing Structure in Higher Education



Note: This model shows a centralized marketing approach where all marketing decisions, strategies, tactics, plans, execution, and budget expenditures are managed through a core integrated marketing communications function with input and requests from colleges and departments. This is traditionally managed across all platforms (traditional media, online and digital platforms, brand standards for photography, iconography, videography, and logos).

Figure 2

Decentralized Marketing Structure in Higher Education



Note: This model shows a decentralized marketing structure where most marketing decisions, strategies, tactics, plans, execution, and budget expenditures are managed at the department, function, or college level. Integrated marketing communications (IMC) oversees standards for the brand (photography, iconography, videography, logos), university publications, and brand and marketing campaigns at the institutional level only.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions to examine the outcomes of marketing structure, alignment, strategy, execution, and brand management on undergraduate applications, enrollment yield, and institutional awareness and reputation at a successful four-year comprehensive national public university.

RQ1. How do integrated marketing professionals in higher education describe their operative environment, including their lived professional experiences in their specific role, their structure, alignment within the university and its benefits, challenges, and opportunities?

RQ2. What role did they perceive marketing structure and alignment play in developing and implementing a successful strategy to achieve a 12.4% increase in enrollment yield?

RQ3. What learnings and insights can be leveraged from this bounded case study to inform other national comprehensive and regional public universities on adapting their marketing structure, alignment, strategy, and execution to drive applications, enrollment yield, and brand awareness?

Significance of the study

This research will contribute to the growing interest in the integrated marketing communications function within higher education, given its crucial role in the overall management of institutional brands, generating enough applications and enrollments for financial stability, and positioning the institution for growth and viability now and into the future. The findings from this study can serve as a blueprint for best practices and assist in guiding the marketing alignment and structure for public universities seeking to improve applications, enrollment yield, and enhance their brand awareness and reputation.

The implications stemming from this research could benefit these vulnerable four-year public universities. Not only can the study shed light on the successful marketing strategies and tactics yielding an increase in applications and enrollment, but it could also provide valuable insights on how those could be implemented at other schools to aid in diversifying the student body, faculty, and staff, increasing alumni participation, and enhancing brand reputation,

potentially leading to greater recognition, awareness, resource allocation, public/private partnerships, and funding.

Moreover, by understanding the data and metrics used in the case study to quantify success, other institutions can align their marketing strategies and structures to optimize their investment in meeting key goals and outcomes, driving student and faculty satisfaction, and engaging current students and faculty in becoming marketing ambassadors. This could increase student, faculty, and staff retention while increasing institutional pride and loyalty.

As Kotler (2012) points out, successful marketing campaigns are hallmarked by attracting the right customer at the right time, aligning the brand personality or culture with a sense of shared vision or purpose, and creating value for both the consumer and the marketer (Kotler, 2012). The benefit of this research combines the understanding of how marketing structure, strategies, tactics, and outcomes as designed by one institution are adaptable and applicable to another, potentially driving increased visibility, awareness, engagement, and competitive advantage to the institution and to its key constituencies.

Lastly, the significance of this study cannot be understated in how it adds to the growing interest and reliance on marketing in higher education by expanding the learnings and knowledge of the practical application of the function in the field, leading to future research and academic inquiry.

The emergence and importance of marketing in higher education are acknowledged throughout the literature, especially in the past three decades (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007; Horrigan, 2007). This function plays a critical role in meeting the stated mission of colleges and universities and is growing in scope and influence across all university sectors (Jacob et al.,

2013; Judson et al., 2009). Given the multiple factors facing higher education today, including escalating costs, value and return on educational investment, reduced public funding, and operating in a pandemic-influenced environment, colleges and universities are turning to the discipline of marketing to guide and lead them through the uncertainty (Higgins, 2017; Mintz, 2021; Polec, 2019).

With these factors as a foundation, higher education marketing is a fertile field for expanded research and learning. Accordingly, literature in this field has evolved over the past few decades from answering questions about why the marketing function is needed in higher education to how scholars understand its multifaceted role and maximize its impact. (Polec, 2019; Tams, 2015). Leadership styles and positions, return -on-marketing-investment models (ROMI), the perceived influence of the function, advocacy for and support of marketing at the highest levels of the academy, and how the integrated marketing communications model serves as the focal point in orchestrating strategy, execution, and measurement have all been explored to varying degrees (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007; Higgins, 2017; Horrigan, 2007; Polec, 2019; Tams, 2015).

In reviewing the base of literature in this field, an area emerges requiring deeper study. This involves understanding how the approaches to structuring, organizing, and aligning integrated marketing communications in higher education impact applications, enrollment yield, and the brand's overall perception by key audiences. This study may also unveil learning on any models or constructs which can be derived to assist institutional leadership in maximizing the investment in this crucial function, given the increased reliance on integrated marketing communications for relevance, salience, and financial stability (DePerro, 2006; Gumport, 2000; Walsh, 2020).

Conceptual Frameworks

Two theoretical frameworks inform this study. Greyser and Urde (2019) offer one framework employed, called the Corporate Brand Matrix. This framework constructs a template for service-oriented entities like higher education better to understand the brand's assets and core elements.

Nine core elements of the brand are inventoried, value proposition, relationships, brand positioning, brand expression, brand core, brand personality, mission and vision, institutional culture, and core competencies (Greyser & Urde, 2019) Once the nine core elements of the matrix are articulated, the output provides a roadmap on managing the brand, guiding strategic decisions, planning tactical activities, aligning marketing efforts to the mission, vision, and culture of the organization, and finitely positioning and differentiating the institution (Greyser & Urde, 2019).

The second theoretical model used for this research is the Resource-Based View framework (RBV). This management theory focuses on how a firm's unique resources and capabilities enable its competitive advantage and fuels its performance in its category or industry (Ciszewska-Mlinarič & Wasowska, 2015). This framework is designed to help identify the institution's resources and capabilities (structure, budget, technology, competencies, expertise, skills, etc.). From this analysis, insights are gathered to explore how those institutional resources were deployed to grow and potentially sustain a competitive advantage by increasing enrollment yield by 12.4% (Mahoney & Pandian, 1992).

The RBV framework also investigates how marketing generated a resonant value proposition that differentiates its programs, culture, and brand personality and how the structure of the marketing function within the institution was leveraged to meet and exceed its goals for

enrollment. Additionally, RBV assesses the competitive environment, other external factors impacting the school, identifies relevant metrics and measures of success, how replicable or inimitable these factors are for others, the adaptability of the school to changing marketplace and consumer dynamics, and how the marketing function collectively influences the positioning, brand management, and recruiting strategies and tactics.

In using the RBV framework, this study can gain a deeper understanding of how the university's marketing structure, combined with its unique resources and capabilities, contributed to the success of growing its applications and enrollment yield while positioning the university for sustained competitive advantage and brand favorability among its target markets. It also allows for the exploration of how the marketing ecosystem of the university works internally to confront and combat marketplace realities in the ever-increasing race for mindshare and market share in higher education.

Research Methodology

This study explores the influence of marketing structure in higher education to understand if each structure, decentralized or centralized, affects applications and enrollment yield. Given the increased role and importance of marketing in attracting students and the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, understanding the effects marketing structure has on driving applications and enrollment is more relevant than ever. Additionally, the organization of the marketing function also affects the brand of the institution, its image, and how key stakeholders perceive the brand such as current and potential students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, and policymakers.

A bounded case study qualitative methodology is used for this research. It is appropriate approach when the researcher seeks information from a particular situation or phenomenon to

expand learning, share insights, and describe actual experiences, observations, perceptions, and outcomes related to the case (Merriam, 2009). Specifically, this is a particularistic case study is utilized when the researcher is studying a subject where the conditions or action already exist and seeks to illuminate understanding of the situation or case studied with an emphasis on uncovering new ideas or meaningful relationships which emerge from the research (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Additionally, this method is classified as an instrumental case study, providing heightened or in-depth awareness of an issue of the bounded case being studied to generate a deeper understanding of the elements of the case and potentially reveal new insights (Glesne, 2016).

Purposeful sampling is used to select the decision-making marketing professionals within the college, department, and university-wide roles, totaling 15 interviews. Data collection methods, such as interviews, documents, and researcher journals and memos were employed. Data analysis included coding, the designation of major identified themes from the data gathered, content analysis to assist in quantifying descriptive terms and frequency of use and application and researcher journal analysis.

Trustworthiness and reliability of the methods and analysis were achieved through collecting detailed, thick descriptions and transcription of interview data, member checking for accuracy of the data analysis of the interview data, documents, and empirical data, and using the two identified conceptual frameworks, triangulation of the data, and identification and mitigation of researcher bias.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitation factors for this study include its focus only on one public, four-year institution, thus not exploring the operational marketing structure in private institutions,

nonprofit schools, or for-profit colleges and universities. As such, this scope may exclude some learnings from those institutions which could be projectable to the research and outcomes of the study.

Moreover, another delimiting factor for this research is the exclusion of demographic and geographic factors in analyzing and assessing data. This case-studied institution is predominantly white, with a demographic composition 70% Caucasian, 11% Latino, and 9% African American. The student body population hails from 65% urban and suburban areas of its home state (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). These are key considerations and complicating issues for marketers in developing strategies and tactics but were excluded from the study to focus on structure, operative environment, and brand management more intently from a broader contextual perspective. Additionally, this study will not focus on the overall marketing budget, the size of the university marketing department, and the actual reporting structure of the marketing function within the universities participating in the study.

Limitations for this research will be the sample size, the restriction to the regional, four-year institution case study, and the ability to generalize qualitative findings to all non-public colleges and universities. Researcher positionality is also a potential limitation, as the researcher has worked under both structural alignments in this study, has opinions and experience in both, and sees the benefits and drawbacks of which could influence the interpretation of the data.

Summary and Definition of Key Terms

Integrated Marketing Communications

The alignment, coordination, and integration of core marketing communications strategies, tactics, and organizational functions (advertising, public relations, publicity, creative

design, media, brand standards) to drive impact and efficiencies and create a unified presentation of the brand across all platforms and stakeholder touchpoints (Schultz, 1992).

Centralized Marketing Structure

Centralized, integrated marketing communications models involve a singular, standalone marketing structure that involves a senior level officer of the organization (Chief Marketing Officer or Chief Communications Officer or co-titled role Chief Marketing and Communications Officer (CMO/CCO/CMCO who oversees all requisite marketing functions and reports directly to the chief executive of the organization (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007; Polec, 2019).

Decentralized Marketing Structure

Decentralized marketing models are characterized by unit or department-level functions where most marketing decisions are made, and marketing activities are conducted; these may or may not be guided by a singular brand governance structure or identification of those standards, but instead, create parameters and guidelines, allowing for more freedom in execution (DePerro, 2006; Edmiston-Strasser, 2007; Higgins, 2017; Horrigan, 2007; Polec, 2019)

Brand Management

Oversight in the development, implementation, and evolution of brand standards, guidelines, and rules to govern the use and protection of the brand, institutional artifacts, logos, and other branded elements, and the consistent deployment of those elements across internal and external executions including colors and color palettes, typography, signage, logos, mascots, iconic images, photographs, content across all media (DePerro, 2006; Edmiston-Strasser, 2007; Judson et al., 2009; Polec, 2019).

Strategic Marketing Plan

Developing and deploying a marketing strategy or strategic marketing plan (SMP) create a blueprint for the university's marketing activities. An SMP aligns the mission, vision, value proposition, and institutional goals into a framework where marketing strategies and tactics can be developed, executed, and measured (DePerro, 2006; Edmiston-Strasser, 2007; Higgins, 2017).

Summary and Organization of the Study

This chapter introduces the study of marketing structure and its effects on applications, enrollment yield, and brand management in higher education. The Resource-Based View theory and the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix were used as the conceptual frameworks guiding the research. This chapter also highlights the research problem, purpose statement, research questions, significance of the study, conceptual frameworks, methodological approach, delimitations, and limitations and defines key terms.

Chapter II reviews the relevant literature on the topic, most notably the role of integrated marketing communications as a functional, operational entity within higher education, focusing on scholarly research and emergent scholarly dialogue and discourse on various aspects of this field. Chapter III is an in-depth exploration of the methodology, with Chapter IV unveiling the research outcomes, Chapter V discussing the result, and Chapter VI summarizing the study with suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

While the field of marketing has been an area of study offered at colleges and universities for decades, the application of marketing principles and formalization of marketing structures in higher education has emerged rapidly and evolved significantly over the past five decades (King, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2019). At the same time, higher education markets have employed new approaches and frameworks to keep pace with rapidly changing information needs, technological advances, and consumer preferences (Marcus, 2021; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). Current literature primarily focuses on the role and growing importance of marketing in higher education, the ways leadership advocacy and the concept of *a dominant coalition* in the academy can be a predictor of acceptance and impact of marketing (Mulnix, 1996), and the influences of various marketing models and theories on marketing activities and structures. A gap in current literature and research exists in understanding how the structural alignment and organization of the marketing function in higher education affect the management, perception, and portrayal of the university brand and how this impacts measurable marketing outcomes.

The Onset and Formative Years of Marketing in Higher Education

Several factors have led to the recent rise and importance of marketing as an organizational discipline and critical function within higher education. Introduced in the closing months of World War II, the GI Bill created a large pool of potential college students providing returning veterans the ability to advance their education with tuition paid for by meeting military service requirements (Geiger, 2014). In turn, colleges and universities took advantage of the opportunity to differentiate themselves in the marketplace by highlighting their unique fields of study, campus features and facilities, and the tangible and intangible benefits of choosing their institution over other options available to potential students. This also fueled a significant

increase in the number of higher education institutions and available choices for students for the next several generations (Polec, 2019).

As mass media platforms grew more prevalent, accessible, and influential in the 1960s, marketing gained an even stronger foothold in higher education, primarily assisting enrollment management and shaping, positioning, and differentiating the academy's brand (Tams, 2015). The concept of marketing within higher education and the refinement of marketing models in the business world during the 1970s allowed higher education to explore and experiment with different structural approaches to how marketing was aligned within the institution. Initially, most university marketing functions were aligned with either a specific college within a larger institutional context or established as a small, nondescript function serving as more of a job shop or service department working as part of an audiovisual team, a public relations unit, or a communication office (Morris, 2003).

Kotler (1995) was among the first scholars to apply corporate marketing theory, structure, and frameworks in developing a blueprint for higher education and how to adapt those to the function. Beginning in the early 1990s, marketing was elevated from what many consider a necessary evil to a critical player in defining, delineating, expressing, articulating, managing, and ultimately selling every higher education institution's identity, experience, and value proposition. Higher education marketing has become so important, that it now operates as the nerve center for managing the traditional Four Ps of marketing: price, place, product, and promotion. (Kirp & Kirp, 2003).

A primary function of marketing at colleges and universities is lead generation, driving applications and enrollment yield, optimizing the positioning of ratings and rankings to attract elite students and faculty, curating the brand image, and maximizing fundraising by selling the

marketable assets of the institution. These marketing drivers and measures of success are not merely a 21st-century fad for colleges and universities. Rather, they serve as a modern-day roadmap and scorecard for strategic plans and tactical activities to position institutions for short- and long-term viability across key performance indicators. In many colleges and universities, marketing alignment and support emanate from presidents and governing boards, comprising a consortium of power and influence from within, frequently conflicting with faculty, staff, and the school's mission (Nguyen et al., 2019).

While many see the growing impact and results of marketing in higher education, understanding how and why it has become vital provides additional context. Mulnix (1996) describes marketing's rise to prominence as the emergence of a "dominant coalition," where marketplace realities and business imperatives fuel the need for acute attention on the positioning and perception of the institution. As technology enables information access, thereby providing valuable data on consumer behavior, colleges, and universities have migrated from purveyors of marketing knowledge and theory to actively engaged practitioners. Marketing campaigns, social and digital media presence, and brand management are the currency used to create awareness and consideration for an institution's many assets, offerings, and opportunities (Lowrie, 2018; Papadimitriou, 2018).

Though many see the necessity and subsequent entrenchment of marketing, others eschew how it has altered the cornerstones of higher education. The challenge lies in reconciling the dichotomy of the vital role marketing must play with effectively managing the function without undermining the foundations of any college or university that underpins my acute interest in the topic. Examples abound where the institutional mission takes a backseat to manufacture a marketable entity. Access and opportunity for all rings hollow as the quest for

adequate operational budgets diverts precious dollars from scholarships and assistance for those needing it most. Majors, programs, and courses of study are developed to propel applications, enrollment, and donor funds and create a student experience beyond the classroom instead of meeting society's more significant needs (Chapleo, 2010; Rauschnabel et al., 2016).

Today, the stakes for higher education are more significant than ever. Higher costs for operating institutions to pay for newer facilities, technology, staff, and amenities have pushed tuition and fees beyond normal inflationary levels to among the highest for any consumer category (Carnavale et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Lower birth rates translate to a smaller pool of traditional college-aged students (Grawe, 2018). An unforeseen pandemic and its lingering effects continue to inexorably change the expectations of students and the ability of colleges and universities to adapt quickly and correctly to meet these seismic shifts (Carlson et al., 2020; Friga, 2021; Pulsipher, 2020).

Integrated Marketing Communications in Higher Education

The concept of integrated marketing communications, also known as IMC, was introduced in the 1980s as a model for any organization to align several different yet interrelated marketing functions holistically. IMC quickly gained popularity with large and complex business entities seeking to create efficiencies and impact by coordinating and organizing the efforts of various marketing activities. The IMC concept was quickly integrated into the marketing curriculum, to reflect the growing adoption of the model. This approach soon became popular in higher education as an acceptable model to coalesce the various functions of marketing (public relations and promotion, art and graphic design, advertising, publications, audio and visual services, internal communications, and public and governmental affairs) into a more cohesive, directed function (Horriagan, 2007). In theory, this alignment created a better line of sight to the

stated university mission, vision, and core objectives of the academy while lending expertise and support to various areas of the university, including enrollment management, fundraising, alumni relations, and the overall branding and brand standard guidelines and artifacts (branded elements) of the university (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007).

Kotler and Fox explicitly addressed marketing and higher education in their foundational book on both, which reflected the increasing importance and application of marketing theory and practice into colleges and universities. They focused on the implementation of functional marketing in higher education and suggested approaches to guide marketing research, audience identification, and differentiation; defined the Four Ps of marketing (i.e., price, place, promotion, and product) in the environment of higher education, and encouraged the development of unique and compelling value propositions (Kotler & Fox, 1985).

Integrated marketing communications as a practice and function in higher education was no longer just an option. Instead, it had become an indispensable weapon to help position the academy to prospective students, families, donors, and faculty and manage the branded identity of the institution to meet a myriad of academic, enrollment, research, retention, and financial goals (DePerro, 2006). A key element of managing the various marketing roles and requirements centered around how to best structure and align the function within the institution to maximize its impact (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007).

Changing Marketplace Dynamics

The advent of the internet and its meteoric rise and importance as a source of information, commerce, and communication, coupled with the overall development and acceptance of new social media platforms, created a compelling case for colleges and universities to strengthen and modify the role of marketing in the academy (Tams, 2015). Higher

education institutions were suddenly forced to look at the new landscape differently. Their primary consumers and customers (i.e., potential, and current students, parents, high school guidance counselors, and alumni) were consuming information about colleges and universities via technology. Concurrently, information on these stakeholders how they used these technologies to make decisions and evaluate the choices at hand was readily available (Polec, 2019). Traditional media and marketing approaches were inadequate to capture the attention of critical audiences via their ever-expanding choices of social, mobile, and digital media platforms.

Simultaneously, the number of students choosing to enter college was multiplying. As a result, colleges and universities were looking at the discipline of marketing and how to effectively coordinate all critical marketing efforts to drive brand and institutional awareness, consideration, purchase, and retention (Tams, 2015). Deploying marketing elements in the academy was also seen as an imperative to cohesively manage marketing-supported efforts across multiple functions, including enrollment management, alumni relations and giving, athletics, brand management, faculty recruitment and retention, and government relations (Mulnix, 1996).

Moreover, escalating costs in higher education placed added importance on the role and efficacy of marketing in higher education. Reduced federal and state allocations to higher education exacerbated the cost of building new facilities, unveiling new technologies, and increasing salaries and benefits for staff and faculty. Compounding this issue was an increase in unfunded or underfunded state and federal mandates stretching tight budgets even further (King, 2013).

As a result, the burden of financing higher education was placed more and more on the shoulders of families and students, who also witnessed reductions in available grants and

scholarships. The cost of college for students and their families was also increasing faster than inflation, resulting in record levels of borrowing money for education. This intersection of higher costs to provide education, reduced government funding, escalating fees, and tuition, and the increasing reliance on families and students to fund education pressured colleges and universities to deploy marketing as a weapon to delineate and differentiate themselves among the vast number of choices students had when choosing an institution of higher learning (Polec, 2019).

Prominent Drivers of Marketing in Higher Education

Three primary factors have altered the higher education landscape over the past few decades. First, more students seek the career opportunities afforded by a college degree, especially in business and STEM fields, escalating demand for more programs, offerings, and choices. Second, higher education has become more of a “marketplace” for students seeking an education and an experience that provides tangible value and a return on their substantial investment. Third, ongoing federal and state funding reductions and escalating costs have forced colleges to seek new revenue sources to maintain fiscal stability and expand services. The result shifts a significant monetary burden which causes an increased debt load on students and families (Bok, 2003; Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Grawe, 2018)

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is the single-most influential driver of these phenomena in higher education. Based on the literature, neoliberalism is the philosophy where marketplace forces, fueled by privatization and capital gain, dynamically alter long-held norms in political systems, economic structures, public/private partnerships, social constructs, technology, and innovation (Harvey, 2007). Neoliberalism has fundamentally altered the mission, vision, purpose, and underlying economic foundations supporting higher education over the past five decades,

creating questions about its purpose, its constituencies, its focus, and in the long-term, its viability as an entity for the public good (Mintz, 2021; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009).

In addition to branding and marketing externally, universities and colleges focused on the importance of creating brand identities and focused marketing campaigns internally, consistently coordinating and expressing their culture within the institution's walls. Establishing, expressing, and solidifying brand identity through intentional marketing-related activities within the academy became a priority to help bolster employee, alumni, student, and faculty identification with the institution of higher education (Judson et al., 2009). Utilizing marketing and branding concepts is critical in aligning the university's history, artifacts, stories, and symbols into a cohesive, meaningful framework that creates continuity and aligns with the institution's mission and vision (Judson et al., 2009).

Fueled by neoliberalism, and with immense responsibilities placed upon the function to effect institutional goals and outcomes, marketing in the 21st century takes center stage in many colleges and universities as a tool to counter the impacts of reduced funding, inflationary pressures, and changing marketplace and consumer expectations (Mintz, 2021). For context, marketing is broadly defined as a discipline in any organization that provides value on multiple levels, from managing brand assets (i.e., logos, visuals systems, voice, and tone standards), to identifying optimal target markets, to generating qualified leads or customers for purchase or renewal, and for managing the Four Ps of price, place or distribution, product, and promotion in a coordinated way to optimize impact and drive marketing-based goals such as sales, revenue, and awareness (Kotler, 2012).

Marketing and Technology

In higher education, marketing not only exists to manage the function but is also expected to create a relevant, and resonant branded identity that influences ratings and rankings. The ultimate marketing measure in higher education is the impact on fiscal measures, notably in meeting optimal enrollment goals (Diep, 2022b; Marcus, 2021).

One of the more transformational aspects in the role marketing has been required to respond to and adapt has been the advent of social media platforms and the subsequent myriad of ways in which people communicate. More than any single disruptive influence, the social media environment of the 21st century has forced colleges and universities to employ a much more intentional and structured integrated marketing communications approach and, with it, a more acute understanding of its importance and role in helping each institution achieve its stated goals on numerous fronts (Tams, 2015). Social media platforms have caused universities to rethink more traditional marketing strategic and tactical approaches, prompting them to look at different alignments and allocation of human resources in terms of how marketing is managed holistically within organizational structures at the institutional level with an eye to the importance marketing plays in critical areas of the academy when attempting to meet specific goals enabled or driven by marketing functions (Manser Payne et al., 2017; Polec, 2019; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016).

As consumers have more choices and access to information than ever, colleges and universities are actively assessing the role marketing plays and how the function is organized (Morris, 2003). The emphasis and expectations placed upon marketing to assist the institution's desire to meet academic, enrollment, financial, and recruitment goals present several options for organizing, managing, aligning, and allocating marketing activities and resources within the overall framework of the university (King, 2013).

Brand Differentiation and Identity

One such outcome of the marriage between marketing strategy and structure in higher education is intentionality around branding and brand representation. Positioning and differentiating themselves among a vast array of choices, colleges, and universities have carved out specific niches in the offerings of curriculum, the delivery of education, the quality of student life, location, affiliation, and the expression of the institution's brand and identity (Chyr, 2017; Higgins, 2017). These combine to create a brand persona, becoming a marketable element to help accomplish institutional goals (Judson et al., 2009). Therefore, the role of marketing in higher education today is not merely one of the disassociated functions attempting to meet current and short-term needs; instead, it has evolved into a critically significant role touching all parts of the academy. It is increasingly relied upon to deliver a holistic portrayal of the university's brand on various platforms with tailored communications developed to reach multiple target audiences (Horrigan, 2007; Manser Payne et al., 2017). Marketing is expected to be equipped to adapt as conditions warrant, as well as create measurements and dashboards to check the efficacy and impact of marketing strategies and tactics (King, 2013).

American higher education predates the founding of this country. Unsurprisingly, it is entrenched in tradition, steeped in history, and monolithic in identity and experience. Colleges and universities carved out niches in curriculum, degrees, and emphasis, but marketing as a function played neither a prominent nor dominant role (Geiger, 2014). Today, with federal and state funding becoming more challenging to procure and costs rising faster than the pace of inflation, colleges and universities are now seeking new and different ways to delineate their brand and remain relevant and relatable to students (Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

While educators and academicians may scowl, marketing as a functional, operational discipline has become indispensable in colleges and universities worldwide (Kirp & Kirp, 2003; Kotler, 1995). Marketing takes center stage as institutions seek top-of-mind awareness, unique brand identities, and curated experiences to make them attractive, viable options for students, families, and new faculty. The emphasis on marketing impacts every aspect of higher education, including logos and color schemes, course, and degree offerings, building and program names, digital and online presence, and apparel and signage. No part of the academy is untouched by the marketing lens and the determination of how all assets are deployed to maximize their effect.

Sustaining the emphasis on marketing is a combination of factors. Foundationally, scholars argue neoliberalism undergirds the intense focus and reliance on marketing based upon the objective of manufacturing a palpable, differentiated branded image with an underlying, unstated desire to limit access for the sake of maintaining prestige, revenue, and respectability (Carnavale et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

Based upon these readings, neoliberalism's impact on higher education is defined as the systemic and coordinated approach among business, politics, corporations, and society as a whole to transform the academy into a more corporate structure in mission, focus, and operation, with the ultimate goal to impact critical fiscal measures such as applications received, enrollment percentages and yield (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009).

While marketing is a necessary and critical function, it is simultaneously erecting roadblocks to access and denying an equal opportunity to millions of deserving students (Carnavale et al., 2020). As the federal and state governments shirk their obligation to fund higher education adequately, these actions build more barriers and financial burdens, forcing students and families to bear higher costs and take on more significant financial commitments.

Similar to the infamous *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court opening the floodgates of dark money and PACs into the political arena, neoliberalism has fostered an arms race in higher education to position each institution as better, different, and special as marketing takes center stage in this endeavor (*08-205 Citizens United v. Federal Election Comm'n (01/21/10)*, 2010).

Neoliberalism not only ignited a need for colleges and universities to seek alternate sources of revenue, but it also forced institutions to define and refine their branded identities. Goldman et al (2002) suggests that strategic planning and marketing in higher education gained traction as a plausible, logical, and well-intended solution to the academy's many problems heading into the 21st century. Sensing the need to create a strategic framework for colleges and universities to adopt, adapt and guide planning and execution, these authors applied market-based empirical analysis and assessment tools to the higher education marketplace.

Using the industry study framework as a theoretical map, (Goldman et al., 2002), identified market conditions and relevant factors in higher education, irrespective of institutional size, scope, and mission. The framework used multiple inputs to assess and analyze factors impacting marketing. These include primary market conditions of supply and demand, the market structure for higher education (i.e., market size, brand differentiation, barriers to entry, cost structures, geography), market activities (i.e., pricing, positioning, marketing activities), the impact of public policy, and performance outcomes. By applying this framework, the authors outlined a blueprint for managing the rapidly evolving higher education market that emerged where all factors impacting the industry are assessed, strategies and tactics developed, results analyzed, and plans adapted as marketplace conditions warranted.

Although colleges and universities have operated at the intersection of the academic world and the business environment for decades, the acceleration of this trend has been more pronounced since the 1970s, gaining acceptance and execution as neoliberalism fosters a more capitalistic and enterprise mindset that permeates college administrators and governing boards (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009).

Against this backdrop scholarly writings revealed eight marketing drivers were consistently observed as an outgrowth of the impact of neoliberalism and the marketization of higher education. These primary focuses were influencing ratings and rankings, driving enrollment management, meeting student preferences and experience expectations, escalating operational costs, contributing to institutional goals linked to marketing activities, centralizing the management of price, product, place, and promotion, ongoing fiscal realities, and technology.

These marketing drivers lead to the desired marketing outcomes that include achieving higher ratings and rankings, optimizing applications and enrollment yield, meeting and exceeding student preferences and experiential expectations, creating a perceived competitive advantage, measurable marketing outcomes with return-on-investment (ROI) metrics, effective management of the Four Ps, and leveraging technology.

Four underlying themes dominate the scholarly conversations in the literature on marketing in higher education. These central conversations are categorized based on the literature to reflect the insights offered in the literature and uncover the impacts of marketing in higher education. These primary themes permeating the scholarly discourse are commoditization, consumerism, commercialization, and corporatization. Defining each conversational theme contextually as it relates to higher education lays the foundation to review and analyze those conversations using the frameworks and theories.

Underlying Themes in Literature

Commoditization

The first theme of commoditization permeates the literature. Commoditization, in this study, is defined as a series of strategies and tactics by colleges and universities to distinguish their brand, campus experience, course offerings and majors, and the institutional uniqueness, culture, and personality to attract students, faculty, donors, and remain relevant with alumni and other key stakeholders (Kirp & Kirp, 2003).

Prominent in the commoditization theme is the overt effort through marketing to create a value proposition and brand positioning. Value creation and positioning are valuable tools for university and college marketers to leverage, nurture, and craft an appealing branded identity for their institution. In the process, marketing becomes the visceral embodiment of the expression of the brand with top-of-mind awareness, consideration, exploration, and ultimately, desired outcomes for applications and enrollment (Jacob et al., 2013).

Given the high cost of college and the reduced funding available for students through federal and state sources, colleges and universities must generate and promote a brand designed to stand out and distinguish the institution amidst a sea of educational sameness. As a result, colleges and universities are forced to manufacture differentiation on multiple fronts. These tactics include offering new courses and trendy degree, introducing valued services, identifying desired student target populations, or generating desired student life options. Then, marketers aggressively promote those attributes as a unique value proposition through aggressive advertising, social media, and digital platforms to reach their target audiences (Bok, 2003; Lowrie, 2018; Papadimitriou, 2018).

No institution is immune from explaining why it is better, different, and exceptional in attracting and retaining students, faculty, and donations (Kotler, 1995). In this context, college ratings on quality, value, and selectivity become the currency used to draw distinctions between schools. Cultivating these individual brands and driving demand becomes marketing's mission. As a result, those promoted attributes and features often overshadows and dilutes the institution's mission (Anctil, 2008; Kirp & Kirp, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2019).

Strategic decisions on how institutions invest time, money, and effort in gaining rankings and ratings also impact marketing strategies and tactics. In actively shaping the brand of the university based on prestige, colleges, and universities constantly attempt to improve their lot among their peers, either leveraging and building upon their current brand position or purposefully investing in activities to produce a higher level of perceived prestige (Goldman et al., 2002; Papadimitriou, 2018).

This marketing approach in developing and promoting new services, programs, technology upgrades, and campus capital improvements comes with a price tag. Students and families are asked to those costs in the form of higher tuition and fees to promote the brand awareness and preference (Bok, 2003; Kirp & Kirp, 2003). A core criticism among the literature reviewed suggests that many schools use tuition and fees as a marketing tool to increase the perception of brand image and prestige, with affordability becoming a more significant barrier to access. Facts bear out this disparity: less than 3% of enrolled students at the most highly selective colleges and universities come from the lowest income brackets (Brown, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2019).

Commoditization also complicates enrollment management marketing as institutional finances are highly dependent upon meeting admission goals by attracting students and families

who can afford the tuition, frequently leaving those who cannot enroll on the outside (Bok, 2003; Kirp & Kirp, 2003; Toma & Kramer, 2009). In the quest to be unique, colleges and universities are prone to a market-driven mindset that craves constant feeding and nurturing across the marketable assets of the institution. Facilities, faculty, academics, and athletics all become merchandisable assets packaged to generate leads and enroll students. Furthermore, it is all unguarded by the fear of becoming just another option or, worse, a commodity. (Bok, 2003; Lowrie, 2018; Papadimitriou, 2018; Toma & Kramer, 2009). Most importantly, marketing has morphed into lead generation on several fronts, including driving applications and enrollment yield, leveraging and positioning ratings and rankings to attract elite students, faculty, and donors by cultivating a palatable brand image (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Critical in driving revenue streams, marketing becomes the primary platform for income generation across numerous target markets and funding sources. Top-of-mind awareness and breaking through the clutter in the crowded higher education marketplace make brand relevance and salience key viability measures (Goldman et al., 2002).

A significant flaw emerges in both the strategies and tactics colleges and universities employ in their marketing mindset to offset commoditization. In their quest to differentiate and stand out, they often stray from the institutional mission, diluting brand value, adding costs, and forsaking the mission to focus on marketing, manufacturing a disconnected brand image and experience.

While some authors (Birnbaum, 2000; Bok, 2003; Kirp & Kirp, 2003) call out the hypocrisy and inconsistencies of the hyper-focused reliance on marketing in the academy, many authors fail to acknowledge how this lack of balance in marketing's role is manifest within institutions across the spectrum. Instead, they offer theories and solutions to justify its

prominence. Kotler (1995), in his seminal book, brings the principles of integrated marketing communications and management of the four Ps in the business world and retrofits the model with little to no accounting for the history, governance, and mission of higher education. Others (Anctil, 2008; Brown, 2011; Papadimitriou, 2018; Toma & Kramer, 2009) seem resigned to the reality and necessity of marketing to thwart commoditization, acquiescing to its pervasive influence, while offering textbook theories and quantifiable practices to justify its strategies and tactics.

This research uncovers a critical insight and worrisome trend in higher education marketing by classifying and quantifying the cottage industry of ratings and ranking with the activities associated with those outcomes (Goldman et al., 2002). The insight unveiled is that institutions self-select their pursuit of prestige through strategic and tactical actions propelled by marketing. Some institutions, guided by a true sense of purpose, intentionally remain true to their unique value, pursue excellence in their mission, and use marketing to position their brand as it is, different from what others think it should be. More troubling, though, are colleges and universities that embellish their brand to remain relevant out of fear that they become just another option without favor or distinction. This is an eye-opening realization.

Consumerism

The second prominent theme from scholars revolves around consumerism and how it has elevated the role, focus, and importance of marketing. While developing resonant marketing campaigns that cut through the clutter and noise across multiple platforms is one challenge facing colleges and universities, another pressing challenge is understanding the mindset of students, faculty, alums, and donors and how their collective experiences as consumers impact

how they perceive brands. Thus, empowered consumerism is a significant theme and driving force in higher education.

Consumerism is the intersection where choice, brand identity, institutional reputation, and expectations on courses, degrees, services, and experiences are highly valued (Anctil, 2008; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009). Student and family consumers actively seek higher education as a portal to the real world with real jobs and seek a return on their investment. They shop for the right fit and those educational institutions that meet their academic and student life needs.

As a result, university and college marketers carefully craft their brand images to target students who value those offerings and distinguish their brand. This, in turn, fuels the lifeblood of colleges today which are applications, admissions, and enrolment yield (Brown, 2011; Kirp & Kirp, 2003). Every aspect of the institution is a marketable asset, from student life experiences to facilities and degree offerings. Trends suggest the key to tapping into the consumer mindset is uncovering the underlying factors that drive awareness, consideration, and exploration of a college and university (Molesworth et al., 2011).

Consumerism burdens colleges and universities at all levels. Elite and highly selective schools chase higher ratings and rankings to maintain their exclusive reputation and prestige. Public regional universities, private liberal arts schools, and community colleges utilize student insights and preferences to enhance student life options (Jacob et al., 2013). These insights are also instrumental in developing new courses and major options that reflect burgeoning employment fields to lure and attract students, faculty, donors, and business partners (Bok, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2019).

The concept “if you create it, they will come” rings loudly throughout the halls of the academy as a panacea to remain relevant to the changing preferences of students and other key

constituents. Higher education has lost its true purpose when it travels the trendy pathways for the sake of being fashionable or appealing to fads (Missaghian & Pizarro Milian, 2019).

Moreover, these conversations around consumerism's dominant role in driving various marketing strategies and tactics in higher education appear to reflect and extend the evolution of the modern world where choice, multiple sales and marketing platforms, and customer empowerment rule. Brands create value as long as they evolve and deliver desired customer value (Anctil, 2008; Brown, 2011). Higher education is no exception today, as many choices, price points, experiences, and niche offerings flood the consumer mindset for consideration. The consumer is in control, and the higher education marketing professionals have received the message and adapted accordingly (Missaghian & Pizarro Milian, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2019).

Higher education's marketization served as a living laboratory for implementing the Brand Flux Model (Williams & Omar, 2014a), in which anticipating and reacting to changing market conditions makes brand and marketing management more flexible to constantly evolving consumer preferences. Positioning, repositioning, and redeploying brand and marketing assets in higher education are crucial in adapting to consumerism in the category. However, as suggested by Kirp & Kirp (2003), institutions must be cautious so as not to upset the delicate balance between marketplace realities and brand identity, lest they risk damaging brand reputation.

Still, brand positioning is a valuable tool many scholars have yet to embrace and advocate for despite the shifting landscape and underlying vulnerabilities unmasked by the coronavirus pandemic at many colleges in universities (Friga, 2021; Pulsipher, 2020). Higher education marketers must refrain from using the tools at their disposal with gimmicks akin to retailers, leveraging the Four Ps on a whim. Examples of this approach include discounting tuition and fees to prop up sagging applications and enrollment yield, developing designer and

trendy courses and degree offerings to entice students, and building costly amenities and country club lifestyle options for living and student experiences (Gibbs & Murphy, 2009; Goldman et al., 2002). Attractive and eye-catching, rapid changes in student preferences, technology, and the consumer mindset can undermine investment in programs that lose their appeal and value quickly, with colleges and universities driving toward the shiny new approach to drive differentiation. Ultimately, the process becomes costly, thereby diluting and diffusing the institution's value (Birnbaum, 2000).

Despite tighter budgets and escalating costs, investment in marketing continues to increase at record levels. Spending in the category topped \$2 billion in 2018 and \$2.2 billion in 2019. While the pandemic interrupted this level of spending, measured marketing and advertising spending in the first quarter of 2021 was double the pace in 2019 (Cellini & Chaudhary, 2020; Marcus, 2021). Much of this activity results from more complex platforms to reach student and family consumers, with non-traditional digital, social, and mobile media playing a more prominent and influential role in the marketing mix (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Not only are media choices more complicated today, but marketers must also understand the behavioral motivators to reach their audiences. Targeting the right message to the right target market at the right time is a fundamental outgrowth of consumerism and a core competency required for marketers in the higher education category. Colleges and universities compete with each other and every brand for mindshare and market share, making targeting messages to consumers more critical than ever (Cellini & Chaudhary, 2020). Understanding what makes brands salient and relevant and crafting marketing campaigns that deliver results through meaningful differentiation is college marketing professionals' ultimate focus and goal (Anctil, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2019; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009).

Fed by empowerment through technology, consumerism will only grow in its importance and focus as colleges and universities seek to remain viable in the face of the predicted enrollment cliff, inadequate support from federal and state resources, and the demand for more robust student choices in curriculum, course offerings, and life experiences.

Commercialization

The third conversation that emerged in the literature suggests commercialization as another source of need and power for marketing in higher education. Whether it be commercial research projects, copyright and trademarks, endowed chairs and faculty positions, physical assets for naming rights, corporate partnerships for capital campaigns, or leveraging athletic teams, everything seems to be for sale in higher education (Anctil, 2008; Bok, 2003; Molesworth et al., 2011). These additional revenue streams can offset enrollment management's cyclical and unpredictable nature and open new educational enterprise marketing options (Bok, 2003; Brown, 2011; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009).

Although commoditization and consumerism have always existed to some degree in higher education, today's commercialization has emerged as a reactionary response to multiple factors in the academy. First, the commercialization of assets within higher education provides predictable revenue streams and form long-term partnerships. As such, identifying and assessing the value of any institution's marketable assets may be one of the most fruitful activities undertaken by college marketers. In short, it becomes a prospecting list for fundraising (Kirp & Kirp, 2003).

Second, colleges and universities have bankrolled donors, alumni, and businesses through intercollegiate athletics, where status and access for name recognition reign supreme. Firms line up and sit on waiting lists for athletic naming rights on buildings and facilities and coaching

positions to garner prized suite and seat deals. Brands seek involvement across multiple athletic and media platforms to drive consumer connectivity and advantage over competitors through awareness, consideration, and purchase (Toma & Kramer, 2009).

Moreover, universities eagerly use revenue sports to court and close deals with new donors and business partners as an investment portal for long-term relationships (Toma & Kramer, 2009). Even an athletic team's success can be a predictor of applications and enrollment yield. Universities deftly leverage this dynamic when selling the university experience to students, donors, and business prospects (Anctil, 2008; Bok, 2003; Toma & Kramer, 2009). The college sports landscape is an attractive venue for brands, and universities are cashing in by expanding investment and marketing opportunities to these increase precious revenues.

Lastly, commercialization permeates higher education in new frontiers by identifying previously untapped assets for sponsorship and frequently repurposing unused spaces, programs, and research projects to generate new partnerships and income. Anything that can be reasonably marketed and sold is prized for its viability to make money and become self-sustaining (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009).

Programs, including those advanced degrees, are offered online and on weekends to tap into working professionals and sponsor companies willing to pay for the opportunity. Anctil (2008) describes other practices in admissions and academics, where schools cherry-pick the most desirable students to raise standardized test scores and GPA profiles, and ratings. Simultaneously, universities sell products for executive education, business consulting, and other packaged programs to expand short-term revenue and charge premium prices for these services, perceived for their high value based upon institutional reputation.

This circular selling process creates instant connectivity and relevance to potential individual donors and corporate partners seeking personal benefit, recognition, or a meaningful business relationship that drives the bottom line. Additionally, the ability to attract the names of well-known alumni, businesses, and research partnerships become badges of legitimacy and honor for the institution, heralded as forging new pathways for student engagement and expanding knowledge for innovative teaching and research opportunities. Nevertheless, as Bok (2003) suggests, driving revenue in the pursuit of academic excellence produces a palatable narrative of necessity that, as time and successful efforts offer, far outweighs the risks of damage to institutional mission and reputation. But at what cost?

One of the significant unknown outcomes of the marketization of and commercialization in higher education is damage to institutional culture internally. The fragile ecosystem within each college and university is carefully nurtured through generations of students, alums, faculty, and the symbols, traditions, and experiences cultivated within (Judson et al., 2009).

Purists decry the effort to upset the delicate balance of maintaining the personality and culture of the institution with the economic realities of friend-raising and fundraising.

Many scholars argue that the most significant conflict with commercialization is institutional mission and identity, which frequently takes a backseat to naming a building, procuring a research grant, or funding valuable student learning opportunities and access for marginalized groups (Bok, 2003; Gibbs & Murphy, 2009; Kirp & Kirp, 2003), although the readings suggest that not all commercialization is sinful or imprudent.

Colleges and universities have always looked for meaningful alliances with businesses. Numerous business theories and practices have been born in the halls of schools by the hard work of researchers and faculty. For many years, the relationship businesses and higher

education was symbiotic and mutually beneficial (Bok, 2003; Kotler, 1995; Molesworth et al., 2011). Selling ideas, innovations, endowed chairs, and research capabilities have been acceptable for decades.

However, the intensity of marketing efforts and the frequency of commercializing the institution's assets have blurred the lines between efforts to achieve the institutional mission and filling the coffers with anything that sells and creates value. It is this conversation where scholars seem perplexed and paralyzed about how to hold back this burgeoning trend of selling the institution. This may be the most challenging theme to address and redirect the practice without true reform (Birnbaum, 2000; Goldman et al., 2002; Kirp & Kirp, 2003).

Corporatization

The final theme emergent from the scholarly discourse around commercialization in higher education is corporatization. Colleges and universities have moved from shared governance and academic freedoms to a commercial business model focus structure (Gibbs, 2002; Molesworth et al., 2011; Nguyen et al., 2019).

Corporate functions, structural department alignment, job titles, business improvement models, and widely accepted business practices aimed at increasing efficiency, eliminating redundancy, and growing revenue streams flourish throughout higher education (Birnbaum, 2000; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009). Such initiatives have surfaced for numerous reasons.

Notably, these include funding cuts for student loans and Pell Grants, resulting in escalating costs and tuition hikes, intense competition for research grants and projects that drive donations and prestige, and a marketplace for anything and everything where a name, a company, or an individual can receive a marketable benefit for an investment in a program, a

building, or a sponsorship (Birnbaum, 2000; Bok, 2003; Maringe, 2009; Molesworth et al., 2011).

Actively assuming and taking on the attributes of corporations creates yet another dilemma for colleges and universities. Do they eschew the business mindset at the risk of seeming out of touch with the reality of 21st-century commerce, or do they adapt to survive and thrive, rationalizing the evolution of their industry as a forgone conclusion for relevance, respect, reputation, and revenue (Bok, 2003)? Who and what becomes the collateral damage in the process...faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, or local communities (Anctil, 2008; Birnbaum, 2000)? The literature suggests that all are at risk with the pronounced trend toward corporatizing higher education.

Some scholars agree that the corporatization of higher education has evolved with the pervasive influence of neoliberalism on three key fronts. First and foundationally is the rise of corporate business leaders sitting on public and private university governing boards. Giving seats to business executives accomplishes several key objectives. It raises the profile of rival schools competing for prestige and support.

These corporate and business titans bring extensive fundraising networks and connections to their boards and institutions. They also influence and help craft research projects and curriculum offerings that support their specific business and respective industries (Birnbaum, 2000). Depending on location and school, they help supply current and future students, alums, and employees for their partner organizations (Brown, 2011; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009).

Second, business mindsets have crept into the management and alignment of academic and operational functions within institutions to increase efficiency, measure key metrics,

encourage continual process improvement, and bring a results-oriented approach to leading colleges and universities.

Business-focus fads and trends dominate higher education management (Kirp & Kirp, 2003). Talent identification practices, efficiency, cost-cutting models, and leveraging technology are just a few edicts issued by governing boards and adopted at the highest levels of university leadership. These actions are often implemented to the detriment of students and faculty, cheapening the educational experience, and weakening the highly prized academic freedom (Anctil, 2008; Brown, 2011). Layers of new management and the creation of new departments and operational functions such as marketing exacerbate the move to a corporate structure, adding bloated and highly paid administrators as cost centers to strained budgets and limited resources (Bok, 2003).

Lastly, corporatization threatens the purpose of higher education by pursuing new knowledge and expanding existing learning purely as an outgrowth of how much revenue it could produce. Profit motive and income generation are crucial factors in deciding what to research, study, explore, and where to expand courses and degrees. STEM curriculum is highly prized; not only does it help employers to fill needed jobs in business and industries, but it also serves as the currency many colleges and universities use to fill endowments with research grant dollars, business projects, and partnerships (Birnbaum, 2000; Bok, 2003). As such, these concurrent phenomena chip away at foundational elements of higher education, including academic freedom, service to the mission, broad-based learning across many disciplines, and access and opportunity for all (Anctil, 2008; Brown, 2011).

Summary of Underlying Themes

Scholars also suggest that the cocktail of commercialism and corporatization may have crossed the line between partnership and patronage. In this construct, colleges and universities receive pressure from multiple stakeholders to transform into an industry, thereby producing knowledge and training future workers and leaders for businesses in the disciplines and industries most vital to them (Birnbaum, 2000; Molesworth et al., 2011). The delicate balance between the mission of higher education and who it ultimately serves is on the verge of a seismic shift from which scholars see no turning back (Brown, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2019).

Throughout the literature, the collective impact of commoditization, consumerism, commercialism, and corporatization presents the conflict between opportunity and irrelevance. On the one hand, the ability of institutions to distinguish their brand, adapt to student choice and preference, market their capabilities and assets, and bring needed operational improvements is the latest in its long history of evolving to meet societal needs. Expanding knowledge, advancing technology, and creating new pathways for students, faculty, and the multi-faceted stakeholders they serve is the ultimate value proposition that colleges and universities deliver. To remain stagnant despite these dynamic marketplace forces would be foolish.

These four themes, however, dominate the conversations and inexorably have led to the marketization of higher education. No one, save purists, argues that marketing is unnecessary in higher education today and for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, collectively, and concurrently, the impact and outcomes of marketing's prominence in higher education are altering its course, focus, and mission with the need for a balanced focus on marketing.

Marketing should be deployed as an asset, assisting in driving goals and objectives throughout the colleges and universities it serves. Today, it is wielded more as a weapon, as in

businesses, where new products, processes, and assets are the arsenal to grab market share, capture mindshare, and optimize revenue generation. Marketing has morphed both into a solution and a problem, and the issues arising from this lack of focus and balance are manufacturing multiple issues with lingering impacts for many institutions.

Complications of Marketing in Higher Education

Throughout the literature, the need for marketing in higher education is articulated clearly. However, its emergence as a critical function is not without concerns about its pervasive and sometimes exclusionary role. These problems include marketing practices that widen the access gap for marginalized and underserved students, marketing and brand strategies rooted in trends and consumerism that are inconsistent with student lived experiences, and the intense focus on the marketable assets of the institution that drive revenue yet decrease resources and focus on student outcomes and equity of opportunity.

How does marketing widen the access gap for underserved and marginalized student populations? The drive for prestige, ratings, and rankings becomes a force multiplier in manufacturing barriers for many students. Increasing admission standards and lowering admission rates while encouraging more applications is a marketing tool exercised by highly selective public and private schools and less selective schools (Birnbaum, 2000).

Generating high application rates with meager acceptance rates is critical for ranking colleges and universities. The more rejected and the fewer admitted, the higher the ranking and the louder marketers boast about the exclusivity and prestige of the institution. However, this simple yet powerful marketing and admissions practice has closed access for many. Thus, highly qualified students seek admission at other schools that may not have the same brand level but are still competitive and seen as outstanding options (Carnavale et al., 2020).

Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016) describe a framework called the 3 Es which stands for enhancing the prestige and standing; embracing an entrepreneurial approach to managing, leading, and marketing higher education; and expanding partnerships, stakeholders; and influencers, focusing on students as consumers. Their framework guides and informs the complex task of packaging the institution as a more marketable product, placing emphasis and context on the targets, activities, strategies, and tactics to coordinate and deploy marketing efforts.

The thirst for ratings and rankings stratifies institutions, students, faculty, and donations. It results in a hierarchy within higher education, with the elite setting the pace and the rest of the industry forced to carve out a niche to grab its needed market share. Examples abound where the entrance exam scores and grades of lower-income and minority students are excluded from statistics to improve rankings, remove concerns about lower scores, and avoid sinking in ratings (Kirp & Kirp, 2003).

All these efforts create a trickle-down effect, where students rejected at highly prestigious schools look for viable options at less competitive yet well-respected institutions, often receiving scholarships and monetary grants as incentives to attend, irrespective of need. Why do colleges and universities embrace this approach? Such a practice elevates the brand's perceived value, raises the student body's selectivity and academic profile, and generates demand with similar potential student targets. Currently, marketing in higher education appears more exclusive than inclusive, with the same groups left out in the name of driving brand awareness and targeting the most profitable students, faculty, and partners (Carnavale et al., 2020).

With the elevation of the scope of higher education marketing, the function has consolidated management of the four Ps, including price, place, promotion, and product. Tuition

pricing strategies aggravate access and alienate equal opportunities for the academy's marginalized and underserved student groups. The stratification and discrimination of lower-income deserving students continue to suppress access and opportunity, as these students are significantly underrepresented in highly selective public and private institutions (Brown, 2011).

Multiple factors have escalated student tuition costs, including reducing federal and state support, Pell Grant, and scholarship reductions. Additionally, staffing increases, energy prices, benefit and compensation costs, technology upgrades, and general inflation lead to higher business expenses for colleges and universities. As a result, higher education witnessed double the inflation rates of almost every other measured category (Archibald & Feldman, 2017; Sackstein, 2019). The coronavirus pandemic accelerated and exposed more financial fragility across higher education, changing student, faculty, staff, and stakeholder expectations and engagement (Ruark, 2021).

Meanwhile, pricing has become a more sophisticated lever for admissions and enrollment personnel to activate, with lower-income students paying a steep price for limited to no access to institutions they are qualified to attend. For many years, student and family financial needs determined aid eligibility (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Today, pricing can function as an incentive to recruit highly prized students, offering discounts to entice those who can pay more to actually pay less for a perceived better education. This disproportionately redirects more dollars to merit-based students than need-driven awards (Carnavale et al., 2020; Kirp & Kirp, 2003).

The problem is more complicated when factoring in the consumer mindset of many students and families who seek value for their college investment. Both public and private schools offer full-or substantial merit scholarships to high-achieving students to lure them from

more highly selective institutions. This practice brings students at a loss to the institution, swayed by the prospect of a free or relatively free college degree with little to no debt (Kirp & Kirp, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2019). In the wake of this approach, though, the students from lower-economic backgrounds who would benefit from more financial aid are left behind. Those resources are then diverted to prop up admissions standards and the academic profile of the student population. In the aftermath, opportunity, and access are limited, with many students forced to take on heavy debt loads while more affluent counterparts escape with little out-of-pocket impact. Marketing strategies and tactics manifest this inequity and disenfranchise those needing financial assistance and support (Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

To witness the pricing battleground admissions and enrollment has become, examine the state of Illinois, the nation's fifth-highest producer of college students (Bransberger & Michaleu, 2016). Here, a battleground is waged daily by neighboring public universities in Missouri and Iowa offering in-state tuition for those states with shared borders, lowering residency requirements, and using grants and scholarships to entice students because their state schools cannot survive or thrive without non-resident students (Illinois State Board of Higher Education, 2021). These strategies and tactics may fill classrooms and provide revenue streams, but again, they also potentially limit the aid, assistance, and access for underserved and marginalized student populations in the attempt to "buy" student enrollment through these price-based marketing efforts.

This thirst for uniqueness and brand identity directly conflicts with the purported goals of many institutions that tout environments as open, accessible for all, and welcoming of the diversity of thought, opinion, and divergent backgrounds among students and faculty. Ethical concerns arise in using branding, marketing, and pricing to drive away students who are

imminently qualified to attend but are not accepted as they lack the socio-economic means to compete with those who can pay or improve the overall profile of the institution (Carnavale et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

As such, marketing perpetuates this problem of exclusion and access and attempts to mask its existence with strategies and tactics designed to cover up its true motives. This approach raises an ethical dilemma for college administrators who struggle to balance driving revenue and other fiscal measures while being true to the institution's mission. Contextually, they often are forced to make choices that preserve the viability and vitality of the institution but sacrifice their stated goals to be open, accessible, and inclusive for all (Bok, 2003; Carnavale et al., 2020).

While commoditization and the drive for differentiation through ratings, rankings, and pricing present a significant problem of practice, consumerism and higher education's response through marketing also contribute to numerous inequities in student access and opportunities. This trend is permeating the higher education landscape in an attempt to meet the growing desires and needs of students, faculty, and staff; create a unique branded experience; and propel more applications (Bok, 2003; Mintz, 2021; Molesworth et al., 2011).

Applications and enrollment yield are the economic engines for college and university revenue. The purchase funnel is a valuable reference; creating awareness, consideration, purchase, and preference for a brand simplifies the customer journey when exploring and purchasing any product or service. This concept has been updated for the 21st century, focusing on the totality of the customer journey and experiences shaped by multiple factors. This framework of how brands connect with consumers in various ways, through numerous touchpoints, shapes their branded image with the goal of purchase and, ultimately, brand loyalty (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Through this lens, it is evident that colleges and universities are migrating to a model of building meaningful brand experiences, from initial contact to nurturing a post-graduate relationship. The dominance of social and digital media facilitates this trend, fostering a two-way relationship with prospective students and families and giving them a “feel” of campus life without ever stepping foot on campus (Missaghian & Pizarro Milian, 2019).

Students today use the internet as a primary tool when searching for college options. It is the portal for building the initial relationship with students and gathering data about their customer journey (Nguyen et al., 2019). It is also the starting point for lead generation for admissions personnel who employ sophisticated algorithms, customer contact strategies, and tactics to court students. Online platforms are the window to the soul of colleges and universities, hoping to lead to a favorable impression and, ultimately, woo a student to apply and enroll (Pulsipher, 2020).

With this backdrop, students sit squarely in the middle of this dialogue and are shaping their desires, wants, and needs for college. Colleges and universities proactively design programs, courses of study, degrees, and student life experiences for recreation and living to attract their identified targets and holistically distinguish their respective institution (Alexander, 2011; Grawe, 2021). Reactively, university marketers use student feedback on why they choose another institution and look for opportunities to manufacture new and better options seen as superior at competitor schools (Bok, 2003; Kirp & Kirp, 2003).

The proliferation of better amenities for health, fitness, recreation, and lifestyle choices are outcomes of this feedback loop. However, they upset a delicate balance in higher education between executing based on a student as consumer mindset and maintaining academic focus, purpose, and integrity (Molesworth et al., 2011).

Lowrie (2018) posits that universities suffer from a long-standing yoke of elitism born from their DNA that they existed initially to serve wealthy white male students seeking higher knowledge and distinction. Furthermore, while access and opportunity to higher education advances parallel the struggles for marginalized and underserved sections of society in citizenship, voting, and equal and civil rights, these obstacles still surface in the academy today. Framing his argument, he suggests that higher education branding stimulates a desire for more knowledge, resulting in a degree to leverage for a better life and increased mobility (Lowrie, 2018).

This desire and demand are lost on low-income, minoritized, and marginalized students who cannot relate to the value proposition or uniqueness of education and experience offered and the positioning (i.e., how the institution portrays its image, pricing, features, and benefits as a composite entity) taken by the schools they may seek out because they cannot relate (Brown, 2011; Diep, 2022a; Maringe, 2009). Colleges and universities are prone to a designer mindset when marketing their institution, focusing on aspects and assets with little to no meaning or relevance to these students. Many of these students opt out, sensing the school being academically, financially, and socially out of reach.

Consumerism raises another concern with marketing in higher education regarding the central role of the product and place of the university. Marcus (2021) and Nguyen et al. (2019) argue that facilities, amenities, athletics, and the look and feel of the campus are packaged with courses, degrees, and academic resources to paint an idyllic portrait of the institution's image and the student experience offered. Photos, websites, onsite and virtual visits, social media tactics, and campus design are curated to reflect the branded image most appealing to the largest number

of prospective applicants. Billions of dollars are spent annually to craft and market colleges and universities (Marcus, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2019).

Lost in this scenario is who pays for those efforts. Students bear this cost through ever-increasing usage fees for new facilities, technology upgrades, programs, and degree options. Tuition hikes offset the burgeoning budget drain caused by marketing (Cellini & Chaudhary, 2020; Marcus, 2021). In an attempt to create access and opportunity for all, marketing may be further restricting the access, opportunity, and attainability gaps for students who lack not only the financial resources with higher fees and costs but are unwilling to mortgage their future for an institution where they cannot see themselves fitting in for a variety of reasons. This subtle but powerful problem partially attributable to marketing serves as a psychological deterrent for students whose lived experiences and desire for a college education run counter to what many institutions offer of real value to them (Carnavale et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

One of the central concerns that surfaced in the literature about the burgeoning role of marketing in higher education is the complications it presents in assisting the institution in fulfilling its mission. Scholars raise the following questions throughout their dialogue.

- When and how does marketing do more damage than good and create obstacles for students (Goldman et al., 2002; Kirp & Kirp, 2003)?
- What student groups are prioritized more as desirable and profitable targets (Brown, 2011; Molesworth et al., 2011)?
- How do marketing analytics, data, and algorithms overlook marginalized and minoritized students and create even more significant barriers to access for them (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016; Williams & Omar, 2014)?

- Does marketing make it easier to attract diverse student populations or widen the gap and alienate them (Bok, 2003; Maringe, 2009; Nguyen et al., 2019)?

Many elements hinge on these questions most notably, how much money is generated to maintain and grow the institution through enrollment and fundraising. Lost in this equation is how the funds raised to improve programs, offer scholarships, name programs, buildings, and endow chairs take away funding from those needing it most. The search for alternative and new sources of revenue through commercializing and corporatizing higher education is widening the access gap.

This problem, unmasked by the evolution of marketing in higher education is a prescient issue and evident throughout the literature. Scholars rightfully argue that institutional mission should not be sacrificed to manage the fiscal realities facing colleges and universities. They also point out that revenue generation is a primary focus of these activities, and the risk of not leveraging the opportunity is dangerous (Bok, 2003). Administrators and marketers in higher education need to be vigilant in ensuring marketing strategies and tactics do not undermine the institutional mission or make access to all more difficult (Brown, 2011; Marine, 2009).

To understand how commercialization undermines the institutional mission and erects barriers to access and opportunity, scholars repeatedly mention ongoing, supplemental revenue stream identification outside of traditional tuition and fees as a primary goal of administrators, faculty, and marketers. Bok (2003) is outspoken in his critique of the commercialization of higher education. He suggests higher education is at an inflection point where the mission is loosely aligned to the economic realities facing higher, fostering an environment where anything and everything becomes a potential income stream. Many institutions need to manage this conflict better, as they are either misaligned with their core values or have a need to

communicate clearly with crucial stakeholders for support and understanding. He states that commercialization is the subtle back door for businesses and industries to exert influence in higher education to meet their needs for ample labor, research, technology, consulting, and other services (Bok, 2003).

By sitting on boards, endowing chairs, naming buildings, offering research grants, and supporting the overall economic needs of the institutions they support, businesses and leaders view the relationship between higher education and business as transactional, seen through the lens of a return-on-investment calculus depending on their needs and expected outcomes (Bok, 2003; Carnavale et al., 2020). Businesses and the colleges they engage with spin the relationship as mutually beneficial, but a mercenary motive lurks underneath the relationship on both sides.

Businesses are extracting intellectual, commercial, and human capital from the colleges and universities they support and altering those institutions are organized, managed, and operated. New business trends on excellence, efficiency, assessment, and processes emerge and are adopted by colleges and universities to strengthen their relationship with those business partners. It also is proof of the influence of corporate executives who succeed with the latest approach and recommend adoption to improve operations in higher education, despite their misunderstanding of the fundamental mission of a college or university. Thus, forcing business practices to assuage and reconcile their disconnection from the shared governance and organized chaos of the academy becomes a default position (Birnbaum, 2000; Bok, 2003).

When institutions begin to stray from their mission, problems emerge. In its purest sense, an institution's mission articulates its purpose, why it exists, who it serves, and how it operates to achieve its stated mission (Marine, 2009). As strategies and tactics to drive revenue away from educational purposes, students and faculty suffer. More dollars are generated for commercial

purposes to support business interests, athletic programs, idea generation, and building facilities (Toma & Kramer, 2009). While these activities are not destructive in theory, when core courses in liberal arts and humanities are reduced or eliminated in favor of higher profile and more marketable STEM options, institutions deviate from their core mission (Birnbaum, 2000; Bok, 2003; Marine, 2009).

Another issue raised is who is best served by the commercialization and corporatization of higher education as colleges and universities creep further from their stated mission. In short, students may suffer the most. Marginalized and underserved students are the collateral damage in the process as higher education as an industry lacks relevant and applicable models to guide institutions through the uncertainty of funding cuts, increased costs, and the student wants and needs while maintaining alignment and focus on its mission (Williams & Omar, 2014b).

The gap many scholars need to address is that by acquiescing to the vagaries of the marketplace to improve brand image, raise money, improve ratings, and fill enrollment ranks, the most vulnerable students are left behind, or worse, left out. With survival and existence on the line for many institutions, marketing means justify marketing ends, irrespective of the barriers and obstacles it poses for many (Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

The over-correction due to existing marketplace conditions creates short-and long-term issues. These include intentionally and unintentionally building barriers to access and widening already vast opportunity gaps for marginalized and minoritized students with strategies and tactics disenfranchising them. From pricing these students out of the ability to afford higher education to eliminating them from visualizing themselves as belonging with images and branding themes that do not appeal to or reflect their lived experiences, marketing is out of balance in its focus (Friga, 2021; Marcus, 2021).

Moreover, with everything in higher education seemingly being an asset for sale, efforts and initiatives to drive revenue can overshadow educational purpose and mission (Maringe, 2009). Degrees, majors, badges, and certificates are seen as sub-branding techniques to fill gaps in offerings and meet demand. However, they are also used to drive more revenue and insulate institutions from the vagaries of the market's impact on fiscal measures. While this reality faces many institutions, it surfaces critical conflicts and problems for educational leaders to acknowledge, manage, and correct to avoid the unintended consequences of marketing manufacturers.

The Pivotal Role of IMC Strategy and Structure

While deploying the latest tactics and acknowledging marketplace drivers are crucial to the success of any marketing effort, one of the most significant opportunities the integrated marketing communications model offers higher education is the intentional, strategic coordination of marketing functions within institutions (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007; Ketchen & Hult, 2011). This framework provides choices and guidance on marketing roles, responsibilities, reporting structures, decision rights, the scope of oversight and influence, strategic development, tactical execution, and overall organizational alignment ((Horrigan, 2007; Ketchen & Hult, 2011)).

There are many ways in which the integrated marketing communications function is structured in higher education today, often an outgrowth of necessity, tradition, leadership preference, or a plethora of other rational and irrational motives (Higgins, 2017). This review will focus on the evolution and application of two primary approaches used in higher education; 1) a centralized structure and approach; and 2) a decentralized structure and approach.

Centralized integrated marketing communications models typically involve a standalone marketing structure which involves a senior level officer of the organization who oversees all requisite marketing functions (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007). Those marketing functions are traditionally referred to as promotion, publicity, public relations, advertising, brand management, graphic and design standards, and general internal and external communications. Centralized models of integrated marketing communications structures often employ a Chief Officer model (Polec, 2019) where a Chief Marketing Officer, Chief Communications Officer, or co-titled role Chief Marketing and Communications Officer (CMO/CCO/CMCO) has executive oversight of all marketing functions and reports directly to the chief executive of the organization. In higher education, there has been a growing utilization of this model driven by the complexities of marketing strategies and tactics given current marketplace realities (Polec, 2019)

The CMO/CCCO/CMCO role in higher education traditionally oversees all the functions within the institution dealing with marketing strategy, advertising, branding, public relations, public affairs, publicity, and graphic design/ audiovisual needs. This authority also includes internal and external publications, as well as other forms and platforms of media, including social, mobile, online, and all forms of branded content (King, 2013; Polec, 2019)). These individual functions can give insight into the depth and breadth of the CMO/CCO/CMCO role and their pivotal importance in helping achieve the institution's mission, vision, strategic, and commonly stated goals, and objectives.

Developing and deploying a marketing strategy or strategic marketing plan (SMP) creates the university's marketing activities blueprint. An SMP aligns the mission, vision, value proposition, and institutional goals into a framework where marketing strategies and tactics can be developed, executed, and measured (DePerro, 2006; Edmiston-Strasser, 2007; Higgins, 2017).

Under the centralized leadership model, these activities are coordinated and aligned under the marketing function for the entire university with oversight from the CMO/CCO/CMCO (Polec, 2019). This approach employs a collaborative approach with key stakeholders throughout the university organization, with SMPs shared with and approved by a governing council or critical stakeholders. However, the daily operations, execution of tactics, decision rights, and approval are overseen by the CMO/CCO/CMCO or their designees (Higgins, 2017).

The centralized model of marketing management in higher education also sets brand standards, implementing the guidelines and rules to govern the use and protection of the brand, institutional artifacts, logos, and other branded elements, and the consistent deployment of those elements across the university in all internal and external executions (Horrigan, 2007; Judson et al., 2009). This includes colors and color palettes, typography, signage, logos, mascots, iconic images, photographs, and content across printed and electronic media. Additionally, centralized, integrated marketing communications management has oversight and sets the strategic direction for the continued evolution of those branded elements, their connection to the overall strategic marketing plan of the university, and how those are measured and manifest throughout the various functions of the academy (DePerro, 2006).

The advertising function in a centralized structure commissions the development, production, and placement of all marketing and advertising materials within the university, often with one notable exception, the Athletics Department. While athletics is often one of the most visible and brand-forward aspects of any university, it is not managed as part of the overall university brand in many centralized marketing constructs. Still, it is carefully orchestrated to align with and strategically connect to the university's overall brand (Tams, 2015).

Another critical aspect of an integrated marketing communication centralized management structure in higher education is the public relations, publicity, and public affairs functions. These three aligned yet subtly distinct functions are contiguous to and influenced by the college or university's overall integrated marketing communications strategy. Public relations involve several activities, including communications and press releases, news and information, and internal communications. Conversely, publicity yields earned media for various university topics, initiatives, events, and priorities. Public Affairs, often associated with external or government affairs, primarily deals with the university's positioning with various governmental, civic, community, particular interests, and associations or groups (Higgins, 2017).

Within a centralized structure of integrated marketing communications management, the CMO/CCO/CMCO traditionally has the final say in all strategic and most tactical executions in the marketing functions of the institution of higher learning (Polec, 2019). Additionally, they report to the president's cabinet or the university president and serve as a key adviser to the president, the governing board, respective college deans, and other department heads.

A decentralized structure contrasts with a centralized structure in several ways. First, in a decentralized structure, there is often a bundling or coupling of selected functions within certain areas of the institution (Higgins, 2017). For example, you may have public relations, public affairs, publicity, communications, and governmental affairs all working in one specific area together, reporting to and aligned separately from other marketing activities. Publications, audio/visual, and graphic design may dwell in their own structure or be found within each functional area of the university (Higgins, 2017). Brand management and governance typically reside within a single area empowered to set brand policy, standards of usage, and guidelines but frequently do not have authority or oversight approval of other areas of the campus.

Marketing activities may be developed from several areas in institutions of higher education. Marketing for university-wide advertising and marketing campaigns may have a strategy set in one area, planning, production, and execution in another, and measurement in another (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007). Coordination and collaboration are essential given the more diffuse the organization of marketing functions in the university. The interrelated yet organizationally separate functions serve as a vendor or supplier for various internal clients and constituencies, orchestrating efforts to ensure institution-wide marketing activities remain aligned to a set strategy and are designed to meet goals and stated objectives (Horrigan, 2007).

Decentralized structures and alignments may have a named marketing unit or department. They may manage marketing, coordinate the execution but not the development of the SMP, and oversee brand and advertising at an aggregate university level, but they are not involved in the marketing, social media, public relations, and publicity for individual departments or colleges within the university (Higgins, 2017; Mulnix, 1996; Tams, 2015).

The decentralized structure allows individual sections or parts of the university to have their own integrated marketing communications functions or specialists. While central publications and individual units may serve the university, departments, and colleges have their own marketing functions, often directed by a college dean's staff member or a department chair. They use university brand management guidelines for execution. Still, they can be free to develop marketing strategies and tactics independently to meet the stated objectives of their area, unfettered by the requirement to always seek approval from a central marketing management function (Higgins, 2017).

Decentralized marketing structures are inherently more flexible, allowing for real-time adaptation to changing conditions, needs, and opportunities within specific areas of the college

or university. This structural approach gives individual marketing units and functions the autonomy to manage marketing activities within the guidelines prescribed by the brand governance apparatus of the university and streamline the processes of concept approval, production, and execution (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007). Speed to market is crucial in the instant information society, and decentralized marketing structures in higher education can leverage the autonomy to act and react more quickly (Tams, 2015). Provided they adhere to university brand standards and guidelines, these mini-marketing areas can create and deploy integrated marketing communications strategies and tactics based on their department or college needs and timing.

While centralized structures of integrated marketing communications management in colleges and universities create more direct control and coordination (Higgins, 2017), this structure has inherent problems. Those include the inability to approve or quickly adapt to changing conditions or needs of the university due to competing priorities, limited staff, approval processes, and the volume and vast volume of materials produced (Morris, 2003). Timeliness, prioritization, scope, or perceived relevance and importance of the activity or audience can become roadblocks to various marketing opportunities in a centralized structure (DePerro, 2006).

Decentralized structures, while offering oversight in control of integrated marketing communications functions at a more college or department/functional unit level, likewise present concerns. This structure lacks a central core governing oversight which can dilute, diffuse, or diminish the impact of brand and marketing activities when left open to interpretation and creative expression (Horrigan, 2007). This can lead to inconsistent demonstration and portrayal of the brand across multiple platforms, thereby generating a disconnected brand experience for various internal and external audiences (Chyr, 2017). Although the decentralized approach to marketing management operates within the organized anarchy framework of colleges and

universities, it can create strategic and tactical disambiguation for the university brand, sending unintended mixed messages and reducing the impact and efficacy of marketing efforts (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007).

Theories and Frameworks Represented in the Literature

Several theoretical frameworks are used in the body of scholarly writing on deploying and operating the integrated marketing communications function within higher education. The most common framework cited across the literature was the IMC Four-Stage Framework (Schultz & Schultz, 2004) that showcases four levels of IMC development in an organization: 1) tactical coordination of marketing communications; 2) redefinition of the scope of marketing communications; 3) application of information technology; and 4) financial and strategic integration. While applying theory in the literature was relevant, the framework did not account for nor did the authors directly address the organization of the IMC function in higher education and did not explore or posit how its alignment through centralized vs. decentralized structures impacted and influenced the institutional brand (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007; Higgins, 2017; Horrigan, 2007; Tams, 2015).

Other theories used included systems theory, where interrelated functions benefit from integration and coordination (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007; King, 2013; Mulnix, 1996). However, none of the researchers defined or suggested specific structures to optimize and activate the IMC function. The concept of the *dominant coalition* was quantified in research displaying leadership advocacy and active sponsorship as vital to the support of marketing and its expanding role in the academy (Mulnix, 1996). This was reaffirmed with further research by Tams (2015) two decades later, concluding, that “midway through the first decade of the 21st century, institutions have placed the marketing function at a moderately high level of their organizational structure.”

(p.90). Admittedly the research left further open exploration of the structures, organizational constructs, and models from which marketing can most effectively operate in higher education (Tams, 2015).

The specific role of the CMO, the Four Ps of marketing, and the exploration of sources of power (bureaucratic vs. network) and leadership styles (transactional vs. transformation) gave insights into this relatively new and emerging role in higher education. However, none of the literature specifically addressed how to structure the function nor discuss overt advantages to this centralized leadership model (Polec, 2019)

Brand equity is a concept that helps correlate the impact of marketing to its activities and desired outcomes. Schultz and Schultz (2004) define it as “composite of the brand’s presence, identity/image, perceived quality, and commitment among constituents, culminating in long-term financial value to the firm and its shareholders” (p. 309). This definition and application on the role of marketing in higher education is a fundamental concept in illuminating the influence of integrated marketing communications as a practice (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007), but it stops short of discussing in literature how this concept can be applied and aligned structurally to maximize the impact in higher education.

A potentially useful tool in the management of brand in higher education is the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix which creates a template for service-oriented entities like higher education to better understand the assets and core elements of the brand as well as how to manage the brand using the matrix as a framework to help guide strategic decisions, tactical activities, aligning those actions to the mission, vision, and culture of the organization and drive finite positioning and differentiation (Greyser & Urde, 2019). Once employed, this tool can create clarity for aligning resources and prioritizing marketing activities within the academy.

Kotler (1995) states that the foundational theoretical elements of marketing leadership in higher education commence with a keen understanding of the “macroenvironment” (p.121) in which the institution operates along with acceptance that those environments consistently change and are highly externally influenced. This ensures the institution’s alignment with its environment dictates its marketing strategies, structure, and support systems to achieve those goals and objectives.

Nevertheless, he also points out that while the linear nature of this approach is ideal, institutional culture, facilities, funding, and infrastructure may be in various stages of development and must be fully equipped to allow for this construct (Kotler, 1995).

The adoption of marketing as a viable, leverageable tool by college and university leadership was explored by Mulnix (1996). His dominant coalition theory suggests that marketing’s scope, role, acceptance, and influence in higher education are proportional to how actively and demonstratively institutional leadership embraces, advocates, and empowers the role. Institutional culture, leadership styles and approaches, and structural alignment are critical in elevating higher education marketing. This prescient study foretold the dominant role marketing would play in the first three decades of the 21st century and has proven foundational in reviewing both the growth and impact of marketing within higher education (Mulnix, 1996).

Some scholars reduce marketing’s role in higher education to formulaic, off-the-shelf models and solutions that acknowledge the need for alignment, strategy, tactics, and measurement. For many, marketing is a panacea for the myriad issues facing higher education.

Revenue generation is a crucial element of any marketing effort. In one model, Goldman (2002) distills the goals of marketing leadership focus into four revenue streams: enrollment, research, public funds, and private giving. Although valid in articulating ultimate measures of

marketing success, more is needed to assist leaders operating in the complex world of student consumer insights, competitive pressures, and brand management. It may do more harm than good as the myopic view on revenue generation leads many schools to stray or abandon mission-driven marketing to the detriment of students, faculty, and institutional prestige (Kirp & Kirp, 2003).

This phenomenon is exemplified by a leadership trend labeled adaptive management, in which academic administrators cleave to the latest data, trend, or fad in an attempt to get ahead of the curve, jump the competition, and preserve their brand while simultaneously abandoning the institutional mission and ignoring internal culture (Birnbaum, 2000). The danger in this scenario is that leadership is attempting to meet multiple demands, including internal cultural expectations and norms, portray an external brand appealing to those most likely to enroll, seek employment, or donate, and, lastly, erode the foundation underpinning of the institution (Nguyen et al., 2019; Toma, 2005).

The rise of consumerism and the marketization of higher education presents a leadership and ethical dilemma. As colleges and universities play the commodity game with pricing, course offerings, and student life enhancements, college leaders are faced with decisions on whether to use marketing to feed the consumption mindset of today's student or stand firm, holding tight to institutional mission, and trusting students will see value in the features and benefits of their school (Molesworth et al., 2011).

Despite the concerns raised by scholars about balance in marketing focus, the solutions they offer are business marketing theories and frameworks retrofitted to the unique environment of higher education. A few scholars implore leaders to return to the mission of the specific institution, leverage the history, artifacts, and culture, and eschew marketing gimmicks and

trends in favor of a higher-level order of brand management, where the attributes of the school are the foundation of how it positions itself in the marketplace (Lowrie, 2018; Toma, 2005). In this construct, leaders can effectively manage the need for marketing while maintaining the institution's integrity, character, and mission, acknowledging marketplace forces, and simultaneously limiting the unintended impacts of marketing.

Kotler (1995) acknowledges the altruism of his model in higher education, noting that successful implementation requires many elements to be in place to facilitate effective marketing leadership. Several leadership and brand marketing models in the literature reviewed exhibited great potential to redirect the essential role marketing plays while providing a blueprint for leaders to refocus institutional marketing efforts and reduce or eliminate its unintended consequences.

The CORD Model offers a realistic and honest view of marketing's role, relevance, and requirements for leaders to recalibrate the marketing role. Maringe (2009) provides this framework, which is an acronym for "Contextualization, Organization, and Coordination, Research and Development" (p.49), to better guide colleges and universities in the formulation and implementation of marketing strategies, accounting for the unique environments of each institution, emanating from its mission and purpose (Maringe, 2009). This model provides leaders with the flexibility to conduct a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis and audit as a benchmark, then carefully and strategically plan marketing activities designed to influence outcomes, including elements such as brand management, structural alignment, market segmentation, competitive landscape, supply and demand, and research.

The CORD model is an initial leadership approach college and university administrators could deploy to control the scope-creep of marketing's influence in and reliance on throughout higher education. The model also provides a systemic method for engaging relevant stakeholders across the institution, generating consensus, and leveraging insights to better position the university.

The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Greyser & Urde, 2019) is also a plausible framework for administrators to deploy to combat the commoditization trend in higher education. This tool aids marketing professionals in grounding brand management strategies and tactics in their core mission, vision, and values, leveraging brand equity and competing in the marketplace. Greyser & Urde (2019) offer this framework to assist corporations seeking to remain focused on who they are, what they stand for, who they serve, and how to stay true to their core brand attributes and benefits.

Designed and presented for commercial enterprises, this matrix offers nine dimensions of brand any college or university could readily assess. Using this framework guides a self-discovery process for brands to return to the essence of their existence, explore their uniqueness, embrace their attributes, and engage with key stakeholders in a credible, authentic, and genuine manner. This approach is in stark contrast to using a variety of tactics in pursuing target audiences with transient fads and fleeting activities that may drive applications and enrollment but leave the institution in a constant identity crisis.

Another framework for colleges and universities to evaluate relevant brand attributes is the University Brand Personality Scale (Rauschnabel et al., 2016). This tool assists in understanding and staying true to an institution's core brand and mission when formulating and executing marketing strategy by identifying six dimensions of university brand personality,

including: 1) prestige, 2) sincerity, 3) appeal, 4) lively, 5) conscientiousness and 6) cosmopolitan.

By employing this scale, universities may uncover strengths and weaknesses associated with their brand personality. From this analysis, they can leverage opportunities and manage weaknesses and threats when designing marketing campaigns across various efforts to promote a realistic and genuine expression of the school.

Finally, the marketing purchase funnel is a valuable and instructive model to illustrate the mental process by which consumers consciously and subconsciously are aware, consider, purchase/ choose, and prefer/ retain a product, service, or brand. As higher education continues competing for the attention of its target markets in a crowded, communication-saturated marketplace, understanding how to reach audiences, process information, and make decisions will become more essential to meet their numerous, marketing-driven, and assisted goals.

Summary

The emergence and importance of marketing in higher education are clearly understood. This function plays a critical role in meeting the stated mission of colleges and universities and is growing in scope and influence across all sectors of the university. With this growth, higher education marketing is a fertile field for expanded research and learning. Accordingly, literature in this field has evolved over the past few decades from answering questions about why the marketing function is needed in higher education to how scholars understand its multifaceted role and maximize its impact.

Leadership styles and roles, ROI models, the perceived influence of the function, advocacy for and support of marketing in the highest levels of the academy, and how the integrated marketing communications model serves as a focal point in orchestrating strategy,

execution, and measurement have all been explored to varying degrees. In reviewing the small but growing base of literature in this field, an area emerges that invites deeper study. This involves understanding how the centralized and decentralized approaches to structuring, organizing, and aligning integrated marketing communications in higher education impact the overall perception of the brand to internal and external audiences and whether there are any models or constructs which can be derived to assist institutional leadership in maximizing the investment in the crucial marketing function (Schultz & Schultz, 2004).

Though many see the necessity and subsequent entrenchment of marketing, others eschew how it has altered the cornerstones of higher education. The challenge lies in reconciling the dichotomy of the vital role marketing now plays in higher education while effectively managing the function and doing so without undermining the foundations of any college or university. Examples abound where the institutional mission takes a backseat to manufacture a marketable entity. Access and opportunity for all rings hollow as the quest for adequate operational budgets diverts precious dollars from scholarships and assistance for those needing it most. Majors, programs, and courses of study are developed to propel applications, enrollment, and donor funds and create a student experience beyond the classroom instead of meeting society's more significant needs (Chapleo, 2010; Rauschnabel et al., 2016). It is this intersection of opportunity and overreach that further research and study can help inform and balance marketing's role in higher education.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter III provides a detailed overview of this bounded case study's research purpose, questions, rationale, design, and setting. Then, participant selection, sampling, and ethical considerations of the research is discussed. Next is an in-depth exploration of the qualitative materials and instruments employed. Lastly, data collection and analysis procedures, trustworthiness and rigor protocols, and researcher positionality are addressed.

Research Purpose

This study explores the influence of marketing structure in higher education to understand explore the practical application of the marketing structure used by a successful comprehensive, Carnegie-classified R2 (High Research Activity) doctoral granting four-year national public university that increased its enrollment by 12.4%. Given the increased role and importance of marketing in attracting students, understanding the effects of marketing structure and how it has evolved is an important factor for this study. Gaining insights from higher education marketing practitioners sheds light on how the function assists the institution in meeting its mission, achieving goals, and adapting to ever-changing marketplace conditions. Additionally, the organization of the marketing function also affects the brand of the institution, its image, and how key stakeholders perceive the brand such as current and potential students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, and policymakers.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do integrated marketing professionals in higher education describe their operative environment, including their lived professional experiences in their specific role, their structure, alignment within the university and its benefits, challenges, and opportunities?

RQ2: What role did marketing structure and alignment play in developing and implementing a successful strategy to achieve a 12.4% increase in enrollment yield at the university?

RQ3: What learnings and insights can be leveraged from this bounded case study to inform other national comprehensive and regional public universities on adapting their marketing structure, alignment, strategy, and execution to drive applications, enrollment yield, and brand awareness?

Research Rationale and Design

This study focuses on the alignment of the marketing functions and how they operate within a successful, well recognized comprehensive national public university in growing enrollment yield of 12.4% in a volatile and highly competitive higher education marketplace. This doctoral granting institution is Carnegie-classified as R2 (High Research Activity) and recognized as a leader in many fields of study. This singular case study approach is selected to gain insights and understanding into how the combination of structure, strategy, execution, roles, alignment, tactics, and brand management has met and exceeded enrollment goals.

By limiting the scope of the research to a single bounded case study, this research dives deeply into three aspects of the inner workings of a 21st-century university. The first concept is how the marketing professionals within the university detail their individual and collective roles in the development, deployment, and execution of a successful marketing strategy by defining their responsibilities and work outcomes. Second, participants were asked to describe their operative marketing environment and provide thoughts on what impact, if any, the structural alignment of marketing influence outcomes in enrollment yield? And lastly, what are the experiences, perceptions, and challenges described by these professionals to give insight into

their beliefs on how the brand management contributes to functional and collective successes of marketing within the university.

Qualitative research methodology is a distinct research approach focusing on discovering, understanding, and interpreting complex phenomena within a specific context using words, lived experiences, observations, and images (Merriam, 2009). Using open-ended data collection methods including interviews, observations, and open-ended questionnaires, participants in the research unveil descriptive, in-depth responses for researcher to gain insights into their experiences and perceptions about the topic being studied.

Several characteristics make qualitative research a practical and viable methodology. These attributes include an inductive approach, where the study is not driven by theory or null hypothesis but may lead to the development of those outcomes or alignment to a framework or context; small sample sizes that emphasize an in-depth understanding of the phenomena or context from a smaller, more controlled setting; an iterative and ongoing process for data collection and analysis which identifies and uncovers categories, themes, and trends; and an acknowledgment that the researcher's background and experiences may influence the process, analysis, and findings when interpreting and reporting the results (Eisenhardt, 1989; George & Bennett, 2005; Merriam, 2009).

For this research, four data analysis approaches were engaged to add to the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis and study, including thematic coding and analysis (Maxwell, 2013), content analysis (Vespestad & Clancy, 2021), application of theoretical frameworks (Creswell, 2014), and narrative analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Initiating multiple data analytical protocols not only helps better organize the data into meaningful and manageable sets to better interpret the resultant data (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2014), it also

mitigates issues surrounding trustworthiness of the study at key intervals in the design, data gathering, reporting, analysis and implication stages (Elo et al., 2014).

Given this variability in data collection and the presence of researcher perspective and bias, this research study was vigilant in ensuring the reliability and validity of the research methodology, data processing, analysis, and reporting through a variety of techniques available such as triangulation, member checking and researcher journaling (Maxwell, 2013). Through the use of thick, descriptive language in capturing the experiences and perspectives of participants in the study with notes and recorded transcripts, the study promotes the credibility and relevance of the research findings and situates the outcomes within the proper context in this category's current body of knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Glesne, 2016)

An instrumental, bounded case study design is selected for this research. This design methodology is used when exploring a single or small number of cases to gain insight into a phenomenon, shed light on a particular issue for greater understanding and awareness, or help reframe a generally accepted belief or theory (Stake, 1995). By using this approach, the extensive exploration of the case through the research questions aligned to existing conceptual frameworks and or theories creates a lens of examination for a deeper understanding of the particular situation or context within its unique setting. It also facilitates building upon, refining, or uncovering new frameworks or theories germane to the research and category (Eisenhardt, 1989). While not seeking to generalize or export findings as a universal truth to broader contexts, an instrumental case study can redraw generalizations as situated in the case for others to explore, learn from, and adapt findings (George & Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2006; Stake, 1995).

Moreover, a bounded case study is employed for this research. This approach is appropriate when the researcher seeks information from a particular situation or phenomenon to

expand learning, share insights, and describe actual experiences, observations, perceptions, and outcomes related to the case (Merriam, 2009). Specifically, a particularistic case study is utilized when the researcher is studying a subject where the conditions or action already exist and seeks to illuminate understanding of the situation or case studied with an emphasis on uncovering new ideas or meaningful relationships which emerge from the research (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995).

This case-study qualitative methodology gathered data from the interview subjects with pre-determined questions and identified subject areas. This approach works best when attempting to understand real-world applications and practices to provide insights, and learnings. It also can surface common themes and was suitable for this specific study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Employing two theoretical frameworks provides a robust platform for analyzing and contextualizing the data (Clark & Creswell, 2008; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Setting

One comprehensive national public university is selected for the case study. This university is classified as a Doctoral University, classification R2, High Research Activity institution (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education®, 2023). This university is situated in a medium-sized community in a large midwestern state within a two- five-hour driving distance of five metropolitan statistical areas ranking among the top 40 in the United States. The university is among the top employers in the community, which features a mix of businesses in industries such as financial services, manufacturing, technology, healthcare, and small supporting businesses. The university is a state-supported entity, deriving its charter, governance, oversight, and a portion of its budget from the state in which it is located. The university draws most of its undergraduate students from the state of its location but also from nearby Midwestern states and across the U.S., as well as graduate and doctoral students from all

parts of the nation and internationally. The student-to-faculty ratio sits at 20:1, with over 140 courses of study and major fields.

This institution admits over 70% of applicants, with an enrollment yield of 20-24%. Competitively, it rates favorably with other comprehensive regional universities with an average GPA of incoming undergraduates of over 3.5 out of 4 and an ACT Score average of 25. Located within a four-hour drive are 11 R1 Doctoral Universities (Very High Research) and 12 R2 Doctoral Universities (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education®, 2023). The university has existed for over 150 years. It is well-known among peers with a well-established reputation for offering quality education, updated academic and student services, and an affordable price.

A Carnegie-Dartlet study on self-reported marketing structures will be used to identify the structure most closely aligned with the institution's marketing structure. (Carnegie, 2020), and analysis will be conducted using the centralized and decentralized models to classify the structural alignment examined and provide the backdrop for the data collection and analysis.

Participant Selection

Purposeful selection was used to identify participants for this research. This selection engages participants whose perspectives, experiences, insights, and understanding are relevant to the overall study. It can provide rich, resonant data for coding and analysis to give structure and resonance to the research (Patton, 2014). Criterion sampling gives added rigor to this study by using the following characteristics and attributes needed by participants for their selection. These criteria are the functional characteristics of their stated role, such as serving as the marketing decision-maker within the identified college, department, or function and supervisory/oversight responsibilities for marketing activities and personnel. They also include having responsibility

for strategy and tactic development, creative and platform execution, budget allocation, and the measurement and reporting of results. Lastly, participants were required to have been in their current or a similar role at the institution for one budget cycle.

At least ten potential participants were initially identified pre-study as meeting these criteria with the research time flexible enough to allow for snowball sampling for others to direct the researcher to potential participants with insights, experiences, and expertise that could enrich the study. Merriam (2009) advises gatekeepers are crucial relationships to seek out, nurture and maintain throughout the participant selection process. This outreach was assisted by the highest-ranking marketing professional in the university, who aided in identifying, supporting, and connecting me to those participants who met the above criteria.

The primary marketing professionals at the university, college, and department level were the required population of this research. Pre-determined questions were drafted to ascertain how marketing is managed at those levels, how the structure is aligned at those levels, where decision-making rights exist in those functions, the identification of formal and informal flows of information and approvals, and the impact, if any on key fiscal measures such as applications received, enrollment yield, and brand management measures.

Interviews were scheduled for 90-minute intervals. Based upon initial pre-study investigations, a minimum of 10 marketing professionals who fit the criteria for the purposeful selection existed within the university for the case study.

Through the initial identification of the 10 marketing personnel, snowball sampling yielded an additional five potential participants. Thus, a total 15 marketing professionals meeting the selection criteria were identified throughout the institution. All agreed to participate in the study voluntarily.

The interview subjects are categorized in Table 1 to display titles, staff sizes, and reported years in the role. Titles and department names have been disguised through function aggregation to maintain confidentiality. Nine participants were from seven departments and the other six from colleges. Most were job titled as a director. College directors were solely focused college marketing activities, while departmental directors supported more university-wide efforts.

IMC refers to the stated or self-reported role by the participant of Integrated Marketing Communications. Department participants are delineated by Roman numerals I -VII. IMC roles within a college are identified with the letters A through F. To maintain the anonymity of participants, no quotations or direct responses captured or used in the reporting and analyzing of the data are given specific attribution.

Table 1

Profile of Interview Participants

Title	Function	Staff Size (FT)	Years in role
Director	IMC Department I	36	15
Director	IMC Department I	21	18
Director	IMC Department I	15	11
Director	IMC College A	2	6
Director	IMC Department II	4	9
Director	IMC Department III	11	1
Director	IMC Department IV	4	10

(Table Continues)

Table 1, Continued

Title	Function	Staff Size (FT)	Years in role
VP	IMC Department V	12	20
Director	IMC Department VI	24	10
Director	IMC College B	3	21
Director	IMC College C	2	2
Director	IMC College D	4	5
Director	IMC College E	2	7
Director	IMC College F	2	13
Director	IMC Department VII	2	10

Ethical Considerations

This study ensured that all ethical standards were followed as dictated by the sponsoring university and the institution being studied.

For the qualitative research phase, several actions were undertaken to protect the institution's and individual participants' integrity and identity. Institutional Review Board (IRB) rules were followed, and approval was sought and granted through the university's specific IRB rules and protocols. This included submission of a Sponsored Project Proposal Intake Form, a Concept Paper outlining the research questions and their intended purpose, and the names of any employees or human subjects known to be interviewed. Once submitted and approved, permission was granted to begin the interview of human subjects for this study.

No individual nor function/college/department is identifiable in the study, and any marketing materials and organizational charts offered as part of data collection were made available only to the researcher. Participants could discontinue their involvement in the study at

any point they choose without reprisal or penalty, however none opted out. A confidentiality agreement was signed by each participant that outlined the study's adherence to institutional guidelines and their rights and protections afforded for agreeing to engage (see Appendix A).

Qualitative Materials and Instruments

As Glesne (2016) pointed out, developing interview questions combines clear research questions and purpose, acute understanding of the participants and interview settings, and knowing what to ask and how to phrase questions appropriately. A survey instrument and interview protocol were developed specifically for this study (see Appendix B). Questions were developed using a general guide as set forth by Patton (2014) using experience/behavior, values/opinions, feelings, and sensory and non-threatening knowledge questions to guide the interviews and frame the study.

Employing the frameworks and theories outlined previously, open-ended questions were developed to elicit in-depth descriptions and graphic depictions of marketing roles, responsibilities, operative environments, formal and informal structures, alignment, and connectivity. Questions also asked for examples of integrated marketing communications produced across various platforms and descriptions of brand dimensions to uncover perceptions about the organization of the IMC function and brand management in their institution.

The objectives of question design were to gather relevant data about this university's marketing organization. It was also to gauge the level of marketing maturity of the brand, how the brand is managed, staffing levels, formal and informal reporting structures, workflow origination for integrated marketing communications development, marketing campaign, budget, and materials approval processes, and participants' opinions and perceptions on the impact, efficacy, influence, and scope of the marketing structure and function in their specific university.

Because this was a case study, each participant, and the function/college/department they represent were not only interviewed, but also were asked to provide organizational charts when available, multi-platform marketing executions, and brand governance and standards were shared to give the research a more textured understanding of how the structure is managed and evolving.

Responses and other data gathered were organized and analyzed using two conceptual frameworks, the Resource-Based View and the Corporate Brand Matrix. This design and inquiry approach allowed consistency in asking and categorizing questions and responses. Additionally, it provided an initial analytical basis of the data collected. Participants were made aware of the study topic and why they were being invited for an interview; however, questions were not offered before interview sessions to avoid planned answers and to draw honest responses in real-time for data collection and analysis. These protocols were enlisted to aid in the trustworthiness and validity of the study and in its transferability in expanding the field of knowledge on the research topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To help guide the interview while allowing for flexibility and discovery through the process, interviewees were initially asked these questions in sequential order. As each interview progressed, other questions surfaced based on responses determined to be within the study's scope or the possibility for those questions and potential responses to add new or expand upon the relevant context within the research parameters. The questionnaire (see Appendix B) highlights the initial interview framework associated with questions to assist with data collection and analysis in the order they were asked to provide consistency and credibility to data gathering.

Data Collection Procedures

There are three data collection instruments for this study. As noted by Patton (2014), having three data collection instruments or approaches only adds to researcher rigor,

trustworthiness, and the validity of the study, placing it within an appropriate scholarly context and enhancing its standing in the field of study (Glesne, 2016; Patton, 2014). As such, this study focuses on three data collection streams: the initial data from interviews, the second from materials, charts, and marketing examples, and the third from this researcher's journal. Using this multi-tiered approach of triangulation, which will be discussed later in this chapter, the researcher ensured that adequate data would exist and that it would be gathered for rigorous coding and analysis (Gerring, 2006; Merriam, 2009).

Interviews

First, personal interviews were scheduled in person or via ZOOM or another appropriate conference service based on participant comfort and schedule to ensure confidentiality and security. The interviews were with the primary marketing officer or person with the highest marketing title and job responsibilities within the institution at function/college/department levels. Participants were informed and consented to recording interviews, whether in person or on a video conferencing service. In either case, those interviews were automatically transcribed and checked by the researcher for transcription and /or/syntax and spelling errors, backed up on a separate storage device, and validated through member checking; (highlighted in another section of this chapter).

Interviews focused on the structure of the integrated marketing function in their respective department, college and institution, the perceptions of the impact and efficacy of the current structural alignment, and other insights, perspectives, and opinions as generated in the interviews. Sufficient time was allotted for prolonged engagement with interviewees to exhaust the depth and breadth of data captured with the participants adding to greater insights (Creswell & Poth, 2016; George & Bennett, 2005).

Video recording and transcription of the interviews via the online conferencing platform Zoom were used with participant consent. The questions developed were grouped and designed to align with each framework used to analyze the qualitative data received.

Organization Charts, Marketing Materials, and Artifacts

Moreover, data and other artifacts were collected, including organizational and reporting charts, multi-platform integrated marketing communications materials, budgets, staff size and scope, and brand architecture guidelines, including logo usage, photography, typography, iconography, and videography, brand mission, and positioning. The materials requested from the interviews and the transcripts were coded for themes and analyzed using the frameworks.

As Merriam (2009) suggests, the collection of documents is both a focused and discovery process, where the researcher begins with the base knowledge of what types of physical and electronic documents to seek but also involves the uncovering of unexpected documents and artifacts that can add dimension and substance to the data collection and analysis phases. Any data collected by the researcher was kept in a separate file, whether a physical location and/or an electronic storage option and will not be used to identify any individual or the institution in the case study.

Researcher Journal

Lastly, observation in qualitative research and researcher journaling was used as the third data collection strategy. According to Merriam (2009), this approach leverages the researcher's notes, observations, insights, and discovery journey. The combined use of rich, descriptive notes made during interviews from responses, observations, and in reviewing documents and artifacts, both added insights and value to the study and also provided necessary context and a comprehensive overview of what is being studied (Glesne, 2016; Patton, 2014). These three data

collection methods help ensure the study's rigor through triangulation, discussed later in this chapter.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for qualitative research is concurrent with and aligned with each phase of the study and requires a systematic approach that involves gathering, organizing, coding, interpreting, analyzing, and reporting the results (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Glesne, 2016; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2014). This is the approach used in this study to rigorously and thoroughly analyze the data to maintain the integrity of the process and validity of the research.

Case studies and an in-depth analysis of the data are most valuable when the researcher uses theoretical frameworks in qualitative research for a foundational analysis of a program or process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, the analysis protocol is an interactive approach after each interview to capitalize on the case study nature of the research and the data gathered and observations recorded to ensure timeliness and accuracy of the data collection consistent with this type of qualitative research (Gerring, 2006; Maxwell, 2013). After each interview and gathering of documents, electronic data, and researcher reflections, the data were transcribed and validated. As data were collected from each interview and source, the data were scoured to familiarize the researcher with what was gathered, place it within the larger context of the study, and help organize data for analysis (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Data sources for this research included interview transcripts and recordings, researcher journal notes and narratives, and documents in the form of various marketing communications materials (i.e., print, video, digital) provided by participants. To help catalog data and configure the study's scope to the research purpose, the interview questions were developed to systematically initialize responses and address the research questions (Fraenkel et al., 2019;

Merriam, 2009). Throughout the collection phase, codes were developed to organize the raw data into categories, then pivoting to using this process to identify themes from the compiled data (Stake, 2008).

In addition to the iterative, simultaneous data coding and categorization process, Maxwell (2013) implores researchers to review recorded data and written transcripts multiple times as part of the data collection and coding process, checking existing notes, citing new observations, and expanding researcher familiarity with the data uncovering potentially meaningful codes and themes not observed in the initial data gathering sequences. With this approach, and given the pre-determined nature of the questions asked of participants, a structural coding process was employed to manage the data gathered and organize it more readily for analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2014). This is a crucial step in case study qualitative research, where specific phenomena and lived experiences combine to explain or illuminate actual outcomes (Gerring, 2006; Merriam, 1988).

Initially, data obtained from each interview and interaction, including interview transcripts, IMC materials across multiple platforms, and organization charts, was assessed, reviewed, and organized into categories based on the data types received to begin data analysis (George & Bennett, 2005; Patton, 2014). After all data collection was complete, the data was read thoroughly, then initially coded to create meaning and structure for the data and information gathered for additional analysis and interpretation of the responses and perspectives surfaced as it pertains to this study (Gerring, 2006; Glesne, 2016; Merriam, 1988).

Following the initial identification and coding, a coding framework was employed to highlight the emergent major and minor themes from the data collected. This coding framework included both inductive and open coding. Inductive coding assisted in allowing for the

identifying themes and codes from the survey instrument, while open coding was useful in recognizing codes and themes outside the questionnaire which added depth and context to the data (Saldana, 2012). These approaches were designed to showcase the consistency and differences in the responses of the data and assists in confirming accuracy in the analysis process of the study (Gerring, 2006; Saldana, 2012).

Lastly, content analysis was the methodology selected to enumerate and quantify certain aspects of data gathered, especially in terms of words, phrases and language used to describe the lived experiences of the participants of research (Saldana, 2012; Vespestad & Clancy, 2021). Included in the content analysis were comments on roles, responsibilities, functions, structure, alignment, decision rights, budget, staffing, brand attributes and management. These will be detailed in the findings of the study in Chapter IV.

Once coding, thematic analysis and content analysis were completed, the two theoretical frameworks (Resource-Based View and Corporate Brand Matrix) were used to assess the effect of structure on brand management measures in the case study and the institution's level of marketing maturity, impact, effectiveness, and success as articulated by these frameworks. This deeper level of analysis helped situate the case study's findings and provides a conceptual foundation for future research.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Establishing the trustworthiness of this study and research findings is critical to ensure it is credible confirmable, transferable, and reliable. Qualitative research requires attention to detail and an emphasis on maintaining strategies and actions to situate the research as resonant and relevant within the scholarly discourse of the category or topic (Glesne, 2016; Patton, 2014). According to Creswell and Poth (2016), qualitative inquiry and trustworthiness are hallmarked

by ascertaining accuracy from the researcher, the participants, and the consumers of the study. Creating a rigorous framework for data collection and analysis and then engaging various tactics regarding coding, thematic identification, and content analysis all enhance the rigor, trustworthiness, and potential transferability of the study (Elo et al., 2014; Saldana, 2012). Therefore, the following strategies and actions were used to adhere to the standards of trustworthiness in this qualitative research.

Credibility

Vigilance in ensuring the credibility of the study develops foundational confidence in its results, given the nature of qualitative inquiry (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). This study collected rich data from interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts in the form of relevant marketing materials. Member checking with participants and triangulating data grants credibility to the research findings and mitigates the impact of researcher bias through the collection, interpretation, and analysis of the data (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, credibility checks with peer professionals as data is collected and analyzed aided in strengthening the validity of the results and as did the use of the two identified frameworks (Resource-Based View and Corporate Brand Matrix).

Rich Data Collection

Maxwell (2013) extolls the benefits of collecting and gathering rich, descriptive data from various sources, including interviews, contextual settings, observations, and detailed researcher notes. Data was gathered and member-checked by participants for accuracy, intent, and context at the study's collection, interpretation, and analysis intervals. Detailed records and an audit trail of interview questions, transcripts, researcher journal notes, peer reviews, member-checking feedback, and all artifacts collected and analyzed were maintained. Additionally, data

collection saturation was a goal of this research to exhaust all possible data sources or until no new themes emerge from the case study, giving rigor and reliability to the study (Gerring, 2006).

Triangulation

Glesne (2016) highlights the value of triangulating data gathered in qualitative research to enhance the dependability and confirmability of the study, giving it dimension and depth and building the rationale for the acceptance and validity of its findings. For this research, triangulation occurred through capturing multiple data collection in the form of rich interview data and transcripts, collecting and analyzing relevant documents and artifacts, and researcher journal notes. The two theoretic frameworks were used to ensure data relevance.

Member Checking

All interview participants reviewed their interview transcripts with some offering edits for accuracy and clarity. Maxwell (2013) recommends this process of engaging participants through member checking to confirm the data collected through interviews, guarding against the infiltration of researcher bias or misinterpretation of the data. This study employed member checking throughout the data-gathering and analysis stages to maintain a focus on validity, credibility, and accuracy.

Transferability

Merriam (2009) states that the transferability of qualitative research gives the reader or consumer insights into a particular case, context, or situation. While not each study is entirely applicable in every circumstance, the value of qualitative inquiry comes from the reader taking insights and applying those to a particular situation (Merriam, 2009). Through purposeful sampling, thick description, and detailed recording of information, the transferability of the research is elevated, and researcher bias will be mitigated (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). This

research embraced a bias towards those above-mentioned protocols and by using of two identified conceptual frameworks to aid transferability. The data and analysis shed new light on the increased importance of marketing management in higher education.

Researcher Reflexivity and Conformability

Glesne (2016) defines researcher reflexivity an amalgam of the following factors: subjectivity, identities, positioning, trustworthiness, and transformational validity. It becomes crucial for researchers to engage in of series of self-reflective questions, research tasks, and positional inventories to help researchers identify, manage, and address bias. A researcher journal was maintained that acknowledged personal insights, thoughts, and perceptions. By articulating those in the journal, I attempted to indemnify bias in the study methods and analysis, providing yet another bulwark of rigor and trustworthiness. Researcher neutrality was maintained by mitigating bias in collecting, interpreting, analyzing, and reporting the study results through an audit trail, capturing data analysis stages, and keeping detailed records of member-checked data for accuracy and thoroughness.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study is delimited in scope by reviewing only one comprehensive, Carnegie-classified R2 doctoral granting university and not studying similar institutions. Learnings from private, for profit, and land-grant schools, for example, are outside this study's purview. The research is also delimited by excluding an exploration of the demographic and geographic composition of this university and its impact on the marketing strategies and tactics developed. Other aspects delimiting this study include in-depth analysis on budget allocations and marketing mix spend, actual reporting structure, and comparisons to other similar institutions.

Limitations for this research include the singular, bounded case study of one university, and the ability to generalize and project qualitative findings to all non-public colleges and universities. Researcher positionality is also a limitation given a decades-long familiarity with both primary marketing structures found in higher education and a keen working knowledge of the benefits and drawbacks of each.

Researcher Positionality

I have spent over 33 years in corporate advertising, marketing, integrated marketing communications, sponsorship, and brand management, and 27 years in a leadership role with a Fortune 50 company. Since retiring from corporate work and transitioning to higher education as a faculty member in marketing, I am intrigued about the role, structure, and impact of integrated marketing communications. This interest has only grown stronger over the past few years with an insider/outsider view, witnessing the effects of marketing in my institution and other colleges and universities that compete for the same students and how the pandemic has altered the landscape in higher education.

With this backdrop and interest, the timing and opportunity to understand if the structure of marketing in colleges and universities affects applications, enrollment yield, and brand management are all inextricably linked as the importance of attracting and retaining students become more critical. While the pandemic may not have given rise to the role of marketing in higher education, it has unmasked both issues and opportunities, with many schools scrambling to create value, appeal to students, and remain viable, relevant options to their key target audiences. Given the rise of the digital age and social media dominance, marketing has become even more complex and presents more significant challenges and opportunities to institutions.

My positionality is influenced by a bias in predictive modeling and an understanding that qualitative research frequently provides valuable insights and direction for marketers. Having worked in centralized and decentralized structures and being aware of brands that use both organizational alignment strategies, the researcher understands the advantages and challenges of each model. Moreover, exposure to the institution's marketing structure where the researcher studied creates a first-person viewpoint in seeing marketing's challenges within one of the constructs. All these factors could cause bias to surface in the researcher's approach to the study, the research questions asked, and in data collection and analysis. Mitigating those potential biases occurs by using frameworks and theory to guide research design and analysis.

Summary

This chapter details the methodology used in the study. This research employed a qualitative case-study approach to understand the effects of an actual, deployed marketing structure in a comprehensive, national public university and how this structure may impact applications, enrollment yield, and brand management. The research design, questions, sampling procedures, ethical considerations, materials and instruments, data collection procedures, the study's trustworthiness, researcher positionality, and data collection and analysis are all outlined in the chapter. Next, Chapter IV will review the finding of the study.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This chapter details the results of this study based on the data gathered through the research phase. This data were obtained through documents and 15 interviews with marketing professionals from different departments and colleges at a comprehensive, national public four-year university. While recent scholarly research has centered on the burgeoning role of marketing in higher education, its growing and pervasive influence, and its importance in driving key fiscal and ratings measurements, there exists limited information and in-depth learnings on how the function is structured in practice and the impact of structure on key outcomes.

This study aims to identify several aspects of a successful four-year comprehensive national public university's marketing function. These factors include its marketing structure, operative environment, and brand management, how each are leveraged, and how this approach assisted in reversing the trend of similar institutions by growing enrollment yield while successfully promoting and managing its brand image and unique value proposition to various constituencies. This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do integrated marketing professionals in higher education describe their operative environment, including their lived professional experiences in their specific role, their structure, alignment within the university and its benefits, challenges, and opportunities?

RQ2: What role did they perceive marketing structure and alignment play in developing and implementing a successful strategy to achieve a 12.4% increase in enrollment yield?

RQ3: What learnings and insights can be leveraged from this bounded case study to inform other national comprehensive and regional public universities on adapting their marketing structure, alignment, strategy, and execution to drive applications, enrollment yield, and brand awareness?

Participants Profile

The primary or supervisory marketing professionals at the university, college, and department level were the required population of this research. To qualify, they were identified as the marketing decision-maker within the college, department, or function. Participants also required supervisory oversight for marketing activities and personnel, including having responsibility for strategy and tactic development, creative and platform execution, budget allocation, and the measurement and reporting of results. Lastly, participants were required to have been in their current or a similar role at the institution for one budget cycle.

Fifteen total participants were involved in the study. Nine participants were from seven departments within the university and the other six from colleges. Most were job titled as a director. College directors were solely focused college marketing activities, while departmental directors supported more university-wide efforts. Department marketers had staff sizes ranges from 36 to 4, with the average span of control being 13 marketing employees. College marketers had smaller staffs, ranging from a high of four in one college, three in another college, and the remaining colleges having only two marketing employees.

Marketing professionals in the case-studied university averaged 11.4 years of service in role, with one professional serving 20 years and the shortest tenure of one year. As for marketers based in the six colleges, one marketer served 21 years, the shortest timeframe was two years, with an average time in role of nine years.

Data Sources, Coding and Theme Identification

This bounded case study was engaged in understanding the inner workings of how a comprehensive national four-year public institution organized, managed, structured, aligned, and

deployed marketing and brand management assets not only to stem a national trend of declining enrollment in similar universities but also grow enrollment yield by 12.4%.

Data sources for this research included interview transcripts and recordings, researcher journal notes and narratives, and various marketing communications materials (i.e., print, video, and digital) provided by participants. To catalog data and configure the study's scope to the research purpose, the interview questions were developed to systematically initialize responses and address the research questions (Fraenkel et al., 2019; Merriam, 2009). Throughout the collection phase, codes were developed to organize the raw data into categories. The research then pivoted to the process of identifying themes from the compiled data (Stake, 2008). According to Creswell (2014), the ongoing, iterative process of collecting, coding, and categorizing assists in organizing and managing qualitative data, especially in case studies where transcripts, researcher journaling, and ancillary data collection of artifacts are cumbersome.

Once the initial coding and review of transcripts were completed, detailed line coding of the member-checked transcripts was conducted to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and initial codes that were developed (Glesne, 2016; Maxwell, 2013). Upon completion of line coding, codes were further condensed, with the most relevant and prevalent codes assigned names under categories aligned with the research questions and participant responses. Saldana (2012) advises placing dominant codes and organizing those into identified themes with logical groupings to aid in reporting and writing the data results. Table 2 summarizes the condensed codes and identifies the broad themes aligned to those codes.

Table 2*Initial Codes Developed and Themes Identified*

Code	Theme: Marketing Roles and Responsibilities
IMC	Integrated Marketing Communications: Functions and activities associated with the development of marketing strategies and tactics.
CAJ	Consumer Awareness and Journey: Understanding consumer wants, needs and decision-making processes for marketing.
LG	Led-Generation: Marketing activities to drive applications, enrollment yield, retention, giving, participation, sponsorship, friend-raising, and fundraising.
CDPE	Creative Development and Platform Execution: Designing, developing, and deploying various creative executions across multiple platforms.
EEM	Event and Experience Management: Creating and curating unique branded experiences that deepen relationships with key audiences.
Code	Theme: Structure and Operative Environment
SA	Structural Alignment: Explanation of structure, staffing, and alignment.
MWE	Marketing Work Environment: Details on the initiation, approval, and execution of marketing strategies and tactics.
MOA	Marketing Operative Attributes: Descriptions the attributes of the marketing function.
BCO	Benefits, Challenges, and Opportunities: Feedback and observations on what works well, challenges or impediments, and opportunities for improvement.
Code	Theme: Brand Management
BP	Brand Personality: Interpretations of the brand voice, tone, and personality.
DA	Dimensions and Attributes: Illustrations of brand attributes and dimensions.
BVG	Brand Value Generation: Portrayal of the brand across various marketing plans, tactics, and platforms expressing the value proposition.
BSG	Brand Standard and Guidelines: Depictions of brand standards and how marketing professional use them across platforms.

Following the initial coding, the codes were grouped into eight categories. Then, through the process of comparison and analysis guided by the research purpose and questions, the codes within each category were aligned into three significant themes identified from the gathered research data. Those significant theme were identified as 1) Marketing Roles and Responsibilities; 2) Structure and Operative Environment; and 3) Brand Management. These identified themes were broad in nature and required more finite analysis.

Thus, to further quantify the results, content analysis was used among common terms and phrases. Content analysis, in this case study, was useful in identifying the frequency, consistency, and ubiquity of marketing terms, phrases, descriptors of structure, and alignment of brand attributes and management (Saldana, 2012). With bounded case study research, content analysis adds a layer of trustworthiness and rigor to the credibility and transferability of the data gathered and subsequent analysis of the results. It also assists in cross-indexing the codes into activities and deliverables of the marketing roles, which allows for more granular analysis, comparison, and contrast of the data (Elo et al., 2014).

Employing the content analysis methodology, Table 3 shows the identified macro-level themes from the data, the supporting descriptive words, phrases, and terms used by participants through the interviews, and the number of participants across all 15 interviews using the term, words, or phrases aligned to the themes. Based upon the identified themes and through content analysis, each theme descriptor articulated in the data are aligned to the corresponding theme. These descriptors form the basis of the data gathered in this research, and the foundation of the findings of the study and data analysis. Each descriptor will be explored in-depth later in this chapter. Only themes coming scoring higher than 11 in content analysis are included in the table.

Table 3*Themes and Content Analysis of Terms and Phrases*

Themes	Theme Descriptors	Frequency
Marketing Roles/Responsibilities	IMC Functions	15
	Creative Design, Development, Execution	
	Marketing Support and Expertise	
	Budget Management and Oversight	
	Student Relations	
	Marketing Results/M Measurement	
	Strategic Marketing Planning	13
	Event/Experience Management	
	Storytelling/News Dissemination	
	Alumni Relations	
Enrollment Management	Retention	15
	Enrollment Management/Recruitment	11
Theme	Theme Descriptors	Frequency
Structure and Operative Environment		
Structure	Reporting Structure and Alignment	15
	Staffing Needs/Deficits	15
	Better Coordination/Connectivity	13
	Decentralized	13
	Hub and Spoke Network	12
	Consolidation of resources	11
Operative Environment	Flexible	15
	Collaborative	
	Adaptive	
	Subject-Matter Expertise/Highly Valued	
	Agile and resourceful	
	Cooperative	14
	Autonomous	12
Cyclical vs. Planned and Organic Work	11	

(Table Continues)

Table 3, Continued

Theme	Theme Descriptors	Frequency
Brand Management	Friendly, Inviting, Caring, Welcoming	15
	Trusted and Well-Managed	
	Solid yet flexible brand standards	
	Realistic and Attainable	
	Personalized Attention/Relationship-oriented	
	Consistency of Brand Expression	
	Relevant	14
	Intimate Setting with Large Opportunities	
	Relatable	
	Credible, Sincere	
	Rich Tradition	
	Diversity Embraced	
Thriving	13	
Connected Community		
Genuine, Authentic, Confident		
Supportive and Invested		
Opportunity for more consistency/sharing	12	
Accepting and Comfortable		
Respectful and respected		

Discussion and Descriptions of Major Themes

Based upon the background and experience of the researcher, the stated intent of the study, and participant responses to interview questions, the data generated three major themes related to the influence of marketing structure on marketing roles, responsibilities, and outcomes at this comprehensive national four-year public institution. Through purposeful coding strategies, triangulation of the data with the researcher journal and member checking, and a thorough review of transcribed interview recordings, the identified themes are 1) the articulation of marketing roles and responsibilities; 2) a rich description of structure and operating environment; and 3) how the brand is managed, perceived, and promoted to various key constituencies. By

focusing on these themes and combining content analysis of the common responses, the data is catalogued to highlight each of the dominant sub-themes under the broader themes.

In this approach, the study looks intently at each factor, highlights participant responses, and creates an enhanced understanding of these marketing drivers under each theme and exploration of each individually, which are shared in detail later in this chapter. This approach also facilitates the alignment the data for in-depth analysis via the Resource-Based View and Corporate Brand Identity Matrix frameworks. It is important to note these themes are not siloed in the marketing environment of this institution; in fact, they are interrelated factors for this data analysis and present a macro-level view of how the various elements of marketing, structure, and brand are carefully orchestrated to meet institutional goals.

Marketing Roles and Responsibilities

Marketing in higher education, in theory and practice, has been altered and refined over the past several decades by various factors, including technology, consumerism, commoditization, corporatization, and commercialism (Bok, 2003; Kirp & Kirp, 2003), fueled in part by emergent media and social platforms (Diep, 2022b; Mintz, 2021). Integrated Marketing Communications, or IMC, is the intentional alignment of human resources, budget oversight, technological capabilities, and the four Ps of marketing (price, product, place, and promotion) into a centralized focus to better manage and coordinate marketing functions for impact and efficacy (Andrews & Shimp, 2018; Kotler, 2012; Schultz, 1992).

The IMC model brings forward various marketing elements to present a more unified brand expression and experience, with the primary goals of increasing brand awareness, improving impact and efficacy, and driving a measurable return on marketing investment (ROMI) (Andrews & Shimp, 2018).

In light of higher tuition, more delivery choices, increased media platforms (Missaghian & Pizarro Milian, 2019; Sackstein, 2019), and the decline of traditional student populations for enrollment (Walsh, 2020), the IMC model has been adopted by many colleges and universities to leverage and combine all the marketing forces into a unified, amplified and stratified approach meet enrollment goals (DePerro, 2006; Johnson, 2020; Pulsipher, 2020). Concurrently, the IMC model also coordinates the traditional four Ps of marketing (price, product, place, and promotion) to gain synergies across target audiences, communications platforms, and the measurability of results (Johnson, 2020; Kotler, 1995; Tams, 2015).

To assist as a baseline for the typical IMC structure and to assist with data analysis and for context, Figure 3 below shows the various marketing disciplines included in the IMC marketing model (Andrews & Shimp, 2018; Kotler, 2012).

Figure 3

Model of Integrated Marketing Communications and Various Functions



Note: This model depicts the theoretical functions of IMC and may not be reflective of every IMC construct depending on the industry, business, and product/good/or service offered.

Educational institutions have adopted various incarnations of this model to manage the increased role and reliance on marketing in higher education. The deployment of marketing assets, from marketing expertise, recruitment, retention, fundraising, advertising, direct and digital marketing, and brand management are all under the IMC umbrella (Horrigan, 2007; Johnson, 2020; Morris, 2003). As in business, how those marketing assets are structured and aligned is based on various factors, including the size of the institution, marketing strategies and goals, key target markets and core constituencies, tradition and organizational climate, and the overall brand of the university (Anctil, 2008; Mulnix, 1996; Tams, 2015). With competition for students, sponsors, faculty, funding, donors, programs, ratings, and rankings becoming fierce, coupled with the escalating costs of an undergraduate degree, calibration and management of IMC in higher education is an ongoing and fluid endeavor (Cellini & Chaudhary, 2020; McClure & Fryar, 2020).

Participants in this study were asked to describe their marketing roles and responsibilities. Several common roles and responsibilities surfaced in all interviews. Content analysis helped group these roles and responsibilities into sub-functions for clarity and consistency. These sub-themes include various Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) roles and responsibilities functional descriptors as articulated by the participants as well as their focus on Enrollment and Admissions. Table 4 groups these themes in order of frequency across all interview participants

Table 4*Marketing Roles/Responsibilities*

Theme/Function	Role/ Responsibilities	Participant Response
IMC Functions	Communications Support	15
	Multi-Platform Execution	15
	Marketing Tactic Development	15
	Marketing Support and Expertise	15
	Digital Marketing Design	15
	Budget Management/Oversight	15
	Creative Design, Development, Execution	15
	Marketing Results/Measurement	15
	Student/Alumni Relations	15
	Internal and External Audiences	15
	Strategic Marketing Planning	13
	Event/Experience Management	13
	Storytelling/News Dissemination	13
	Management of Four Ps of Marketing	10
Enrollment and Admissions	Retention	15
	Lead Generation	11
	Recruitment	11
	Enrollment Management	11

Using content analysis to contextualize the data and align it with the identified themes and codes, the most frequently mentioned roles, responsibilities, and areas of emphasis for IMC professionals were communications support, multi-platform creative development, design and execution, digital marketing, marketing support and expertise, student/alumni relations and audience management, budget management, oversight, and measuring marketing results. Other major topics included strategic planning, event and experience management, storytelling, and news/information dissemination, managing the Four Ps of marketing and, marketing roles and responsibilities related to admissions and enrollment.

Integrated Marketing Communications Functions

Across all interviews, there was near unanimity in articulating many of the core roles, responsibilities, and functions of integrated marketing communications in this university,

irrespective of function or location within the university marketing community. The most common responses to the questions involving the roles and responsibilities of marketing professionals in the study were acute clarity of the multi-faceted aspects of the function, from the development of marketing strategy and tactics to execution. All participants described their roles as nuanced aspects of IMC within their college or function.

One professional in a department with university-wide marketing responsibilities stated succinctly, “We provide one-stop-shop services for various internal clients and external audiences, from planning to execution and placement.” Another professional based in a college marketing role remarked, “My role and my staff's role are to keep the name, image, and awareness of my college and various departments front and center within our students, staff, faculty, donors, and alumni. We do this across multiple platforms with various creative approaches.” These responses are reflective of all marketing professionals who participated in the study, irrespective of their function or college/departmental affiliation.

A departmental marketing director echoed the overarching nature of the role and the need to be able to manage multiple concurrent projects and IMC requests at any given time. “We are sort of a jack of all trades for many internal departments within this division and throughout the university. Sometimes, it’s video, sometimes leadership communications. Sometimes, it’s social or digital. Oftentimes, it's a combination of all of those.”

The IMC role in this institution is vast, pervasive, and consists of many functional skills and responsibilities. To understand how these marketing professionals describe those roles and responsibilities, the following sections review the data on each in detail, describing what the role or responsibility entails, and their lived experiences at the case-studied institution.

Communications Support

Communications support was a wide-ranging topic for participants, from preparing college communications from the dean's office to orchestrating messaging for marketing programs and plans for students and alumni. A college IMC director stated, "40% of my time and my team's time is supporting the marketing communications needs for the dean, departments, and student organizations in our college." The IMC director of another college estimates they spend "60-70% of our time managing college and departmental communications across a variety of channels." With ever-increasing communications platforms and demands for more and enhanced communications, this role and responsibility will only grow in stature and importance.

Creative Development and Execution

Multi-platform creative development, design, and execution was also an omnipresent role and responsibility described by the professionals interviewed, with an emphasis on the ever evolving and dynamic nature of technology influence on creative choices. A department IMC director remarked on the team's ability to "quickly, efficiently, and adaptively create meaningful social media messages to prospective and admitted students" as a critical element of their success in growing enrollment. "Having the expertise to design a campaign that works across multiple platforms like video, social, print, and digital makes us even more essential," said another IMC director. "It is the value we provide to internal stakeholders and external audiences so that we can speak with a unified voice across different media."

Most colleges in the case-studied university managed IMC creative development on their own, given the autonomy to work within brand guidelines and standards, given the narrower scope of many IMC efforts. Departments like athletics employ a larger marketing staff, with the

need to disseminate IMC materials to larger audiences. However, larger university departments and institutional-wide efforts often call for specialized skills and talents within their assigned staff. " We constantly look to the university marketing team as a partner and asset to help us execute marketing campaigns and materials given our large scope of audiences and the need to reach them with multiple touchpoints," said an IMC director. In two other departments, IMC directors stated both "rely heavily" on the university marketing team to create and executive multiple IMC efforts while still maintaining decision and budget oversight.

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing and defining the digital customer journey for stakeholders inside and outside the university was also a major topic of discussion among participants. All marketing professionals discussed the need to be able to understand consumer preferences, create digital experiences that match their expectations, and then constantly deliver and update as technology and needs dictate. One IMC director discussed past and future enhancements in user experience and design. " In the past, we made disjointed, non-parallel approaches to reaching, communicating, and interacting with users in the online space. Today, we have standardized the look and feel of the digital presence, allowing for flexibility, but with an eye to making each engagement online be the best it can be."

This approach was applauded by several in interviews, who extolled the value of having a more simplified, unified feel to digital marketing communications. "This makes our job in this college easier and better, given the large amount of digital marketing we produce, and the fact it needs constant curation and updating," observed a college IMC director, who added that digital marketing and communications can represent over 50% of their team's workflow. The advent and explosion of digital channels and the need to tailor messages to the medium creates both

opportunities and challenges for marketing professionals, who require skills sets understanding the nuances of maintaining salience across all media while customizing approached based upon those digital preferences.

Marketing Support and Expertise

Given that marketing is an emergent and growing function within higher education, the study participants often discussed the unique roles they and their teams play in supporting the institution's goals and objectives. "We are highly valued not just for what we do and how we do, but for our experience, expertise, and the support we bring to many efforts," stated an IMC director. "How we are marketing the university, how we use data and feedback, how we embrace the traditions of the institution are truly valued strategic and execution skills. Furthermore, in today's highly competitive environment, our role is looked upon not just to execute, but to help lead."

"In my college and with my team," said one IMC head, "we are brought into discussions today we may have never been thought of 10-12 years ago. Leadership throughout the college and the university sees the power of having strong marketers who can think quickly, react rapidly, and drive results. It is a dynamic environment." Thus, marketing's expanding role and influence continues is seen an invaluable asset in meeting institutional goals.

Audience Identification and Management

Knowing your audience and how best to reach them is an extension of marketing expertise, and in this institution, it is a highly regarded and necessary talent. Marketers across all functions, departments, and colleges talked freely about the "student-centric" mindset they carry into the development of marketing creative and placement. The focus on the student as a primary "customer and consumer" of the university permeates the messaging and media platforms used to

reach them across multiple topics. "Analytics and data are so available today, and we as an institution are getting better all the time at listening to and creating messages that resonate, and students can relate to," said an IMC director at the department-level.

This is also true with faculty, staff, alumni, and critical external audiences when developing IMC materials and campaigns. One IMC director noted "Alumni reflect on the era of when they attended here, and we pay careful attention to target messages that appeal, and they can relate to." Staff and faculty IMC messages and campaigns are also designed and developed with the target audience in mind, according to all marketing communications participants. "We take great care to make sure we know whom we are talking to, what we want them to think, say, feel or do, and then how to best reach them given the message," said another IMC director. Nurturing and curating various audiences and customizing messages and the platforms to reach them is mission critical for marketers.

IMC Budget Management and Marketing Measurement

Budgeting, planning, the overseeing allocations, and measuring marketing's impact were areas of focus among all participant interviewees. The three areas of the institution with the largest marketing budgets were admissions and recruiting, university marketing, and athletics. Actual budget amounts for each of these areas were asked for and provided; however, for confidentiality reasons and competitive intelligence, they are not included in the data. Although, within these three departments, every participant mentioned that marketing budgets were exclusive of staff. Furthermore, while department budgets were considered adequate and clearly helping achieve marketing goals, those amounts "could and likely be higher and more robust to reach more potential students, donors, maintain our growth and raise the overall profile of the university," said one IMC college director.

Macro-level budgets for these departments were approved at the department head and senior executive levels of the university, although the actual allocation of those dollars and the approval rights over specific tactics and executions were maintained at the department or function level. In this construct, there is more autonomy and flexibility over the allocation of budgets and the ability to move dollars to new tactics and or venues depending upon measured results. Marketers appreciated the level of trust given to be stewards of those dollars and to be vigilant in maximizing the return to meet the university goals. Other departments and functions used a similar approach for the allocation, oversight, and approval of marketing budgets.

At the college level, budgets and allocations were exclusive of costs paid to marketing professional staff. The budgets at the college level were significantly smaller than at the university level. Oftentimes, the leading IMC professional in the college role was not aware of the actual amount of dollars but used an approval process by which dollars for specific tactics were requested and granted. With this approach, individual colleges managed line items for specific marketing tactics, including campaign development, collateral materials, digital marketing, and SEO optimization, and those funds were deployed at the request of the marketing function. Again, across all departments, functions, and colleges, concern was raised regarding adequate marketing budgets, staffing, and the ability to meet marketing goals and objectives with the ever-increasing reliance on the function to drive measurable institutional goals.

Measurement of marketing outcomes was based on a variety of criteria, depending on the goals or objectives of the campaign, effort, or initiative. Admissions and Enrollment Management marketers carefully look at “the response rates of marketing materials generating applications and paid deposits” to assess the impact of marketing campaigns. "Applications and

enrollment yield are a function of people paying a deposit. We know when they send money, the chances are significantly higher they have chosen to attend here".

One department uses "various figures, including giving, increases and decreases in the number of donors, amount given, engagement on social and digital platforms, and event attendance " to gauge how effective marketing efforts yield desired results. Another department reviews digital measures and engagement in programs, use of specific services, and membership in student organizations as a manner to assess marketing effectiveness in driving outcomes.

Likewise, individual college IMC directors rely heavily on "engagement and interactions measures such as click, likes, visits, attendance, enrollment in programs" to track the marketing efficacy of those initiatives. "It is a constant test, learn, deploy, adjust, redeploy, and repeat process for us," according to one college IMC director. We have many students who help us as interns and understand what messages, images, and platforms work with students, and we are constantly learning and tweaking our creative, design, and messaging to make our marketing efforts better." The impact and efficacy of marketing is constantly being scrutinized, given tight budgets and heightened expectations to show a return on the expanded expectations of the function.

Strategic Planning

Marketing strategic planning was another area mentioned by all interviewees, but big differences exist across the university marketing landscape as to how, when, and with whom planning occurs. The most centralized and coordinated strategic marketing planning (SMP) takes place between university marketing and Admission and Enrollment Management. According to marketing professionals from both departments, this occurs annually with both teams "based

upon decision timeframes for early and regular enrollment, as well as ongoing marketing efforts to increase brand awareness and drive applications.”

The process involves coordinating marketing goals, admission, and enrollment goals and as a vice president stated, “aligning those into an actionable marketing plan with flexible tactics, as it is critical to map out marketing strategy and tactics early, monitor trends, and make changes depending on responses and outcomes.”

Alumni outreach stated that planning is also more regular, “with a primary focus of ongoing, scheduled timeframes for major events such as homecoming, fundraising, and other marketing-driven activities.” Athletics parrots the same marketing planning approach, with sports seasons dictating the cadence of marketing activities throughout their planning cycle and calendar year.

In contrast to departmental planning, colleges use a more hybrid approach. “The calendar and regular, annual events and activities do allow for marketing planning and the time to learn from previous campaigns and adapt based on changing goals or objectives,” said a college IMC director. They added, “Nearly 60-75% of our planning is more organic and opportunity-oriented versus something we had on the schedule”. Other college marketing personnel relayed similar experiences with balancing long-term planning and what they frequently called “organic” marketing planning. “Sometimes there is a unique opportunity or event that surfaces, and we have to be ready to jump in quickly and execute rapidly,” said another director.

As for marketing planning across the university, other than enrollment management and recruiting and fundraising efforts, most IMC campaigns are planned at the department or college level, primarily for expediency. “Sometimes we don't have the breadth or depth of an IMC effort that warrants in-depth planning, so we manage it ourselves,” was the comment of one college

IMC director. Data on better opportunities for coordinating planning will be discussed in a later section.

Event and Experience Management

Event and experience management was again mentioned within each participant interview, but the scope of those duties varied greatly. Every college IMC team and all departments/functions are responsible for planning, managing, promoting, and executing several events each year for various audiences. "Creating meaningful, memorable, and relevant events for our students, faculty, and alumni is a major focus of our IMC efforts," stated a college IMC director. Other college IMC directors shared similar sentiments, stating that event and experience management was a significant focus in marketing planning and execution.

Another college IMC leader concurred. "So much of what we do is about creating first impressions and branded experiences for everyone who steps on campus. How we make them feel consistent with what they have seen online, what they read on the website, and how they experience it when they visit or arrive on campus is as integrated as it gets. We can't leave anything to chance; it must be a unique university experience, and managing the events and those resultant experiences sets the tone and is the ultimate expression of the brand of this institution." This college director continued, "We only get one opportunity to make a great impression. And if what we show in social media and in direct mail does not match what they feel when they visit campus or interact with personnel, it creates a disconnected experience. Careful orchestration and management of events and experiences for students is marketing in action." Event and experience management has taken on increased importance in higher education, where replicating the branded feel of the institution becomes a critical marketing tool to help sell the university to prospective and current students.

Storytelling/News/Information Dissemination

Mining for and telling stories, news, and information was another IMC task shared by many study participants. "One of the best ways we connect with audiences is through sharing stories, giving them news and information, they may not be aware of, to help them better connect to the university," said an IMC director. "You never know how one story may open an opportunity to a student, show a pathway, or reveal a previously unknown aspect of the university. We take great pride in telling meaningful stories and sharing current news and information that connects them to the larger university community in a more relevant manner."

Storytelling and sharing information on student and alumni successes and their journeys was a prevalent and often mentioned role for marketers across all colleges. As a college IMC director explained, "Using relatable stories and situations other students have faced can touch students who may feel as if they are in this by themselves. It helps to know others have traveled similar roads. It makes a meaningful connection".

Given the constant 24-hour news and information cycle and the proliferation of social media, storytelling and news and information gathering is a non-stop IMC effort. "Barely a day goes by where I do not hear of two, three or four stories about students, alumni, faculty or staff which could all be told," shared one IMC department director. "We have to be gatekeepers and decide the timing and where and how to tell the story and on which platforms can best connect. Sometimes, it can be a simple photo and caption, or sometimes an article. But we don't lack for stories and news and places to share them." The timely and ongoing role of storytelling and sharing relevant news and information by IMC professionals is only growing in its scope and influence within institutions of higher education, and seeking new and different angles to engage various audience is an ongoing focus for marketing.

Managing the Four Ps of Marketing

The Four Ps of marketing (i.e., price, place/distribution, product, and promotion) are tasks all marketing professionals interviewed referred to within their description of roles and responsibilities. But all those who mentioned this critical marketing function also mentioned it with a caveat: they don't really control all Four Ps, so management in this context is more nuanced. According to a college IMC Director, "I don't control the price, but I can promote affordability. I don't control place but can leverage location. I don't control the product programs and degree offerings, but I can share their unique offering. But what I can control is how I promote it."

Many marketing professionals echoed this sentiment, not as a concern, but as a reality and a balancing act to manage carefully in their role and with their teams. "We only control so much, and truthfully, it is more on the promotion side than anything else. Our responsibility is to showcase the university, what makes it special, and do it consistently across all touchpoints," commented a marketing director. "We have a great asset to market, and our job as marketers is to portray it."

Another IMC director similarly stated, "In an area like athletics, there may be more flexibility in pricing with ticket deals to drive attendance, but again, the product and venues aren't manageable; only the promotion and in-game experiences are elements that can be managed. It is a big challenge at times, but that's what marketing is." The reality for college IMC professionals is managing the promotion aspect of the Four Ps to the best of their ability, while leveraging price, product, and place as assets in their marketing mix.

Enrollment and Admissions

Informing, persuading, and driving action are three basic outcomes of any successful marketing campaign and are the primary responsibility of IMC professionals (Andrews & Shimp, 2018; Kotler, 2012; Schultz & Schultz, 2004). In this university, those stated roles and responsibilities from this research data were articulated as lead generation, recruitment, retention, and enrollment management. Depending on the location of the marketing professional interviewed and their role, there was variability in the data on which of these marketing-driven tasks were applicable.

Retention

Universally, marketing professionals emphatically in their interviews stated that retention was a primary focus of their role. "We exist because of the students. Our marketing strategies and tactics evolve around them," said a department IMC head. "Making them feel connected, showing them respect, communicating with them in a relevant manner is why we do what we do, whether it be for any of our services or showing them where they can plug into a club or organization; it's a major role we play."

This sentiment was shared across all marketing professional participants in the study, irrespective of their role function and alignment. A college IMC director stated, "Our goal is to consistently communicate with students to make them feel at home, confirm their choice, and nurture their investment in being here. We use marketing communications to solidify our bond with our students." This was echoed throughout all other college marketing directors.

Across college and department IMC directors, many shared how athletics plays a role in marketing to students. One study participant pointed out, "Athletics can and does play a big role in rounding out their college experience, getting them to games and events, and making them

feel part of the larger university community. For some, this can be the difference in staying engaged and getting involved or feeling disconnected." Retention as a marketing role and responsibility was clearly voiced as a primary strategic and tactical goal for marketing.

Recruiting, Lead Generation, and Enrollment Management

While retention was resoundingly articulated as a marketing role and responsibility, recruiting, and lead generation were less so, with only two of the six colleges mentioning it, one with the role of recruiting in their title. A college IMC leader stated, "Recruiting and driving applications and enrollment is something we deeply care about, but it is managed at the university level and through the dean's office and department heads. Our marketing communications is on current students and faculty and community outreach."

The two college IMC directors who expressly mentioned recruiting and lead generation as part of their marketing responsibilities stated over 50% of their efforts were around recruiting and lead generation, and they were "actively engaged" in the strategies and tactics using IMC tools and tactics to grow enrollment in their colleges.

University-wide functions, such as admissions, university marketing, and web and technology, were overt and intentional in mentioning lead generation, recruiting, retention, and enrollment management as part of their focus. "We are solely focused on marketing our university to drive awareness, generate applications, and get students and families interested enough to enroll and put down a deposit. It is our success equation," says one IMC director. "We operate in a consistent test and learn environment, and marketing plays a major role in what we say, where we say it to attract viable students."

University marketing and web and technology see their roles as key partners and players in assisting in this effort. One IMC director believes, "Our role is to support any and all efforts to

promote awareness of the university, drive consideration, and get prospective students to apply. We work closely with Enrollment Management to develop IMC strategies and tactics to reach students across a variety of platforms and get on their radar." Another IMC director shares that their role is to "make easy, intuitive and seamless web, online and digital experiences" to drive applications, make it easy to enroll and register, and be a "portal or front door" for the university.

Summary of Marketing Roles and Responsibilities

By clearly articulating the roles and responsibilities of marketing in this setting, it is evident to see the breadth and depth of marketing skills and expertise required to manage the various aspects of marketing, planning, messaging, execution, budgets, impact, and their influence on enrollment yield. With these stated roles and responsibilities revealed in the data collection, this study now reviews the data regarding the structure, alignment, and operative environment of how marketing work gets done in this university.

Marketing Structure

The structure, alignment, and operative environment of integrated marketing communications in this comprehensive, Carnegie-classified R2 (High Research Activity) four-year national public institution are of particular relevance to this study's research questions and the rationale for the bounded case study approach. In understanding not just marketing roles and responsibilities but how the function is organized and operates, we can better learn what makes this marketing construct work and what lessons can be drawn from this data. As with other data in this study, in addition to coding, line coding, and identifying major themes, content analysis was used with marketing structure data to enumerate common responses, words, and phrases

describing structure, alignment, and the marketing operative environment. Table 5 highlights how this data was contextualized for reporting using this methodology.

Table 5

Marketing Structure and Operative Environment

Function	Theme Descriptors	Mentions
Structure and Alignment	Reporting Structure and Alignment	15
	Highly Valued Pervasive Role	15
	Subject Matter Expertise	15
	Decentralized	13
	Hub and Spoke Network	12
Operational Environment	Flexible/Adaptive	15
	Agile/Resourceful	15
	Empowered	15
	Cooperative/Collaborative	14
	Collegial/Supportive	12
	Autonomous	12
Opportunities and Challenges	Cyclical/Planned/Organic Workflows	11
	Partnership	8
	Staffing Needs/Deficits	15
	Better Coordination/Connectivity	13
	Consolidation of Resources	11
	Aggregation of Planning	9

Structure and Alignment

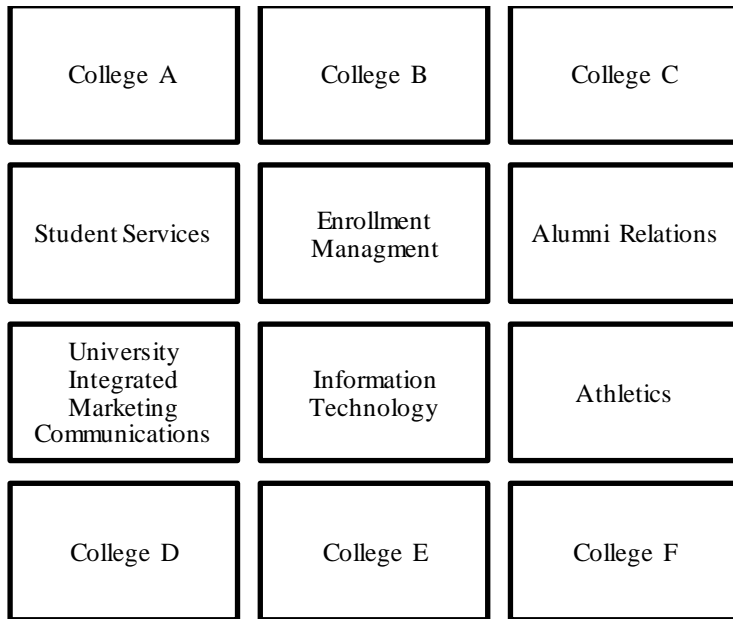
The data obtained through this study revealed what is classified as a decentralized or hybrid marketing structure. In this construct within higher education, the marketing function resides divided among function departments, divisions, or colleges. The hybrid, or as described by many participants in the survey as a "hub and spoke" model, is predicated upon having a central marketing communications function to lead and execute university IMC efforts that also offers support for other areas of the institution but does not manage or have reporting responsibilities for departmental/college marketing personnel. A core marketing communications function also serves as the "steward" of university brand guidelines and trademark/logo

management, which includes typography, photography, iconography, color palettes, and personality, tone, and voice standards to ensure consistency and avoid diluting or diffusing the brand (Andrews & Shimp, 2018; Kotler, 2012).

Figure 4 depicts the marketing structure revealed through data collection at the institutional level. The information, as consistent with the approach outlined earlier, slightly alters the names of departments, colleges, and functions within this university to protect the confidentiality of the institution and the participants of the study.

Figure 4

Decentralized or Hybrid Marketing Structure at Case Studied Institution



In this structural alignment, each area has separate marketing staff and standalone management; all have different reporting structures depending on where they reside. College IMC marketing directors report to an associate dean or college dean. Enrollment Management reports directly to the provost's office. Alumni Relations and university IMC functions report to a vice president in the university president's office, as does Athletics, Student Services, and Web

and Information Technology. As such, major university IMC campaigns and initiatives are shared and approved at the university president's staff level.

At the college level, marketing directors described their reporting structure within their role in terms such as "ideal," integrated," "part of the leadership team," and "expertise assets" close to the inner workings of their academic environment. All of them have access to the dean's office within their college, sit on the dean's leadership council, and have influence and input on decisions impacting marketing for their area. "Marketing's role and what we bring to the table is highly sought after and valued in my college," stated one IMC director in a college, a sentiment echoed among all college marketing colleagues.

Similar findings surfaced in the data gathered in departments and functions outside the individual colleges, where marketing skills across multiple roles are highly valued and respected. "Our roles are not only valued and respected, but we are also seen as subject matter experts on IMC and are often brought in to be a thinking and execution partner on many key initiatives," said an IMC director.

With nearly 4,000 employees, including faculty and staff, in this university, over 100 marketing professionals are employed in various functions across the institution (see Table 1). One participant said in their ten years at this university, the size and scope of marketing had more than doubled. The largest marketing function employs 36, and the smallest at the college level has two full-time professionals each (Colleges A, C, E, F).

The concepts of "hub and spoke" and network were used by 12 marketing professionals to describe the working structural alignment of marketing in the university more finitely. An IMC director summed up this descriptor this way, "While we don't have a formal structure to university marking, we are all connected through a shared sense of purpose, common goals, and

performing a unique role. When I need something from them (university marketing), they are a phone call away. It's reassuring." This opinion was expressed by members of other departments and college marketing teams, who remarked that the lack of a formal reporting structure and alignment grants the freedom for making decisions and executing within guidelines without the "trappings" of a formalized structure.

Operative Environment

After participants shared their organizational structure and alignment within their own college or department, this study focused on their lived professional experience within this structure. These learnings were critical to a deeper understanding of how they performed marketing roles and responsibilities, how workflow was initiated and managed within their function or college, and to best describe the nature, style, and operative environment in which they and their teams operate.

In describing their workplace environments, several key terms and phrases stood out in the content analysis of the data. All participants called their marketing workplace "flexible," "adaptive," "agile," and "highly resourceful." This speaks to the ever-changing nature of the marketing role and the reliance by their respective leadership on their expertise when required. "No two days are quite the same. The environment in higher education marketing is dynamic," relayed the one IMC director. "We have to be agile and not get too locked in because things change, and we have asked to respond quickly," said a college IMC director.

University marketing leadership and admissions marketers concurred about the need for flexibility and stated that despite there being a decentralized structural alignment to marketing, a highly supportive, collegial environment exists. "There is knowledge and an expectation we are all in this together, so if we need web support or university marketing assistance, it happens

because we understand it is a partnership and there is no room for power plays or flexing muscle," says one IMC director.

This teamwork approach does not thwart autonomy in the roles, though, as one director participant stated, "When the day is done, we get to make the final call on what we do, and how we do it, as long as it is not inconsistent with or conflicting with existing guidelines. There has to be a lot of trust given on both sides to make this work since we are all reporting to different leaders."

Driving this dynamic work environment is the balance these marketing professionals must maintain between planned, cyclical work and organic, unplanned work. One IMC director said, "Oftentimes, we know what's coming because of the calendar, time of year, and what has happened in the past. But when an opportunity arises, we have to carefully calibrate our resources and our emphasis, stay true to our goals and plan, and make decisions based on the facts at hand. Autonomy is a blessing, but it can be mixed."

Several college and departmental marketers interviewed relayed a similar concern as marketing, with its growing influence and respect, is sometimes looked to by others to solve problems beyond its scope. "Marketing is not a cure-all and the tools we have come with limits. Sometimes saying no or offering an alternative may be in the best interests of all, but it is not an easy conversation."

In the researcher journal, many reflections were captured in the tone and visceral change by participants in their operative environment. While being largely positive on how they operate, there was overt concern expressed verbally and nonverbally on the pressures to deliver, stretched resources, and heightened expectations which added a level of angst and uncertainty to the operative environment.

Opportunities and Challenges

In this decentralized, hybrid structure, the participant marketers of this study cited several challenges and opportunities. Among those most noted was the need for more staffing, especially at the department and college levels. No college marketing team is greater than four individuals, and the need for strategic and tactical marketing skills is conveyed as “greater than ever before.” Staffing and resource management, which includes adequate budgets, were also mentioned as areas of opportunity to increase investments to maintain the salience, relevance, and awareness of the university as a whole and the individual colleges and their programs.

Additionally, study participants discussed three critical items that they thought would help elevate and illuminate university marketing efforts. These included better ongoing and regular coordination of marketing planning and execution, opportunities for regular, scheduled connectivity to share best practices and learning outcomes from marketing efforts, and the possible consolidation of or reallocation of some resources to gain efficiencies.

One college IMC director lamented, "There is so much great work going on here, but given busy schedules, we don't see all of it or hear about it after the fact. We lose the benefits of sharing great marketing ideas and feeding off each other's creativity because of our decentralized structure." Several marketing directors across functions suggested there is a way to "explore how we best utilize our scarce human and budgetary resources" to keep the spirit of autonomy, agility, and flexibility, but to align like marketing roles together, such as social media creative development and planning.

Many stated regular, shared meetings and annual planning sessions would be a major improvement in already good communication and would serve as a springboard for higher levels of coordination and collaboration and “bring down some siloes.” "No one is intentionally

keeping others out of the loop. We are all busy. Many understaffed. However, connecting intentionally and regularly with our shared perspectives as marketing professionals can only help each of us individually and collectively," stated one college director, a sentiment echoed by several.

The structure, alignment, operative environment, and benefits and challenges were consistently shared among participants in this research. The data clearly shows how the marketing structure supports marketing activities throughout the campus and offers some practical, actionable ideas for improvement in planning, connectivity, and resource allocation. This data was supported by the research journal as well, where many participants qualified their concerns on structure and alignment by buffering their responses with qualifiers such as "it is a really good work environment, but it could be better." This pattern of masking the opportunities and challenges with the benefits of the current structure and alignment presents a paradox in the data gathered where the pull of autonomy and empowerment conflicts with a yearning for more connectivity. It also speaks to the passion expressed for the freedom the decentralized structure affords them, eliminating layers of approval and providing the opportunity to manage their own function without bureaucratic layers of approvals and workflow buffers.

Brand Management

Branding is not a new concept in higher education as colleges and universities have carefully crafted and shaped their brand image for decades, through offerings, reputation, ratings, and experience. Today, however, with the stakes higher than ever before, brand management is a critical marketing function that can help universities not only survive but thrive in this ever-changing competitive landscape (Chapleo, 2010; Goldman et al., 2002).

Brand management is the term for managing the assets, goodwill, icons, symbols, implied meanings, traditions, history, and products, goods, or services of any brand (Andrews & Shimp, 2018). In higher education, brand management represents many of the same things, how it is curated is a function of the culture of the institution (Williams & Omar, 2014b), the personality and tone it conveys (Rauschnabel et al., 2016), and how the assets of the brand are marketed through spending (in the industry aggregate) billions of dollars to create branded images acceptable to target markets (Marcus, 2021).

Brand management is perhaps more critical today in higher education than ever, especially at comprehensive, regional public institutions, which, through the pandemic and ongoing cutbacks in federal and state funding, face financial and brand awareness and preference issues among their traditional pool of students (McClure & Fryar, 2020). Thus, brand management becomes a tool in the arsenal of college and university marketers to better position their schools and reinforce their value. Table 6 outlines the major themes that surfaced regarding brand management. Content analysis aligned those themes in keywords and phrases to better understand brand management in this case study.

Table 6

Brand Management Descriptors

Theme	Descriptors	Responses
Brand Personality	Friendly, Inviting, Caring, Welcoming	15
	Credible, Sincere	14
	Supportive and Invested	13
	Genuine, Authentic, Confident	13
	Accepting and Comfortable	12
	Reciprocal and Nurturing	9
	Traditional yet Contemporary	9

(Table Continues)

Table 6, Continued

Brand Attributes	Trusted	15
	Personalized Attention/Relationships	15
	Well-Managed	15
	Realistic/Attainable/Affordable	15
	Intimate Setting/Large Opportunities	15
	Relevant	15
	Relatable	14
	Thriving	14
	Rich Tradition/History	14
	Embraces Diversity	14
Brand Value/Expression/Guidelines	Connected Community	13
	Respectful and Respected	12
	Consistency of Brand Value/Expression	15
	Solid yet flexible Brand Standards	15
	Opportunities for more consistency	13
	Opportunities for sharing best practices	12
	Alignment with Institutional Mission	8

Brand Data Collection and Findings

Data for this part of the study was collected in three primary ways. First, data was obtained through interviews with participants to gauge their thoughts on the institution's brand personality and tone, the brand's dimensions and attributes, its unique value proposition and how it is articulated, and the use of guidelines and standards across all IMC platforms.

Next, during each interview, participants either volunteered or were asked to provide examples of how they executed the personality, dimensions and attributes, value, and brand guidelines. All 15 participants willingly shared examples of various IMC executions. Through research of readily available online sources and the contributions volunteered by participants, over 400 artifacts were curated, cataloged, and reviewed as part of the data gathered.

These items ranged from mass media advertising (i.e., television, print, digital) to tangible, physical printed IMC materials (i.e., brochures, leave-behind folders, posters, traditional direct mail) and websites and social media executions. Lastly, the university's brand

guidelines were made available for this study. These guidelines served as a reference for brand parameters in typography, photography, videography, color palettes, iconography, and the use of university trademarks, logos, and seals, and preferred standards on tone and voice.

To better organize the data for presentation in this chapter, interview data and content analysis of those interviews will be aligned and shared by three identified themes: brand personality, brand attributes, and brand guidelines. Then, a similar process is used to present and review actual IMC materials provided and collected for this study.

Brand Personality and Tone

Brands, like humans, have personalities, display tone, convey different dimensions, and connect to others through what they say and how they say it through a myriad of touchpoints (Andrews & Shimp, 2018; Kotler, 2012; Rauschnabel et al., 2016). Participants in this study were asked, in their own words, to describe the personality of this institution and to convey those traits that uniquely create a consistent expression of the brand.

The most frequently used terms to describe this institution's brand were friendly, inviting, caring, and sincere across every participant. According to one college IMC director, "This is a warm, welcoming place. You sense it from the time you walk on the campus. It feels like a home away from home for many students." Another college IMC director agreed. "From the classroom to the staff to the experiences students get from move-in to graduation, we consistently hear them say how comfortable it is here. They feel wanted and accepted, and it is a real feeling they express."

Those personality traits are amplified by many other common descriptors shared, such as "credible," "sincere," "genuine," "authentic," "nurturing," and "confident." According to a department IMC director, "Students, parents, faculty, and staff know this to be a supportive

university. We are truly invested in helping everyone succeed. And much of it comes from the fact we know who we are and are confident in our role and purpose, not focusing on what we are not.”

This institution’s personality and tone are points of pride, not only for the university, its alumni, staff, faculty, and students, but are assets for marketing professionals and their teams. Researcher journal notes the visceral physical and emotional animation displayed by all participants when describing the brand personality and tone. They were unanimous in their articulation and enthusiasm of the brand and welcomed the opportunity to discuss it as well as professionally leverage the brand in their IMC strategies and tactics.

Brand Attributes

Brand personality and tone showcase the humanity of any brand, and brand attributes give it dimension and depth and create bonds with consumers (Andrews & Shimp, 2018; Rauschnabel et al., 2016). The data gathered through participant interviews shows not only a prominent level of consistency in the frequency of the mention of brand attributes but also the depth to which those attributes are universally recognized and leveraged as an asset.

Through questions designed to share their perceptions on how the brand creates value and resonates with its target audiences, every participant relayed the following attributes and dimensions of the brand individually, including "trusting," "personalized attention," "relationship-oriented," "well-managed," "realistic," "attainable," "affordable," "intimate setting with big opportunities," and "relevant."

Unanimous naming of those attributes flowed from the transcripts of data and researcher journal notes. They were so consistently mentioned that as data collection progressed, an effort was made to intentionally listen for and capture those descriptors to verify their prevalence and

the pervasive manner in which they were used. According to one college IMC director, “this university's long history and tradition are such a leverageable asset for a marketer. That all of us who are in these roles get to help promote and curate this brand image to new generations of students is a great responsibility.”

Other terms, phrases, or adjectives used by many participants to describe the brand and create resonant value for marketing purposes included portraying the university as “relatable,” “thriving,” “a rich tradition and history,” “embracing diversity,” “a connected community,” and “respected and respectful.” Another IMC director summed up the brand attributes best in stating, “This is not a monolithic brand. It has many admirable attributes, and we try awfully hard to consistently weave those into every touch point we have with every audience.”

In higher education, where the lure of consumerism and the constant attempt to chase the latest fads to distinguish one school from another can create disjointed marketing messages, it is crucial for marketers to embed their marketing in the foundational footings of their brand (Missaghian & Pizarro Milian, 2019; Rauschnabel et al., 2016). The consistency of how these core foundational personality traits and attributes are deployed in relevant, relatable, and resonant integrated marketing communications platforms is crucial for maintaining salience, awareness, and consideration. With colleges and universities, it translates into applications and enrollment yield.

Brand Expression/Guidelines

The ability to clearly articulate a brand's personality and give depth and meaning to its attributes is one aspect of marketing, but those elements alone do not make for successful integrated marketing communications. They must be crafted into meaningful IMC materials across a variety of platforms to bring to life the brand and create a desired action, oftentimes at

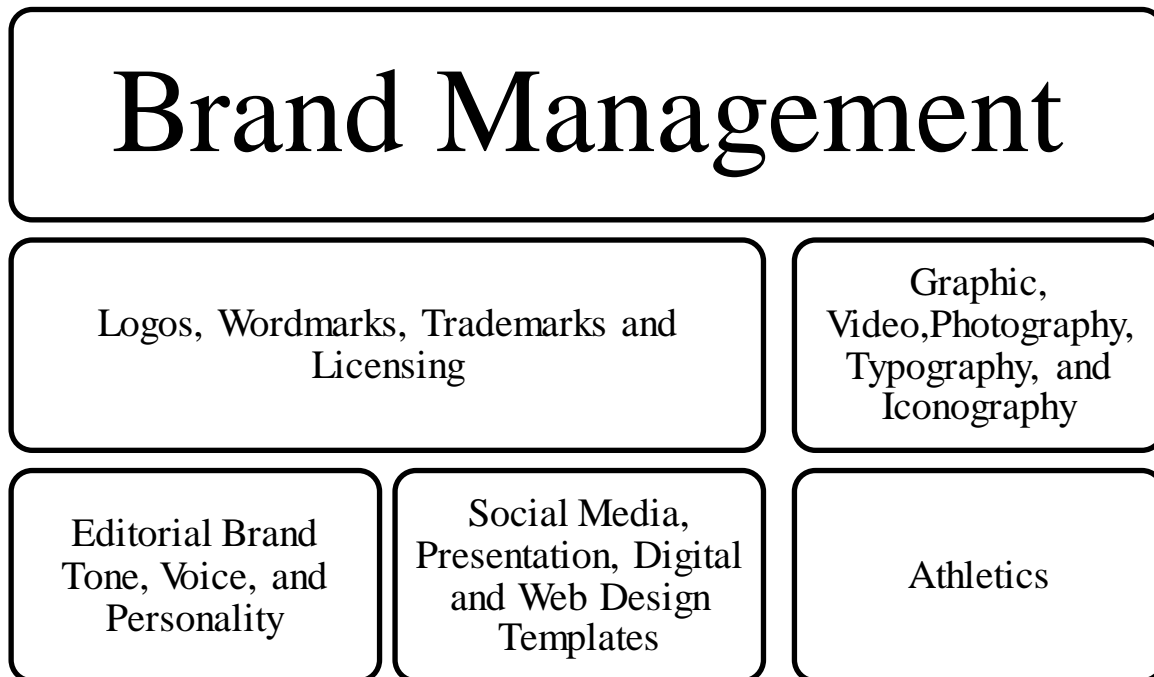
considerable human and capital expense (Diep, 2022b; Maringe, 2009; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016).

Brand guidelines are developed to ensure brands maintain a consistent voice, tone, look, feel, and expression of their unique value. Such frameworks are designed to help large and small organizations set standards for the brand across all creative touchpoints and mitigate the risk of diluting or diffusing the brand's standing (Blakeman, 2018; Kotler, 2012). In larger organizations, irrespective of structure and scope, the understanding, communication, training, adherence, enforcement, and evolution of those brand standards is a critical role of integrated marketing communications professionals to manage the symbols, artifacts, traditions, experiences, history, and assets of the brand (Andrews & Shimp, 2018).

In this bounded case study, this university has clear, accessible brand guidelines and standards governing the usage of logos, colors, fonts, photography, and iconography. These are available through an easy-to-navigate website. This website contains a thorough explanation of the use of brand assets and guides the user through acceptable and unacceptable uses of those assets. In addition, personnel within the university marketing function are assigned with oversight of various categories of those standards, with review and update responsibilities to provide continuity and ongoing active brand management. Figure 5 below outlines the major categories of brand management and guidelines in this university.

Figure 5

Major Categories for Brand Guidelines/Standards for Marketing Professionals



In addition to providing written guidelines, this brand management system shows detailed examples, gives helpful suggestions and hints as to how to implement the standards, and provides users with contact information in case questions arise or further clarity is needed. While allowing for flexibility, creativity, and the adaptation of marketing materials to various audiences and needs, this brand style guide provides critical foundational and instructive support to maintain the consistency of the brand, given the decentralized nature of the marketing structure.

As new marketing personnel join the organization, they are oriented to the brand standards and guidelines by central marketing personnel to level-set expectations on the use and execution of brand standards. Coupled with rapid changes in technology and the introduction of new social media platforms, managing brand assets is an ongoing, iterative process, as described by central university marketing professionals, who then must be diligent in sharing updates and the rationale for changes and additions to colleagues throughout the institution.

Not only does this approach to brand governance give examples and guidance, but it is also replete with references used by many of the participants in this research as to the personality, tone, attributes, and dimensions of the brand. This repetitive reinforcement is a hallmark of how marketing professionals throughout the university maintain a high level of brand consistency and expression through integrated marketing communications campaigns and materials despite not being structurally aligned into one function.

According to one IMC director, "These guidelines are a useful tool to help us manage the complexities of expressing our brand. With so many platforms and marketing messaging, it gives us flexibility within boundaries to make sure we focus and stay true to the brand of the university." Acknowledgement of and adherence to brand standards and guidelines was a palpable, significant finding in this study across the data gathered.

Brand Audit

While roles, responsibilities, operative environments, structure, and articulation of the university's brand were the primary focuses of data for this study, gathering examples of how marketing professionals activated the brand was necessary to gauge the impact of structure and its connection to helping drive enrollment yield. As part of the data collection process, participants volunteered and/or were asked to provide examples of integrated marketing materials across a variety of platforms, initiatives, efforts, and campaigns to quantify a small sample and assess brand management and execution. Although Chapter V will dive deeply into an analysis of those efforts using a conceptual framework, it is essential to conduct an audit of data gathered to understand how the brand is managed at this institution across IMC executions.

Again, purposeful content analysis and categorization of the data assisted in aligning the stated themes and codes identified from the interviews conducted and the journaling of the

researcher to the actual executions provided to examine whether those stated brand elements were manifest in creative and content development. This data analysis is not undertaken to assess impact; it is only used to formulate a basis of comparison to the themes identified and articulated in the interview data and to add to the trustworthiness, rigor, and credibility of the study. Actual materials cannot be shared to maintain participant and institutional confidentiality.

Table 7

Brand Management Audit Aligned to Identified Themes and IMC Platform

Platform	Advertising (traditional/digital)	Web/Internet	Social/Mobile	Posters/Brochure (flyers/direct mail)	Total
Pieces					
Reviewed	41	146	209	17	413
Brand Themes					
Personality	41	122	196	12	371
Attributes	39	113	201	14	367
Value	29	71	54	14	168
Standards	41	140	199	10	390

Note: Items are shown as the number of individual pieces of data reviewed by category.

For context, not every integrated marketing communications piece is developed to highlight the attributes and/or value proposition of this specific university, especially in web pages, where information dissemination, forms, and communication comprise many of the IMC elements executed within the platform. Social media posts were also focused on one of two primary roles: either conveying the brand's personality and tone through creating branded images of the university without overt selling or value messages or promoting a specific activity or

opportunity for students, faculty, staff, and the community. These latter mentioned executions did not overtly extol brand value and, thus, did not exemplify this theme.

Noteworthy in this audit is the level of consistency across brand and IMC executions with expression of the personality, attributes, and value across key platforms for recruiting and retention purposes (i.e., advertising, social media, and brochures/direct mail). These platforms are used by this university as a primary contact strategy to drive awareness, consideration, applications, and enrolment yield based on the content of those executions.

Also important is the high level of adherence to and compliance with brand standards and guidelines in tone, voice, visual look/feel/colors/fonts/typography, and logos. This was both an observable and discernable attribute, prone to deviation most generally from student-created IMC materials seeking to break through a university-branded identity and standout; nonetheless, within the reviewed IMC material, 94.4% met university-established guidelines, admirable in any large organization with a decentralized marketing structure and thousands of marketing communications materials produced annually.

The use of the terms, phrases and depictions of the brand tone, personality, attributes, and dimensions permeated the reviewed materials. They reflected the “friendly, approachable, attainable, inviting, welcoming and sincere” personality of the brand across all platforms, in words, pictures, images and messages. IMC materials conveyed many of the brand attributes and showed relevant and relatable expressions of those attributes, including being “trusted, affordable, intimate setting with large opportunities, a thriving connected community, and rich tradition but a contemporary mindset.”

The brand audit also revealed opportunities, including a more overt manner to speak to and acknowledge the university’s stated support of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Many

materials featured diverse persons, but the materials themselves lacked a truly diverse point-of-view or insight which could be brand consistent and the university IMC efforts more resonant and reflective of the actual lived experiences of students. While not the focus of this study, the data revealed being a predominantly white institution (70% of undergraduate students), the data unveils an area for continued focus and improvement.

Summary

This chapter focused on the data gathered in this study and what it revealed about the lived experiences of marketing professionals in a comprehensive, Carnegie-classified R2 four-year national public university which has showcased double-digit enrollment yield growth since the end of the pandemic, counter to many partner institutions across the country (McClure & Fryar, 2020). Revealed in the data was a consistent expression of IMC roles and responsibilities, a decentralized, hybrid structural alignment model where marketing resources and staff are located throughout the institution supported by a central university marketing function as needed, and a clear, consistent articulation of the university's brand personality, dimensions, unique value, governed by shared guidelines for the execution of IMC models.

In the next chapter, this study will analyze the data using two frameworks, surface opportunities and implications from the data and analysis, and suggest an emergent model for consideration and further study to assist colleges and universities as they strategically plan and execute marketing tactics.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS

This research was undertaken to understand how a comprehensive, Carnegie-classified R2 national, four-year public university's marketing structure, specific roles and responsibilities, and brand management practices contributed to a 12.4% increase in enrollment yield. Additionally, this bounded case study was designed to illuminate the lived experiences of marketing professionals to learn how they operate in this structure and to glean any insights within their environment to assist other national and regional public institutions, many of which have witnessed declining applications and enrollment yield, to manage better, focus and organize their marketing efforts.

As detailed in the literature review, marketing in higher education has taken on increased importance over the past few decades. It is now heavily relied upon to help institutions meet multiple goals, including applications, enrollment yield, recruiting, alumni outreach, fundraising, donor and corporate sponsorship, and promotion of its unique offerings and experiences connected to its ratings, rankings, and reputation (Birnbaum, 2000; Goldman et al., 2002; Kirp & Kirp, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2019).

Not only is marketing an essential function within higher education, but it is also being used as an offensive strategic and defensive tactical weapon to combat four significant trends facing the industry today; consumerism, commoditization, corporatization, and commercialism (Anctil, 2008; Bok, 2003; Johnson, 2020; Kirp & Kirp, 2003). These macro-trends are the outcomes of several factors, most notably: the pace of technological advances; reduced federal and state funding; escalating tuition and fees; the thirst for ratings, rankings, and prestige; and a projected decline in the number of traditional-college age students (Archibald & Feldman, 2017; Carnavale et al., 2020; Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Grawe, 2021).

The vital role marketing plays in higher education today is indisputable. Thus, as colleges and universities grapple with marketplace realities, their brands' focus, alignment structure, and management become more mission-critical than ever. This qualitative research provides an inside look at how marketing practitioners manage the complex, ever-changing world of higher education marketing, grounded in the three research questions.

RQ1: How do integrated marketing professionals in higher education describe their operative environment, including their lived professional experiences in their specific role, their structure, alignment within the university, and its benefits, challenges, and opportunities?

RQ2: What role did marketing structure and alignment play in developing and implementing a successful strategy to achieve a 12.4% increase in enrollment yield at the university?

RQ3: What learnings and insights can be leveraged from this bounded case study to inform other national comprehensive and regional public universities on adapting their marketing structure, alignment, strategy, and execution to drive applications, enrollment yield, and brand awareness?

The data gathered in this study and highlighted in the previous chapter revealed valuable insights on the marketing function in this university. The data points to a nearly unanimous articulation of the macro and micro-level role of marketing in the institution, the requisite responsibilities of the function, its structural alignment, description of the operative environment, and an intense focus on enrollment management. Data also showcases a clear understanding of and expression of the brand, the consistent application of guidelines and standards, and the embrace of the brand assets as tools to help the institution meet its many goals.

To assist in contextualizing the data collected in this research and adding a deeper level of applicability in this field of study, two frameworks assist in analyzing the data and answering the research questions. The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory provides a framework to assess how an organization harnesses its internal assets and its impact on its performance in its industry or marketplace (Ciszewska-Mlinarič & Wasowska, 2015; Mahoney & Pandian, 1992). For this analysis, the RBV is used to examine the following internal assets of the case studied university: resources, defined roles, institutional assets, marketing responsibilities, and operational challenges. The RBV links how resources are utilized in this specific institution and how these elements are organized to optimize their impact and efficacy.

Next, the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM) is a framework developed by Greyser & Urde (2019) to assist in distilling a business to its brand core by identifying all the relevant internal and external aspects of brand. For this study, the CBIM provides an analytical construct to show how brand management and institutional brand reputation are portrayed across platforms to maximize impact and increase resonance with various audiences.

Once the data from this study is analyzed using these frameworks, implications and recommendations are offered for similar institutions seeking insights and guidance on structuring, aligning, empowering, and managing their marketing and brand functions. Lastly, an emergent conceptual framework is introduced based on this case study, with suggestions for additional research to validate and extend its scope and potential use as a tool for higher education marketers. The initial assessment begins with the RBV framework and its application for the data in this study.

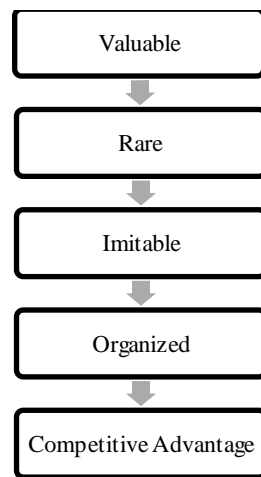
Resource-Based View Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theoretical framework defines any organization's competitive advantage by assessing how it leverages its internal resources and capabilities, then evaluates those assets as being valuable, imitable, uninterchangeable, and unique or rare (Barney et al., 2021). How a firm strategically manages those resources and how its performance is enhanced or distinguished within its industry can explain how it creates value and maintains a discernable advantage over firms offering similar products, services, and offerings (Edwards, 2014; Mahoney & Pandian, 1992). The resource-based view of organizations centers on the concept that they manifest economic value, mainly in the manner in which they organize and allocate resources irrespective of their intended purpose, meaning they can be a business, a cooperative, or a socially constructed entity such as a religious order, club, or university (Barney et al., 2021).

Previously, the Resource Dependency framework was used to model how public universities, in light of tight budgets, declining enrollment, higher levels of competition, the scramble for funds and human capital, could design strategies meet market-driven goals (Powell & Rey, 2015). The RBV framework provides a broader context and more relevant assessment for this study. Rothaermel (2017) evolved the assessment by designing the VRIO framework, an acronym for Valuable, Rare, Imitable and Organized. Institutional assets are assessed by determining their value, rarity, how imitable or easily replicated they are, and lastly, how they are organized, with the resultant output evaluating their collective strength in offering a competitive advantage or showcasing a competitive vulnerability. Figure 6 is a graphic depiction of the VRIO tool used for analysis in this study and where this university's marketing resources will be viewed through this lens.

Figure 6

VRIO Framework



Definition of VRIO Model

To better understand the role this model will play in the assessment of the data, the following definitions are provided for context and to inform what is being assessed and how the assessment leads to a measured evaluation from the tool.

Valuable

In the VRIO model, resources and capabilities are considered valuable if they are utilized to enhance organizational effectiveness and efficiency in meeting stated goals and objectives while concurrently mitigating the impact of competitors (Ciszewska-Mlinarič & Wasowska, 2015).

Rare

Resources and capabilities are defined as rare when few others possess them, and they can provide a demonstrable competitive advantage because they are unable to be procured or developed by another organization (Barney et al., 2021; Rothaermel, 2017).

Imitable

The ability to imitate or replicate the resources and capabilities of any institution is the third layer of evaluation in the VRIO model. This precept contends that the harder it is to duplicate those resources and capabilities, the more substantial competitive advantage grows, and firms distance themselves further from commoditization in their category (Barney et al., 2021; Mahoney & Pandian, 1992).

Organized

Assessing how the resources of any firm are organized to create and deliver value and highlight its unique offerings, reputation, and brand equity is a critical step in analyzing the strength of its competitive standing (Boyd et al., 2010; Rothaermel, 2017). The allocation of those resources through formal and informal structural alignments sets the tone for many operational outcomes, including role and responsibility clarity, communications, collaborations, culture, strategic planning, tactic execution, customer experiences, and ultimately, competitive advantage in a dynamic and ever-changing marketplace (Davis & DeWitt, 2021; Powell & Rey, 2015).

In addition to the VRIO framework definitions, two key asset classifications and two assumptions undergird this model. First, assets are described as tangible or physical entities, such as buildings, equipment, and land, or intangible, such as reputation, traditions, intellectual property, history, and culture. Secondly, the resource-based view assumes an organization's expertise, resources, and abilities as heterogeneous and different from other organizations. It also assumes that resources within a specific firm are immobile and not transient. Items considered immobile such as brand assets, equity, symbols, and variable and proprietary artifacts to the firm (Barney et al., 2021; Edwards, 2014; Jurevicius, 2021).

In using this framework, the data gathered from this study can be assessed and outcomes analyzed related to its marketing structure and brand management based upon resources classifications (tangible and intangible) and capabilities (heterogenous and immobile) determining if they provide either: long-term sustainable competitive advantage; temporary competitive advantage; competitive parity; or competitive disadvantage (Davis & DeWitt, 2021; Mahoney & Pandian, 1992; Rothaermel, 2017).

The analysis, highlighted in Table 8, uses the identified themes in the previous chapters and content analysis to benchmark this university's competitive advantage in structuring, aligning, managing, and organizing its resources. An explanation of each element of the analysis will be provided to share contextual insights into the VRIO framework assessment of this data and to assist in answering the research questions.

Table 8

VRIO Model Analysis -This table matches identified themes from the VRIO framework to assess the impact of marketing roles and responsibilities, structure, and brand management.

Resources & Capabilities	Valuable	Rare	Imitable	Organized	SCA	TCA	CP	CD
Marketing Themes								
Roles Responsibilities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		X		
Structure/Operative Environment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		X		
Brand Management	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	X			

Note: SCA-Sustained Competitive Advantage; TCA- Temporary Competitive Advantage; CP-Competitive Parity, CD-Competitive Disadvantage.

Narrative Analysis of Data

In reviewing the coding, themes, and content analysis of the data through the Resource-Based View theoretical framework, it becomes clearer how this university has managed its marketing function to optimize its impact on outcomes and possesses crucial tangible and intangible assets that it leverages throughout the institution.

Valuable Resources and Capabilities

In the VRIO model, resources (tangible and intangible) and capabilities(heterogenous and immobile) are considered valuable when are deployed to enhance organizational effectiveness and efficiency in meeting stated goals and objectives while concurrently mitigating the impact of competitors (Ciszewska-Mlinarič & Wasowska, 2015).

This university exhibits valuable tangible and intangible resources, including a marketing network of over 100 professionals, connected yet operating with inherent flexibility and autonomy, guided by a strong sense of consistent brand management. Other valuable assets articulated in the data include campus location, accessibility, ample and growing facilities, a robust and growing offering in majors and fields of studies, long-term marketing employees, a well-established tradition and history, a large, loyal, and active alumni base, linkage and demonstrated cooperation with its host municipality, and a vibrant culture that is embedded in the operational workflows. These all work in together to augment and elevate the value of these resources.

The value of this institution is consistently expressed as an outgrowth of its longstanding reputation as being a "high-quality, affordable, attainable institution providing large opportunities for students in a more intimate, friendly, caring and invested campus environment," as echoed by most participants in this study and validated through content analysis.

It is a clear example of how the marketing function in this university individually and collectively harnesses the power of those assets and then portrays the unique value in resonant, relevant, and relatable marketing communications and experiences. It reinforces the reputational culture of the university and, in the process, creates palpable, perceived, distinguishing value for various audiences by uniting all those elements into a marketable entity (Boyd et al., 2010).

Rare Resources and Capabilities

Resources and capabilities are defined as rare when few others possess them, and they can provide a competitive advantage (Barney et al., 2021; Rothaermel, 2017). This study's analysis of rare resources and capabilities centers around the described brand attributes presented in the data.

While the marketing roles may not be rare in this institution, they exhibit rarity in terms of the scope of responsibilities, dependent on the marketing needs of the area they serve and their responsibilities. This rarity is shown in the differences in responsibility scopes across marketing professionals. While all described IMC functions as foundational to their roles, the aspects of IMC varied by role and location, with segmentation occurring within functions dependent on the strategies, goals, and objectives of the area they serve. Thus, the structure, alignment, and the operative environment are uniquely aligned to best meet marketing needs for this point in time, as described in a decentralized structure.

The tangible and intangible assets of the brand are rare, providing a competitive advantage to this institution. The data revealed brand attributes of "friendly, caring, invested, inclusive, warm, welcoming, focused on individual and personalized attention" clearly and consistently. These attributes are marketable assets that reinforce the brand's value and are not easily duplicated or as authentically shared with credibility by other similar regional four-year

public universities. Additionally, the tangible assets of the school's look, feel, tone, long and storied history and personality have been carefully curated and nurtured to reflect a unique persona for this brand, reflective of the educational environment in which it operates.

Imitable Resources and Capabilities

Barney et al (2021) cite having inimitable or difficult to duplicate resources provides growing insulation from competitive encroachment and diminishes the impact of commoditization.

Using the model for analysis on this factor, insulation from imitability presents an even higher threshold for any university to meet regarding marketing roles, responsibilities, functions, and structure since the ability to replicate them is not only hard to prevent, but they also likely exist in similar forms at other institutions, limiting the potential for sustained competitive advantage. For the case-studied institution, its intense, shared focus on recruitment, retention, and the strategic and tactical execution of IMC efforts to drive those outcomes within the current alignment evaluates as a temporary competitive advantage given the highly volatile educational enrollment environment driven by the forecast enrollment cliff, reduced federal and state funding, and ever-changing student expectations and preferences.

While this comprehensive, national university has positioned itself uniquely among its regional and national competitors through an intentional and inimitable portrayal of its brand, this distinctive institution must remain vigilant in evolving its brand and altering its marketing structure, strategies, and tactics to quickly adapt considering the marketplace forces altering the college and university landscape.

This assessment of a temporary competitive advantage comes despite an elevated level of attention to brand management across all platforms and the unanimity of purpose by marketers

from all parts of the university. Marketing professionals at this university are passionately committed to using the established guidelines and standards to build brand awareness, consideration, and enrollment yield. The brand management system bedrocks marketers throughout the university with a blueprint for success by deftly positioning the brand's assets at every consumer touchpoint to create clear, consistent IMC messages that constantly reinforce the value of the brand and amplify the many aspects of the institution that make it better, different, and special. In this respect, the inimitability of the brand's look, feel, and personality and how it is resonantly portrayed across various platforms to target audiences is a significant competitive advantage, mitigating the potential impact of role, responsibility, and structural imitation.

The question remains, however, will brand management alone be sufficient to maintain and sustain this university without additional attention to structure, marketing investment, staffing, and enrollment management?

Organization of Resources and Capabilities

The data obtained through this case study reveal that the purposeful organization of marketing resources in this university is calibrated around three factors: the collegial, collaborative shared governance culture of the institution, the assignment of marketing resources for maximum flexibility and focus, and the selection from the best features of two marketing structures (centralized and decentralized) to capitalize on unique marketplace opportunities.

Content analysis of the data gathered revealed a stated feeling of collegiality among marketers (12 of 15 specifically mentioned the term), despite a decentralized, hybrid structure in the marketing function. This descriptor of the operative environment as collegial stems from the institution's long-standing bias toward and strong advocacy for shared governance.

This linkage between the collegial work environment and the shared governance foundation of this university was verified in reviewing researcher journal notes, where study participants carefully shared the delicate balance between ownership of a role or function operating in a manner that illuminates and supports the formal and informal operative environment of the university. Researcher journal descriptions also unveiled a deference to and acknowledgment of shared governance as foundational philosophical and operational mindset, and while not perfect, it is heavily reflected in the organization of the university's marketing resources.

Clarity and focus of role and responsibility are foundational to this organizational mindset. Marketing professionals in this institution are aligned throughout the marketing network to provide expertise and insights and execute plans and programs. Accountability for delivery and timing is at the function, department, or college level, with little to no bureaucratic approval processes to bog down the speed to market, again, an example of shared governance and empowerment. This accountability also enhances the ability to adapt and change as plans and results dictate, with marketing professionals empowered within their role and structural alignment to act autonomously within the brand guidelines and budget constraints of their area.

Under this decentralized marketing structure and operating environment, the ability and necessity to act and react quickly is an acknowledged competitive advantage. Additionally, through this "network" alignment guided by consistent brand standards to enable, creative freedom exists within the confines of established parameters to ensure heightened sensitivity to adhere to those guidelines. Content analysis of codes, themes, and IMC materials confirm that despite a more collegial and decentralized structure, acute alignment of roles, responsibilities,

operative environments, and structure, and brand management conjoin the marketing efforts and present a highly consistent, unified brand expression throughout all touchpoints.

Given this is the environment in which these professional marketers operate and have become accustomed to, there exists a cautionary reflection captured in the researcher journal notes. A caveat surfaces as these marketers have a vested interest in and personal affinity for the current functional structure, given the frequency with which they described the benefits of this alignment. Noteworthy, though was additional near unanimity in study participants in stating higher levels of connectivity and collaboration were needed to continue the university's marketing trajectory, and if this required structural realignment, they would be open to the concept.

Resource-Based View Theoretical Framework Summary

By employing the Resource-Based View theoretical framework in this research, the study generates a more nuanced and detailed analysis of how the marketing structure, operative environment, lived experiences, and management of the brand in this comprehensive national public university have contributed to an enrollment yield growth of 12.4%. This level of analysis not only adds to the credibility of this research but also offers insight into its transferability of the vast amount of data gathered (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Through the RBV theoretical framework analysis, the data of this reveals this university has optimized its marketing resources with clearly defined marketing roles and responsibilities, organized those into an alignment to capitalize on managing multiple, concurrent IMC workstreams across departments and colleges, and developed a functional brand management infrastructure with a high level of compliance and shared understanding and consistent expression of the brand. This is not to state this university is perfect in its marketing structure,

alignment, and operative environment. The data suggests the current operations of marketing are working and helping the university exceed its enrollment goals. It does not, suggest, however, the function is without opportunities for improvement as stated by participants themselves.

Vulnerabilities

Although this analysis grounded in the RBV framework is helpful for a deeper understanding of how this university is positioned for competitive advantage, it also uncovers some vulnerabilities. Data reveals opportunities to formalize regular networking opportunities for marketing leaders and their teams throughout the campus, not just when resources are required, but for idea sharing, best practice identification, and awareness of larger strategic planning and campaign initiatives.

Additionally, a more universal, coordinated focus on lead generation and recruitment throughout college marketing personnel with university admissions and enrollment management marketing would enhance current efforts and better align IMC messaging and platform execution. Finally, marketing resources, from staffing to budgets, are thin and need more efficiency in institutional coordination. As the pool of students and the emergent enrollment cliff looms, as tuition and expenses outpace inflation, and as learning modalities and student major fields of study and lifestyle expectations evolve rapidly, the ability of marketing structure, focus, resource allocation, and brand management will require constant adjustments to grow and maintain its competitive advantage (Johnson, 2020; King, 2013; McClure & Fryar, 2020).

To further explore the role brand management plays in this university's marketing successes, this study pivots from the structural and operational analysis to a deeper understanding of the brand itself. This analysis sheds light on how the structure and operative

environment of the marketing function is supported by the expression and manifestation university's unique brand.

Corporate Brand Identity Matrix Framework

Given that one of the most viable aspects of the sustained competitive advantage at this institution is its brand, and how it is managed, an additional framework can help understand its core dimensions. The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM) (Greyser & Urde, 2019) is a tool designed to assist brands across all categories in uncovering the foundational aspects of brands, their shared internal and internal meanings, and provide an ongoing assessment benchmark in evolving, positioning, and portraying the most salient brand attributes.

Based on the data gathered in this research, the CBIM is an appropriate framework for robustly exploring this university's brand. The tool consists of nine aspects of a brand for review with the goal of expressing the essence of a brand and articulating its core identity to key stakeholders, allows marketers to intently focus on those brand dimensions and attributes that distinguish themselves in the marketplace, building and enhancing brand awareness, consideration, and loyalty (Greyser & Urde, 2019; Kotler, 2012).

The CBIM facilitates an introspective analysis of the brand by asking open-ended questions regarding eight key aspects of brand. Greyser and Urde (2019) posit the resultant outcome of the matrix is the brand core sitting in the center of the tool, a distilled expression of what the brand stands for, why it exists, and how it serves as a focus to guide marketing strategies and tactical executions. The matrix simultaneously concentrates analysis of the eight aspects of organizational brand with the identification of external, internal, and combined constituent and audience focuses. The following elements are the evaluated aspects of the brand with a brief description of each.

Value Proposition

The value proposition is how a brand articulates its unique, differentiating dimensions and attributes in IMC platforms to various target audience to create awareness, consideration, trial, purchase and preference (Andrews & Shimp, 2018).

Relationships

The identification customers and key stakeholders and the desired relationship with those stakeholders as function of the brand.

Position

The position of a brand is the place in which it has carved out standing among current and potential customers and stakeholders based upon its offerings and unique brand attributes, benefits and features (Andrews & Shimp, 2018; Schultz & Schultz, 2004).

Expression

The expression of brand across all communication platforms including brand colors, logos, artifacts, symbols, visual systems, fonts, tone and voice (Kotler, 2012).

Personality

A description of the human elements or characteristics of a brand so as distinguish it and give it relevance and relatability (Andrews & Shimp, 2018; Rauschnabel et al., 2016).

Mission and Vision

Mission articulates for what purpose and in what context a brand exists and informs how it operates. Vision provides a aspirational and inspirational focus and direction (Kotler, 2012).

Culture

Defining the culture of the organization, its values, how it operates, is organized and how it is curated from within and manifest externally (Judson et al., 2009; Williams & Omar, 2014b).

Competencies

Organizational self-assessment of core competencies where it excels and differentiates itself from key competitors (Barney et al., 2021; Boyd et al., 2010).

Brand Core

The distilled essence of the brand stated as its promise and what it delivers of unique and intrinsic value (Greyser & Urde, 2019).

Figure 7 shows the matrix, the elements of brand assessment, and audience focus.

Figure 7

The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix

External	Value Proposition <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are key offerings, and how do we want them to appeal to customers and key stakeholders?	Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What should be the nature of relationships with key customers and other stakeholders?	Position <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the intended position in the market and in the hearts and minds of key customers and stakeholders?
External/Internal	Expression <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is distinctive about the way we communicate and express ourselves and makes it possible to recognize at a distance?	Brand Core <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do we promise and what are the core values that sum up what our brand stands for?	Personality <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What combinations of human characteristics or qualities forms our character?
Internal	Mission and Vision <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What engages us (mission)?• What is our direction and inspiration (vision)?	Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are our attitudes, and how do we work and behave?	Competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are we particularly good at and what makes us better than the competition?

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Using the output of content analysis from the 15 participant interviews and the questions developed aligned to the CBIM framework regarding brand personality, attributes and dimensions, and brand value expression, this data can be categorized and assessed against the various dimensions of the tool. The brand management descriptors and the frequency of mention

across interviews are the data sources supplying the responses to the CBIM questions and categories.

Figure 8 below shows the application of the CBIM framework to the case-studied institution based on the questions asked and responses given in this research's data collection, coding, and content analysis phase.

Figure 8

Corporate Brand Identity Matrix Output for Case-Studied University.

External	<p>Value Proposition Unlimited large university opportunities within a personalized, thriving college atmosphere</p>	<p>Relationships Mutual respect, values diversity, supportive and focused on individual and collective success</p>	<p>Position The first and best option to explore when considering your college journey</p>
External/Internal	<p>Expression Attainable, realistic comfortable, accepting, inviting, well-managed, relevant, forward-thinking</p>	<p>Brand Core Well-established, respected, confident choice for an affordable high-quality education, experience, with unlimited opportunities</p>	<p>Personality Friendly, welcoming, supportive, genuine, authentic, trusted, caring, nurturing, sincere</p>
Internal	<p>Mission and Vision* A premier, connected community of students and educators dedicated to advancing personalized college educational experiences</p>	<p>Culture Collaborative, cooperative, invested, traditional yet contemporary</p>	<p>Competencies Personalized attention, embracing diversity, building lasting relationships, shared learning and knowledge creation</p>

**Note:* Mission and vision statements were recrafted and combined/paraphrased to protect institutional anonymity and preserve the confidentiality of the study.

Corporate Brand Identity Matrix Analysis

The center of this matrix, the brand core, is the confluence of the brand's external and internal expressions and manifestations. Here, the various attributes and dimensions of the brand are united through strategic intent (positioning and mission/vision), competition, and differentiation (value proposition and competencies) into an actionable, ownable, viable IMC platform that is unified through brand expression and personality (Greyser & Urde, 2019).

Reviewing the output analytical tool, the data from the study reveals a more precise answer to one of the central aims of this research, which is to understand how the combination of marketing roles, responsibilities, structure, operative environment and brand management, expression, and dimensions work in collectively to create and convey a meaningful value proposition, thereby driving applications and enrollment yield in one comprehensive national four-year public university. The ease, consistency, clarity, and conviction with which marketing professionals across this institution use IMC strategies and tactics to articulate its unique brand attributes and value are remarkable despite the decentralized nature of the function's structure is evident in the data gathered, the themes identified, and confirmed through the content analysis.

Marketing professionals were highly united in how they described the brand personality, tone, voice, attributes, and dimensions and took immense pride and care in curating it across multiple IMC platforms to key stakeholders internally and externally. This consistency is reflected in a review of the CBIM matrix. The value proposition is aligned with competencies; relationships and culture reflect a focus on people and how they are treated. Mission, vision, and position work together to orient IMC's strategy. Additionally, the brand's personality and expression of the persona reveal the tone and voice used to connect with key stakeholders effectively. It is a primary reason why this university remains relevant, resonant, and relatable to applicants and one reason why enrollment yield has exceeded national trends in other national and regional public four-year schools.

In this case study, the CBIM matrix also affirms how adherence to brand standards and guidelines illuminates IMC efforts when such a consistent articulation of the brand exists. Coupling an acute awareness of what the brand stands for and managing how it is expressed is a powerful distinguishing arsenal in positively influencing enrollment-driven marketing outcomes.

When comparing the content analysis of the 413 IMC executions reviewed, consistent brand personality attributes and dimensions appeared in 89.8% and 88.8% of all reviewed IMC materials. The CBIM validates this high level of consistency as the tool output in the Expression part of the matrix mirrors the brand data analysis. This co-confirms the importance of managing brand expression and consistency of brand personality attributes and dimensions in the strategic and tactical development of IMC executions.

While structure and alignment of marketing functions have served this university well, and despite some room for improvement in collaboration and information sharing, the bedrock of this institution's success lies in the relentless reflection of its relevant brand across IMC touchpoints, resonant with target audiences who can relate to the brand core, prompting them to engage with the school by applying, visiting, enrolling, giving and becoming an advocate for the experience.

Despite this admirable and exceptional level of brand expression, opportunities abound for improvement and modernization, especially when reaching diverse populations and creating relevant, resonant, and relatable IMC campaigns and executions. Again, this study's aim was not focused the quality and resonance of IMC with diverse stakeholders, but it is clear in reviewing the data and auditing the brand the efforts are cursory, and many lack a true insight which speaks with relatability to those audiences this university says it values but needs a more authentic approach in reaching to them.

Implications and Emergent Conceptual Framework

This bounded case study comprised 15 interviews totaling over 200 hours, over 400 pieces of IMC materials gathered and reviewed, a thorough coding and thematic identification process, content analysis, and using two theoretical frameworks to categorize and analyze the

data. The study aimed to understand how the structure, alignment, role, and responsibility clarity, lived professional experiences, and the management of institutional brand across various platforms to various audiences assisted in growing enrollment yield at four year-public university by 12.4% in 2022. Based on the data, analysis, and outcomes, this study's implications are drawn to address the research questions.

Acute Role and Responsibility Clarity

Marketing professionals in the studied institution conveyed a clear and consistent articulation of their roles, responsibilities, and the focus of IMC efforts in their function. Little deviation exists in how they relayed their marketing charge and scope of work in their purview. They also expressed a shared level of confidence in the trust placed in them by their leadership in providing marketing expertise to meet the goals and objectives of their respective areas. One significant implication of this research, is that imbuing and empowering marketing professionals to manage their roles, set clear expectations on the scope of their responsibilities is critical and foundational. Both the data and the layered analysis confirm this finding.

Network Structure, Alignment, and Operative Environment

This university employs a decentralized marketing structure. It is characterized by a central marketing function that oversees university-wide IMC efforts. It supports other areas of the institution, primarily with the execution and deployment of IMC campaigns for recruiting and brand awareness. However, marketing functions reside in each of the university's colleges and in major departments managing enrollment, athletics, student services, technology, and outreach/alumni relations, reporting to different leadership structures. Over 100 marketing professionals serve this university and are dispersed throughout. Such a structural alignment has

the potential to enable workflow issues, diminish the impact of marketing, and create discordant, disconnected expressions of the brand and dilute the impact of IMC strategies and tactics.

Considering this described "hub and spoke hybrid" marketing alignment, this structure works in this institution for three discernable reasons. First, the clarity of roles and responsibilities for all marketing professionals' role and responsibility guides their workflow and deliverables in a way that avoid duplication of efforts and aligns resources to meet department, college, and institution-level needs flexibly. Second, a shared sense of marketing purpose and value to the university guides strategic planning and tactical outcomes where marketing expertise and skills can be drawn upon as needed at a more granular level. Lastly, the "marketing network" within this university is an extension of the collegial atmosphere of the school and mirrors the brand's connected, cooperative personality. This culture allows for sharing and assistance while empowering marketing professionals and their teams with this required autonomy to accept, assign, and complete work without a labyrinth of approvals and delays in reacting to opportunities and executing marketing plans.

These factors enable this university's current decentralized marketing structure and alignment to assist in effectively creating and delivering thousands of IMC materials each year. Although many calls from consultants and some scholars touting that a more centralized, corporatized approach to marketing be adopted ubiquitously throughout higher education, a one-size-fits-all mantra is cautioned based upon this study (Johnson, 2020; Morris, 2003). Institutional size, scope, culture, goals, and the competitive environment are all critical factors to evaluate before deciding how marketing is aligned within a specific institution (Horrigan, 2007; Tams, 2015). Both centralized and decentralized structures present inherent benefits and challenges.

In this study, a delicate balance exists. Without calibration of the drivers mentioned above and the cooperation of marketing professionals dispersed throughout the institution, the impact of structure and marketing operations would need to be examined to optimize its ability to meet demands for its services. The caveat for other marketing professionals in universities is to clearly understand the role of marketing, the expectations for the function, the cultural influences impacting the operative environment, and then align those resources to maximize and optimize marketing's contributions to the overall goals of the university. The uniqueness of each university should be reflected in how marketing is structured and aligned to elevate its performance and fully leverage the function's impact.

Brand Management

One of this research's most consequential and fundamental implications is revealing how this university manages its brand. Although marketing resources are spread throughout the university, the brand management function is centralized. This intentional management decision drives adherence to its brand guidelines, and in the process, is surfaced among its greatest assets by amplifying and illuminating the brand expression throughout multiple audience touchpoints. Such an intentional and systematic approach to brand management has manifested itself as an asset of competitive advantage for this institution. It has propelled brand salience and relevance as enrollment yield grows.

The intentional curation of this brand is noteworthy for the following reasons. First, the centralized management of brand standards, guidelines, and assets provides marketers clarity, consistency, and flexibility, irrespective of their alignment within the institution. It is readily accessible online, constantly updated as warranted, and guides all aspects of the brand from

voice to tone. It also eases the onboarding transition for new employees to immerse themselves quickly in the brand standards.

Secondly, the palpable knowledge of the brand by marketing staff, witnessed by the consistent articulation of brand personality, attributes, and characteristics, creates a level of shared ownership throughout university marketing efforts. This shared ownership was consistently repeated throughout data collection and verified in its descriptors and through content analysis of over 400 IMC marketing materials with 90% of those materials meeting brand standards and guidelines. This elevated level of consistency is a point of differentiation for this university and positions it well to drive awareness, consideration, applications, and enrollment yield.

Lastly, this acute confidence in not only knowing the brand attributes but in realizing the limits of what the brand represents and what it is not, is also an asset in building genuine, authentic relationships with prospective students, families, faculty, staff, donors, and corporate partners. In an age where brands, many in higher education, use pricing gimmicks and engagement hyperbole to drive awareness and consideration, this university embraces what it is as well as what it is not. This level of brand perception internally is the hallmark of a strong brand. Given these factors, this marketing network, staffing model, role and responsibility stratification, and brand management system supporting IMC at this institution are valuable tools to manage the four Ps of marketing, drive applications, and enrollment. The question remains: What learnings from the research on this operative marketing environment could apply to other similar universities?

In analyzing the compiled data, assessing the identified themes and categories, and through additional exploration using two theoretical frameworks, an emergent conceptual model

is offered for consideration. Although it requires additional research, this conceptual model could become an evaluative framework for universities and colleges in reviewing the impacts of marketing roles, responsibilities, focus, structure, alignment, and brand management to optimize the function and adapt how it is used based upon factors unique to the institution.

Emergent Conceptual Framework- BRAND SCORE Model

Evidence from the data in this study supports the multi-dimensional, pervasive impact of marketing in higher education. The research results suggest that brand management and curation, role and responsibility identification, operational environment attributes, and structural alignment are significant determinants of marketing efficacy. To apply these findings to actual marketing operations within higher education, as well as aid institutions in effectively deploying their resources and brand assets, this model creates a systematic tool for initial benchmarking and ongoing evaluation of marketing.

This emergent tool, as revealed in the data from this study, distinguishes the interrelated aspects of marketing into two primary functions: 1) brand management, and 2) structure, alignment, and operative environment. Segmenting these two aspects of marketing for deeper internal analysis allows institutions to isolate variables previously not evaluated or considered crucial to marketing efforts. Additionally, looking at both these primary aspects of marketing's contributions to higher education at a more granular level facilitates a more holistic review of strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. It avoids the use of multiple frameworks which can be cumbersome and may provide a less-than relevant level of analysis. In turn, these assessment outcomes could create a roadmap to guide institutions in overhauling, adjusting, or evolving their marketing operations to meet the dynamic nature of their environment.

No brand is monolithic. This model reflects the ability to assess both the tangible aspects of the brand (i.e., standards, guidelines, logos, wordmarks) as well as the intangible aspects of the brand (i.e., personality, tone, voice, attributes, dimensions) and provide clarity on consistent expression, management of brand assets, and differentiation among competitors.

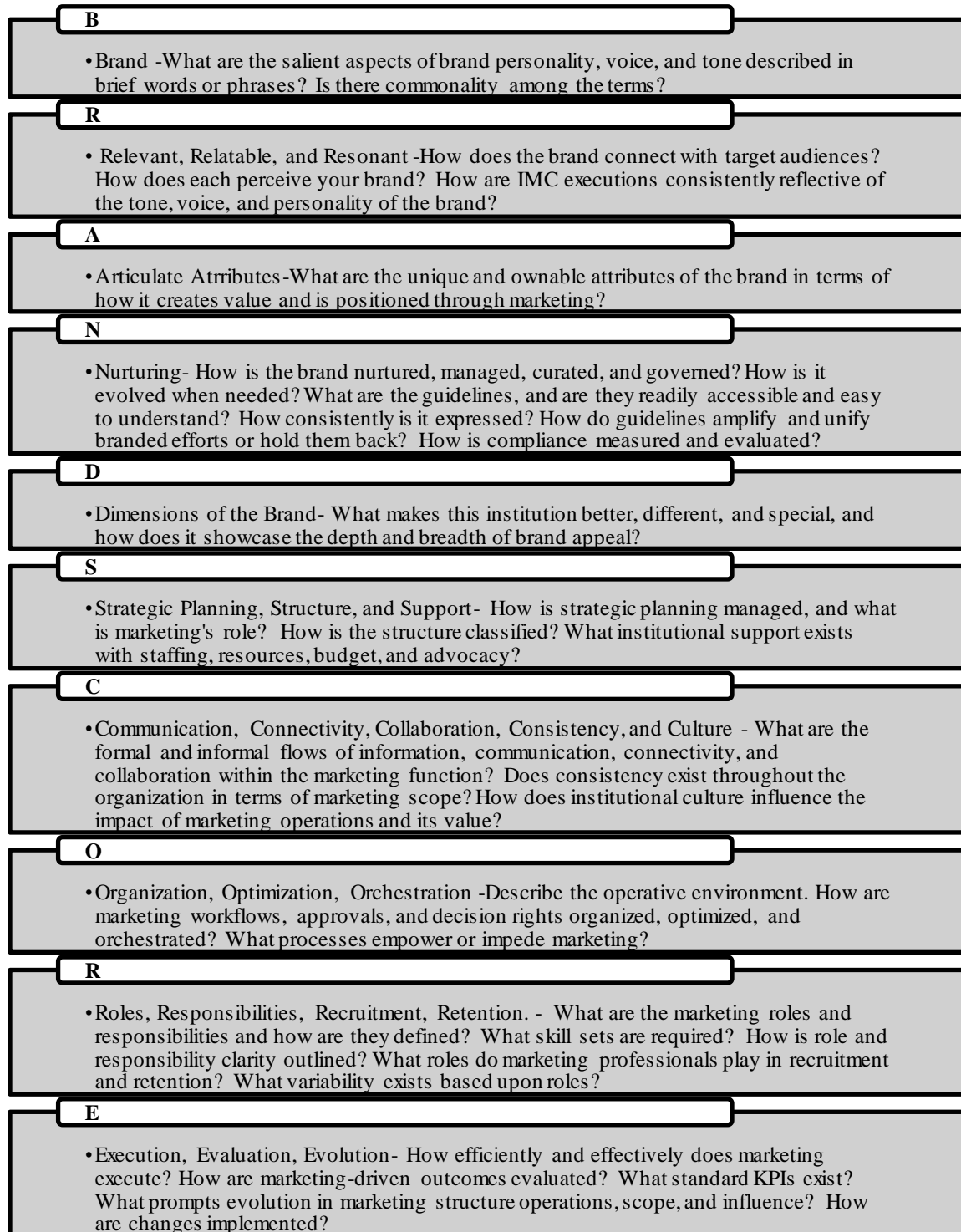
No structure is ideal. This model allows for an intensive review of planning, structural alignment, organizational culture, resources and staffing, budget, marketing focus, goals and objectives, and measurement. Again, these drivers influence the operative marketing environment, a thorough assessment of these factors can assist university leadership and marketing professionals in ensuring the function is positioned optimally for the institution.

Only once each primary function as designated (brand management) and (structure, alignment, and operative environment) is objectively understood as they exist can leadership assess the function and make any necessary changes to properly deploy marketing to assist the institution in meeting its goals and objectives.

Figure 9 suggests the outline and initial structure of the emergent conceptual framework, the critical variables to assess as informed by the data of this study, and the organization of the evaluation process. Using BRAND SCORE as an acronym for the marketing variables to evaluate creates an iterative approach to reviewing the relevant elements of each tool component with simple words and phrases to provide the data for analysis. The tool could also assist in isolating identified underleveraged strengths, deficiencies, or missed opportunities among the various dimensions evaluated by the tool. Although the model could provide immense value at the institutional level for a macro marketing review, it may also prove beneficial at a department, division, or college level in assessing efficacy, focus, and organization.

Figure 9

BRAND SCORE Emergent Conceptual Model



Note: The acronym BRAND assesses brand-related aspects of the institution; SCORE the operative environment and structure.

This framework and categorized questions are drawn from the data gathered and analyzed in this study. They are initially designed to systematically guide viewers through a holistic view of marketing within their institution. While the Resource-Based View framework and Corporate Brand Identity Matrix were appropriate for reviewing separate aspects of structure, value generation, brand differentiation, and institutional identity, as this study highlights, they are less dimensional in assessing all aspects of IMC value creation and alignment, especially in higher education.

Once properly vetted and verified through additional research, the BRAND SCORE tool could become foundational in providing colleges and universities a valuable framework to benchmark marketing activities, structure, brand assets, and management without costly consultants offering formulaic off-the-shelf solutions. This single-source, individualized level of analysis offered by the BRAND SCORE conceptual model could reveal critical insights on marketing within higher education marketing functions that are vying for mindshare and market share in this highly competitive, admissions-propelled environment.

An additional study of the BRAND SCORE emergent framework should be designed to verify its scope, refine questions and categories, and assess its usability, viability, predictability, and flexibility, given the different structural and marketing operative environments throughout colleges and universities. It can also serve as a tool to assess the impact of marketing strategy and tactic development and the alignment and allocation of marketing resources on diverse populations and underserved markets, where evolving the brand tone and voice can better reflect those audience and their lived experiences, creating a level of resonance and relevance that are ignored or missing.

Analysis and Implications Summary

The data and analysis in this study revealed significant learnings for college and university marketing teams and leadership seeking to optimize the investment in the function. Those findings include the inextricable linkage between brand management and the marketing operative environment. Dependent factors include the clarity of brand standards, guidelines, and consistent expression, an acute focus on recruiting, and retention, increasing brand awareness with relevant resonant and relatable IMC executions, and delineating roles and responsibilities.

In this study, the decentralized structural alignment reflects numerous considerations, including the institution's shared governance culture, workflow management realities given the sheer number of IMC materials produced, marketing scope, staffing, and budget. While the structural alignment in this case study did not impede marketing operations or impact, the data uncovered opportunities for better networking, sharing, and connectivity within this hybrid decentralized structure.

Through content analysis and the use of two theoretical frameworks (Resource-Based View and Corporate Brand Identity Matrix) for finite analysis, the data unveiled a significant competitive advantage for this institution in the following aspects: the curation of its distinct brand resulting in value creation emanating from its consistent expression across all IMC touchpoints, the leveraging of the Four Ps of marketing to power increased applications and enrollment yield, and the collaborative operative environment and structure in which marketing is organized. Marketing, at this comprehensive, national Carnegie-classified R2 (High Research Activity) four-year public university is reflectivity of its recognized reputation and stature, its over 160-year history, its unique setting and culture, and the mission and vision it seeks to serve.

Finally, an emergent conceptual framework is suggested for further research in reviewing the data. The BRAND SCORE model provides a plausible platform for colleges and universities to assess brand, structure, and operative environment holistically. This tool could assist users in isolating strengths and weaknesses within marketing structure, operations, and brand management to elevate, illuminate, and amplify marketing efforts for the institution.

Although this study did not begin with goal to develop a grounded theory, the BRAND SCORE emergent model and the analysis of the data suggests the intersected role structure, operative environment, and brand management is dependent on several factors, including acute role clarity, intense focus on recruitment and retention, institutional culture and governance, and brand management. The calibration and interplay of these variable warrant further research to determine if such a grounded theory can be proved.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS, SUMMARY

This bounded-case study aims to understand the marketing operative environment of a comprehensive, Carnegie-classified R2 High Research Activity four-year national public university and discover how the function's structure, alignment and brand management contributed to this institution's growth in applications and enrollment yield. The following research questions framed this study and created the basis for its findings and conclusions.

RQ1: How do integrated marketing professionals in higher education describe their operative environment, including their lived professional experiences in their specific role, their structure, alignment within the university, and its benefits, challenges, and opportunities?

RQ2: What role did marketing structure and alignment play in developing and implementing a successful strategy to achieve a 12.4% increase in enrollment yield at the university?

RQ3: What learnings and insights can be leveraged from this bounded case study to inform other national comprehensive and regional public universities on adapting their marketing structure, alignment, strategy, and execution to drive applications, enrollment yield, and brand awareness?

This study is especially timely given the dominant marketplace realities facing all institutions. These include a trend of enrollment decline in many four-year public universities, a forecast enrollment "cliff" facing higher education, and the increased reliance on marketing to positively influence measurable outcomes such as applications, enrollment yield, retention, funding from public and private sources, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic, and ongoing changes in the demographic makeup of the United States (Blumenstyke, 2021; Carnegie Dartlett Marketing Innovation, 2020; Grawe, 2018; McClure & Fryar, 2020).

Moreover, many college education investments are tantamount to taking on massive debt as tuition and costs have outpaced inflation (Archibald & Feldman, 2017; Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Sackstein, 2019). Thus, families and students are shopping for value and an anticipated return on investment when selecting an undergraduate college or university, so what and how these institutions offer as better, different, and special creates awareness and consideration for their school, with the ultimate goals of leading to applications and enrollment.

Furthermore, the importance and growing scope of marketing in higher education transcends this study and the post-pandemic navigation window. Its roots stem back almost four decades when the concept of integrated marketing communications began to grow beyond an academic subject into an application used to organize marketing functions within higher education (Kotler, 1995; Schultz, 1992).

The thirst for distinction among institutions grew with higher ratings, rankings, and differentiation in particular fields of studies. Ancillary items such as experiential programs, amenities, and services became marketable assets to distinguish one institution from another. This response was due, to a large extent, to external pressures facing higher education. These pressures included reduced federal and state funding for capital and student assistance. It was also the result of the power of consumerism and the role of technology in changing student expectations. Thus, commercialism became a strategic imperative to assist universities in seeking new alliances and partnerships to offset funding shortfalls. The commoditization among colleges offering similar degrees, fields of study and student services only amplified the influence and impact of marketing. And with the increased cry for efficiency in marketing-driven outcomes, corporatization forced universities to operate more as businesses than ever to offset growing

costs, generate efficiencies and deliver on goals and objectives (Birnbaum, 2000; Goldman et al., 2002; Kirp & Kirp, 2003).

In addition to these marketplace dynamics, changing demographics and the forecast enrollment cliff loom large over higher education. This comes simultaneously as more traditionally underserved populations and growing diverse audiences seek higher education as a pathway and necessity. And this occurs amid an environment with fewer federal and state funds to help enroll these students and support higher education, increased inflation, and abounding economic uncertainty that impacts enrollment decisions and educational opportunities (Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Grawe, 2018).

Scholarly research on marketing in higher education focuses primarily on various aspects of the function of marketing, including reporting structures, the migration and activation of integrated marketing communications (DePerro, 2006), return on marketing investment (King, 2013), leadership advocacy (Mulnix, 1996; Tams, 2015), the role of a chief marketing officer (CMO) to oversee marketing, various branding efforts, and the evolving focus and scope of marketing (Edmiston-Strasser, 2007; Horrigan, 2007; Morris, 2003).

Although these studies and other scholarly literature reviewed earlier make the case for IMC in higher education, displays how it has evolved, and quantifies structures, alignment options, and enhances role identification, this study reviews the function in higher education through a unique perspective and methodology. By employing a bounded-case study approach and examining the lived professional experiences, operative environment, roles, responsibilities, and brand management used by marketing professionals in one institution that has achieved double-digit growth, a great deal can be learned about how and why the function is impacting its university's goals through actual professional practitioners.

Discussion of Results and Implications

The centralized management of brand standards and guidelines coupled with the shared passion for and curation of the brand assets, personality, tone, voice, and consistent application across all platforms is an essential factor in this institution's marketing success. This is especially important given that the institution's marketing resources are decentralized and aligned by functions, departments, and colleges; in a less consistent institutional marketing approach, we could easily see diffusion and dilution of the IMC executions that could impact marketing effectiveness.

Supporting these two factors in this university is an intense focus and articulation of roles, responsibilities, and an informal "marketing network" where autonomy and empowerment thrive, along with a culture that invites collaboration and cooperation across teams and expertise. Content analysis that identified the frequency and consistency of terms, words, and phrases describing these factors was especially useful in highlighting the positive features of the university's approach to marketing and underlining the level of consistency this university has achieved in its marketing efforts.

In and of itself, marketing structure is a contributing factor to the effectiveness of this university's marketing efforts. More important, though, are brand management, role and responsibility clarity, and the operative marketing environment throughout the institution. These factors play a significant part in explaining marketing's role in helping drive a 12.4% increase in enrollment yield in this case study.

An exploration of these factors brought forth an emergent conceptual framework that combines the variable elements of structure, alignment, roles, responsibilities, and brand management to provide a comprehensive review of these factors. The BRAND SCORE

conceptual model not only provides a panoramic view of marketing within a university, but it also isolates various aspects of the function to help assess an institution's marketing benefits, challenges and opportunities. The model allows for an intense examination of the institution's brand dimensions, brand management practices, marketing structure, and operative environment. It can also benchmark the marketing functions status and impact, then provide potential paths and roadmaps for refinement and evolution.

Delimitations and Limitations

Qualitative research possesses inherent limitations that need to be addressed to provide trustworthiness and credibility to the study and results and to frame the context in which the research was conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Maxwell, 2013). This study has some delimitations and limitations to provide context and ground the methodology and results.

The delimitation factors for this study include a focus only on one public, four-year institution, and does not explore the operational marketing structure in private institutions, nonprofit schools, or for-profit colleges and universities. This scope excludes learnings from those institutions which could be relevant to this field of study.

Another delimiting factor for this research is the exclusion of demographic and geographic factors in analyzing and assessing data. This case-studied institution is predominantly white and did not review marketing structure, materials, and brand implications from a diverse perspective. These considerations are complex issues facing university marketers when developing strategies and tactics but were excluded from the study to focus on structure, operative environment, and brand management more intently from a broader contextual perspective. Additionally, this study did not focus on the overall marketing resource allocation.

This study is limited by several aspects. Being a bounded case by design, it focuses on only one four-year public university and its marketing function and does not incorporate another similar public university marketing perspective. It is also limited by the experiences of 15 marketing professionals within the case-studied institution, rather than the more than 100 marketing employees in the university. Limitations also surface in this being conducted at an institution with a decentralized marketing structure rather than a centralized alignment.

Other limitations of this study include the fact that no interviews or data on how marketing impacts the various constituencies it serves, including university leadership, faculty, staff, prospective students, and current students. Researcher bias is another limiting factor to acknowledge and address in qualitative research settings (Patton, 2014). With over three decades of marketing experience and working under different marketing structures, the researcher brought perspectives on how marketing functions could and should be organized to this study and a bias that a centralized structure was an inherently better option. The results of the study revealed structure and alignment are a complex amalgam of institutional culture, governance, and brand management, and a one-size fits all approach without a thorough evaluative framework could be detrimental to a marketing function if not assessed carefully.

To mitigate and limit this stated professional bias, this study collected rich, transcribed, and recorded data, collected and reviewed over 400 IMC executions, and triangulated data collection with member checking and researcher journaling to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data and study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To make the findings of the research more relevant and transferrable, content analysis and two theoretical frameworks were used to analyze the data and help situate it within existing scholarly literature and provide greater

validity to the study's outcomes, implications, and recommendations, ultimately giving rise to an emergent conceptual model from this research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Maxwell, 2013).

Future Research Recommendations

Marketing's vital role in higher education is here to stay. The spotlight on marketing and the continued reliance on the function to deliver is exponentially increasing. This study substantiates marketing's current contributions and foreshadows its expected results in higher education by how it manages branding, IMC campaign and tactic development, and its structure, and alignment, of all which optimize the impact of marketing on driving applications and enrollment yield.

The initial study suggested would be to validate the BRAND SCORE emergent conceptual model as a viable tool to assess how marketing is managed in higher education at the institutional level. Using four to six universities of comparable size and charter (regional -four-year public universities, private liberal arts schools, and land-grant universities), a study could be constructed to verify the tool's predictive outcomes for marketing management, identifying strengths, weaknesses, and threats, and opportunities to align resources and brand assets to drive applications and enrollment. BRAND SCORE could also be adapted to evaluate brand salience and relevance with traditionally underserved student populations and diverse emergent student segments, so IMC strategies and tactics better speak to those key constituencies.

Another potential study would be a quantitative research approach that asks colleges and universities to identify their marketing structure, using publicly available data, the researcher could conduct a regression analysis to see if there is any correlation between the variables of marketing structure, applications received, and enrollment yield. Depending on the size of the response and scope of the survey, the data could be analyzed by size of school, Carnegie

Classification, region, public versus private, or other participant modifiers. Such a study would add updated data to this rapidly changing field and provide future research efforts with a baseline of data to adapt and explore relevant topics and trends in the field as they emerge.

Lastly, it would be valuable to pursue a study to understand how colleges and universities portray their brand, what constitutes the most relevant aspects of the marketing mix, and, ultimately, what are the most determinant factors influencing students and families to apply and enroll. A mixed method approach designed as a causal-comparative study would be appropriate, taking one or multiple schools, implementing a survey to determine what factors were most salient in deciding on a college choice, looking at demographic differences and preferences, and then using interviews to add depth to the quantitative data. Given marketing's prominence in higher education, there is plenty of variety in topics and research areas to pursue.

Final Conclusions and Summary of Study

This study aimed to identify how role of marketing structure, alignment, operative environment, roles, responsibilities, and management of the brand contributed to a comprehensive, Carnegie-classified R2 (High Research Activity) national four-year public university's 12.4% increase in enrollment yield. This research provides new insights and expands the knowledge set in higher education marketing through the lived experiences of marketing professionals, the detailed descriptions of their roles and responsibilities, their organizational structure, and alignment, their institutional brand, and the ways their operative environment enables them to help meet departmental, college, and institutional goals. Through conducting lengthy interviews, reviewing hundreds of IMC marketing materials, and analyzing the data with two theoretical frameworks, this study brings clarity on an actual marketing function, its

organization, and its collaborative effectiveness to achieve goals and drive applications and enrollment yield.

The study was designed using two conceptual frameworks to guide the development and organization of questions, aid in selecting study participants, and facilitate the coding, identification of themes, and analysis of the data gathered. These two conceptual frameworks, the Resource- Based View theoretical framework (Barney et al., 2021; Mahoney & Pandian, 1992; Rothaermel, 2017) and the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Greyser & Urde, 2019) grounded the analysis and contextualized the data. The research findings highlight how the combination of aligning resources for competitive advantage to optimize marketing not only generates operational value, but bolsters that value by an acute, ubiquitous awareness of and expression of the tangible and intangible assets of the brand; this combination becomes a powerful weapon to increase awareness and positively impact operations and enrollment.

Study participants were purposefully selected based on their marketing oversight or management role within the university. Fifteen qualified participants were identified as potential subjects for interviews. All consented and agreed to contribute to the study. Chapter III outlines the methodology used for gathering data. Interviews were conducted from November 2, 2023, to December 7, 2023, via teleconferencing software with transcription capabilities.

Questions aligned to the frameworks asked participants to detail their roles, responsibilities, oversight and management duties, alignment and structures, operative environment, and perceptions of the dimensions of the brand in 90-minute interviews.

Afterwards, participants were sent interview transcriptions for member checking and to verify or clarify statements made. Additionally, participants were asked to provide or share integrated marketing communications materials produced as examples for further review.

Triangulation of the data involved member checking of the interview participants, reviewing all transcripts, and keeping a detailed research journal.

Once the data was gathered, the process of inductive coding began. After initial coding was completed, three themes were identified. These themes were the identification of marketing roles and responsibilities, articulation of marketing structure and operative environment, and descriptions and dimensions of brand management. To further assist in the analysis of the data and identified themes, content analysis was employed to assess the frequency of core terms, phrases, and descriptors in each of the themes. Content analysis more finitely enumerated brand personality, tone, voice, attributes, dimensions, and value generation aspects of over 400 IMC executions.

After the content analysis concluded, identified themes and descriptors were first evaluated using the RBV framework's Valuable, Rare, Imitable, and Organized (VRIO) assessment tool (Rothaermel, 2017). Given the criteria for each, this examination showed a slight or significant competitive advantage across VRIO dimensions. The most significant competitive advantage identified is the unique and leverageable aspects of the university's brand tone, personality, and distinctive attributes (Boyd et al., 2010).

The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix provided the opportunity to review and explore the breadth and dimension of the brand, shedding further light on the strength of this asset within this university's marketing arsenal. The synthesis within this framework furnished further validation that the omnipresent and accordant articulation and expression of this brand, coupled with its portrayal in relevant, resonant, and relatable IMC materials and touchpoints to its target audiences, is a valuable, differentiating asset.

Resultant of the thematic and content analysis and by employing two identified theoretical frameworks, a new conceptual framework and model emerged. This conceptual model, titled the BRAND SCORE model, gathers the articulated themes of this study into a single, holistic tool that, with additional research and validation, could prove helpful to colleges and universities in assessing relative strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of their marketing structure, alignment, operative environment, and brand management systems.

Answering the research questions to examine if structure and alignment played a part in assisting this comprehensive, national four-year public university in growing enrollment yield by 12.4% while coming out of the COVID pandemic, it is clear they played a contributing role. What was revealed in the data is that the decentralized structure of this university is neither a strength nor an impediment; however, how it is managed, the clarity of roles and responsibilities within the marketing structures, and the acute attention to detail on the curation and management of the brand and assets of the university are beneficial advantages which marketing has been able to expertly unleash in growing awareness, consideration, applications, and enrollment yield for this university.

This study also reinforces that the nexus of marketing management in higher education should concentrate on three critical elements: structure, operations, and brand. The way they are led and coordinated must reflect the institution's mission, vision, and culture. The alignment of those activities may be centralized or decentralized, but what has set this university on a trajectory for ongoing success is the intense focus on lead generation and recruiting new students while simultaneously affixing on the retention of existing students.

The amplification and illumination of this brand and the unification of the various IMC components of the marketing mix are a testament to the culture and passion of the institution and

reflect its goal to remain a primary choice for the students it serves. Lastly, this study suggests that irrespective of structure, unleashing the power of marketing strategies and tactics that elevate the brand across all consumer touch points in a connected, collaborative, clarified environment is a force multiplier in generating value and delivering marketing-driven, measurable results.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM AND CONFIDENTIALITY

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mark Gibson, Ph.D. candidate, and Principal Investigator Dr. Dianne Renn of the Educational Administration and Foundations Department of the College of Education at Illinois State University.

This active practitioner qualitative bounded case study research aims to understand how the marketing structure and marketing operations of a regional four-year public institution helped propel a 12.4% increase in enrollment yield, counter to a national trend where many similar universities are losing enrollment.

Why are you being asked?

You have been asked to participate because you are an active marketing practitioner in the Illinois State University organization, or you have marketing responsibilities and oversight in your role or oversee individuals engaged in marketing.

You are ineligible to participate if you are currently located in the European Economic Area.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

What would you do?

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview, sharing your thoughts, perceptions, and lived experiences in your role in marketing within this institution. In total, your involvement in this study will last approximately one to two hours, including approximately one hour for the interview and another hour to review the transcription of the interview.

Are any risks expected?

There are no risks anticipated beyond scheduling and making time for the interview and checking transcriptions.

Will your information be protected?

We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential.

Recording of responses and transcriptions of interviews will be kept on a password-secured hard drive unavailable to anyone but the research team. Information that may identify you or potentially lead to reidentification will not be released to individuals who are not on the research team. This data and research will be the findings of a dissertation research study and will be published.

However, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by authorized individuals.

Could your responses be used for other research?

We will not use any identifiable information from you in future research, but your deidentified information could be used for future research without additional consent from you.

Who will benefit from this study?

This research will provide insights and understanding as to how the structural alignment of marketing in this university and the management of the marketing function and the assets of brand were coordinated to grow enrollment yield by 12.4%. Similar regional four-year public institutions would benefit from this case study to better align and coordinate marketing.

Whom do you contact if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about the research or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Mark Gibson, Researcher, at 309-838-2298 mdgibso1@ilstu.edu, or Dr, Diane Renn, Principal Investigator, at 309- 438-2040 or dcrenn@ilstu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

Documentation of Consent

Please return this form as an attachment to an email addressed to Mark Gibson at mdgibso1@ilstu.edu as consent you agree to be a participant in this study by checking the box below or typing your initials on the signature line return it as an attachment to the same email address above.

I consent to this interview

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B: SURVEY INSTRUMENT AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview Questions by Framework

Framework	Questions
	<p>Describe your operative environment as a marketing professional in higher education? What is the actual structure of the marketing function?</p> <p>Detail your alignment and reporting within your function and to the university?</p> <p>How is integrated marketing managed in your area/function?</p> <p>Who are the key internal clients and stakeholders your function serves?</p> <p>What areas are included and excluded from marketing?</p> <p>How and to whom does the function report at the institutional level?</p>
Resource Based View	Describe the formal and informal communications processes in the function.
RBV	How would you describe its impact or efficacy? Challenges and benefits?
Framework	<p>What opportunities exist for improvement?</p> <p>What area(s) manage marketing and brand?</p> <p>How does workflow come into your function?</p> <p>Who has approval rights and budget oversight?</p> <p>What percentage of work is considered the following?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution-level or brand awareness • College or department level • Applications or enrollment focused <p>What research or analytics are used in assessing IMC impact?</p>
Corporate Brand Matrix	<p>What does your brand stand for?</p> <p>Articulate your IHE brand personality.</p> <p>How does your IHE articulate a value proposition?</p> <p>How is marketing aligned with the mission and vision of the IHE?</p> <p>How is the IHE positioned, and what sets it apart from the competition?</p>