Effects of Marketing Theories and Customer Relationship Management on Small Colleges

Melissa Martirano[1]

[1] School of Business and Technology Marketing, North Central University, Prescott Valley, AZ, USA

Correspondence: Melissa Martirano, School of Business and Technology Marketing, North Central University, Prescott Valley, AZ, USA. E-mail: mmartirano@njcu.edu

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of marketing options on college selection, and of CRM tools on marketing efficiency. Five theories of marketing options and efficiency, including Customer Relationship Management, will undergird this study. The problem herein is that small colleges in particular must determine ways to market themselves, optimize use of technology, and increase enrollment in order to compete with other post-high school options. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of marketing options on college selection, and CRM tools on marketing efficiency, using selected theories of marketing options and efficiency as theoretical framework. This study will be conducted utilizing qualitative methodology; information-gathering tools used will be interviews and questionnaires. Data interpretation will be through thematic analysis influenced by elements of transcendental phenomenology. The participants will be approximately 20 currents and former administrators/faculty from small colleges (fewer than 1000 students) from schools in the Mid-Atlantic region, and approximately 400 students enrolled in those schools. The administrators will be interviewed; the students will answer questionnaires. All inquiries are drawn from research questions that reflect the problem, purpose and theoretical framework of this study.

Keywords: small colleges, enrollment, consumer relationship management, marketing, social media

1. Introduction

Small colleges are in trouble. Those without large endowments must meet a majority of their costs via tuition (Mills, 2014). Although larger and well-endowed schools are also facing budget issues, small colleges are hit particularly hard. Of the schools in a Vanderbilt University that closed in recent years, all shared these characteristics: fewer than 1000 students with assents under $50 million and endowments around $1 million only (McDonald, 2014).

Revisiting marketing options may benefit small colleges that are suffering a downturn in enrollment or are in danger of closing (Croke, 2015). For instance, this study will examine new marketing options that include emphasis on internet and social marketing, as well as software applications for managing customers (Tileaga, Nitu, & Nitu, 2014), adaptable to an educational setting in order to be useful in assisting current small colleges in effectively attracting students initially to a small college environment (Davis et al., 2014; Hawkins, 2013; Kirk, 2010).

1.1 Background

In response to changing technological and employment demands, colleges of the liberal arts era have transformed into specialty schools, teaching skills for specific employment or post-graduate professional training (Jepsen, Troske, & Coomes, 2014). Small colleges, particularly liberal arts-focused schools, are bearing the brunt of this shift. There are several significant factors at play important to the future of small colleges in the United States, concerning their stability, even sustainability, that is their ability to continue to operate without depleting resources or over-leveraging, and viability. Currently, small colleges in general are losing students, revenue, even closing in record numbers (McDonald, 2014).

For purposes of this study small colleges will be considered as those that fall within a widely-held definition that enroll fewer than 1000 students (McDonald, 2014) although there are some who would inflate that number up to 5000 (NACAC, 2015). Even with high enrollment, expenses incurred in running an institution of higher learning

make it difficult for small colleges to meet their operating expenses without taking huge amounts from their (often meager) endowments or falling into debt (The Economist, 2012). The logical option resulting from this situation is that small colleges should explore innovative techniques to step up their marketing process to compete with government-funded schools, technical schools, online universities and well-endowed larger universities (Keller, 2014; WebpageFC, 2015). These techniques and strategies should take into account the impact of the marketing theories involving the internet and social media, as recognized by commercial business and industry, in developing new marketing approaches (Sashittal & Jassawalla, 2014). This research fills a gap in the literature by presenting a fresh look at this topic through qualitative research directed at both students and staff which can inform those concerned with the state of academia today by basing research on marketing options and efficiency-related theories.

In the competitive higher education arena of the twenty-first century, small colleges have not kept pace with their competition in directing focus and budgeting funds to develop and employ effective marketing strategies for attracting students (Barnes, 2014; Watson, 2000). According to Ring (2009), the leaders of the American Council on Education indicated that nine degree granting small colleges were closed in 2009; an increase that is dramatic in the past 2 years from four in 2007. College marketers are seeking new and affordable ways to attract and retain students through activities, programs, personal care, and networking. Nonetheless, during the past year alone two well-known small colleges, Sweet Briar in Virginia and Tennessee Temple University (Bidwell, 2015), and Clearwater Christian College in Florida (Higher Education, 2015) have announced that declining enrollment and inability to cover costs are forcing them to close.

There exist new marketing options that have succeeded in an education context, those that have not, and consumer/business-oriented strategies not normally associated with school marketing (Pardot, 2014; Ragins & Greco, 2003) that include emphasis on internet and social marketing, as well as software applications for managing customers. These could be adapted to an educational setting in order to be useful in assisting current small colleges in effectively attracting students initially to a small college environment (Davis et al., 2014; Hawkins, 2013; Kirk, 2010). This information may provide marketing strategies effective at boosting enrollment and, as a correlative, assisting in reducing the increasing number of small colleges that are in danger of closing, which is increasing by 10% or more per year (McDonald, 2014).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Small colleges today face a problem. They must determine ways to market themselves and increase enrollment in order to compete with other post-high school option. Small colleges, with an enrollment of fewer than 1000 students (Singh, 2010), currently are at a crossroads concerning their financial stability. They often lack resources to meet operating costs (Hicks et al., 2014; Mills, 2014), which challenges this financial stability in the context of competing with a host of other post-secondary options that are proving attractive to modern students: community college programs, online programs, technical or specific professional training, the military, larger institutions, or direct entry into the job market (Keller, 2014). Without this study, the potential success of applying certain marketing theories and practices to assist small colleges attract more students to assist with defraying expenses and remaining solvent, will be untested, especially for colleges in the area of study (Mid-Atlantic United States). Colleges, like any business, must attract students (consumers) through marketing and ways to improve marketing will be of interest to them.

Thus, those affected most by this study are those interested in marketing theories for small colleges unable to sustain enrollment and meet costs that are closing (Bidwell, 2015; McDonald, 2014). With enrollment being a main revenue source for such schools, numbers must be maximized if small colleges are to remain viable and sustainable. Methods to increase enrollment are afforded through new and innovative marketing techniques and strategies, some borrowed from the world of commerce, including Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software and automation tools (Hart, 2006) which are used in marketing to keep track of inquiries and respond to them automatically, and recognition of a change in consumer trends that include reliance on the internet and social media (Hawkins, 2013; Tileaga, Nitu, & Nitu, 2014).

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the proposed qualitative case study, which incorporates elements of transcendental phenomenology and thematic analysis, is to examine the impact of marketing options on college selection, and Customer Relationship Management tools (software to assist in marketing duties) on marketing efficiency, using selected theories of marketing options and efficiency. Therefore, the research will examine issues of both marketing options and efficiency (regarding CRM), and how they relate to specific small colleges in the New England/Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, in order to elicit information that will assist in ascertaining

impacts of marketing options on small college selection, and analyzing marketing approaches that attract students. It will be grounded in five theories correlated to the areas of inquiry: marketing, technology and CRM. Because as the literature suggests, small colleges appear to be in danger of closing due to high operating costs, increasingly successful competition, and insufficient enrollment, a marketing strategy to help gain and keep students would contribute to effective marketing options for building small colleges. Such options will be explored in the context of examining theories related to college selection, developing a workforce educational partnership with the community, implementing efficient, CRM-supported internet marketing, including social media, while maintaining a quality small college operation.

This study will be undertaken through qualitative research using the tools of both interviews and questionnaires to elicit information pertinent to the problem, purpose and questions posed herein. Four-hundred students currently enrolled in a small college setting in the Eastern region (New England/Mid-Atlantic) of the United States will provide the population sample for questionnaires. Twenty current or former administrators or staff from small colleges in the same geographic region will also contribute their perceptions via interviews. Both groups will address issues of the impact of marketing on college selection, and the school officials can also shed light on the effect of enrollment on the financial condition of small colleges within the framework of their own experiences.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

There are numerous marketing option theories that can be used to support research regarding college selection; however this study will focus on five primary theories. The research questions and hypotheses presented herein are derived from the following specific theoretical works. Some theories are borrowed from commercial business contexts. The five theories upon which this dissertation is based will be discussed with specifics during the literature; however, an introduction to each one is as follows:

(1) Internet Marketing Theory posits the potential usefulness of internet-based marketing, usually in a commercial context. In recent decades, "interest in the Internet is unprecedented, and its use in marketing is increasing exponentially" (Peterson, Balasubramanian, & Sonnenberg, 1997). There are numerous applications of internet use in commerce, including business sponsored websites, tracking systems, basic advertisements, pop-up advertisements, and value propositions, which in this study the correlation will not be to sales but rather enrollment.

(2) Social Networking Theory was first developed in a business context and is closely related to internet marketing. For the purposes of this study, it is the examination of consumer behavior (student choice) as affected by affiliation with social networking cites such as Facebook and Twitter. Easy access to information from sources through such networks can spread positive or negative ideas relative to products and services, through comments or reviews akin to word-of-mouth influence, but on a global scale.

(3) Enrollment Management/Marketing Theory specifically addresses factors that influence college recruitment/marketing and enrollment. These theories posit practices that might increase marketing effectiveness for learning institutions, such as increased internet use and designated staff contacts for prospective students, and deal mainly with recruiting aspects of possible college operations.

(4) Structured Enrollment Management/Marketing Theory is related to the above, but focuses more on total college or university planning that concerns enrollment and marketing. This "requires knowledge of institutional budgets, funding, communications, marketing, admission processes, practices and standards, recruitment, retention, student services, financial assistance and leveraging, academic preparation, institutional fit, external demographics, institutional profile, student transitions, alumni relations, communication, campus environment, career development, learning styles and methods, institutional research, assessment," not to mention "data collection, constituency connections to campus, town-gown relationships, and university development" to effectively stimulate enrollment (Wilkinson et al., 2007).

(5) CRM-supported Internet Marketing Theory has developed recently with the advent of both heavily internet marketing and software that facilitates it. The theory basically posits that institutions (in this study the institutions being small colleges) that utilize internet marketing can do so more effectively if they also utilize customer relationship management tools and software. Existing studies of this theory focus on the manner in which CRM software makes it easier for users to track and store data retrieved from internet sites visited by potential clients.

1.5 Research Questions

Following a qualitative methodology involving the tools narrative interviews (including anecdotal evidence) and

questionnaires, two research questions will be explored to ascertain the extent of the problem of small colleges facing threats to their financial stability, the impact of enrollment, academic quality and pre- or post-admission designated student contact persons on this problem, and the potential effect of specific marketing techniques and other practices on enrollment and marketing efficiency at small colleges. The two questions are broadly phrased to allow subjects to elucidate without tight constraints, yet focused upon the issues at hand so that the results will be meaningful to and applicable across the spectrum of potentially-affected institutions and those with some interest or stake in the future of small colleges.

Q1: What is the effect of marketing options on college selection?

Q2: What are the effects of Consumer Relationship Management tools on college   marketing efficiency?

Qualitative research used herein will examine propositions and alternatives that provide the foundation for measuring the outcome of this research.

Proposition 1: Internet marketing options positively affect college selection.

Proposition 2: Social media use positively affects college selection.

Proposition 3: Staff contacts with prospective students positively affect college   selection by students, which increases enrollment.

Proposition 4: Use of Consumer Relationship Management CRM) positively affects college marketing efficiency.

These propositions will be used for analyzing information gathered related to marketing in particular small colleges in a specific region. The research will suggest approaches based on theories that were or were not successful at the test institutions, hence informing consideration by other institutions, particularly small colleges currently facing declining admission numbers and enrollment due to falling retention figures nationwide and their marketing options. This study is unique in that it expands upon but does not reiterate the findings of other writings concerning similar issues, such as Mills' analysis of financial problems faced by a small, state-financed technical school in the Midwest (2014). This study will add to the body of literature by addressing these research questions and hypotheses to students and staff at small (under 1000 students) colleges on the mid-Atlantic and New England area not previously studied in this context.

1.6 Nature of the Study

Qualitative methods will be used in this study. Qualitative research allows for experiential recounting, not the empirical data-gathering of quantitative studies (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). In addition, the research design used herein is modeled with the intention of removing researcher bias and presented theoretically and thematically to allow categorization and generalization (Tillman, 1967).

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because small colleges are in trouble financially, and can step up their marketing approaches and use of technology in order to increase enrollment and avoid financial problems or possible closure (Mills, 2014; Schee, 204). Thus, this study is needed by those with an academic interest in the continued existence of small colleges, and those concerned with how marketing theories and technology might assist small colleges unable to sustain enrollment and meet costs that are closing (Bidwell, 2015; McDonald, 2014). This study raises a problem worthy of further academic research and review, and also will suggest recommendations to address the current situation based on information gathered and interpreted in light of the questions framed and the theoretical framework. Without this study, it is possible that more small colleges will close (The Economist, 2014).

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

The following unique and critical terms for the proposed study facilitate communication and provide a common understanding for the reader of the proposed study.

College Selection. Choice to enroll or not enroll at a specific institution.

Consumer Relationship Management (CRM) Software. One tool that responds to the rise in importance of internet contacts in sales and marketing in a commercial context (Business to Business-B2B, Business to Business to Consumer-B2B2C or Business to Consumer-B2C) that can enhance information collection, analysis and storage of potential clients (in the case of colleges students) which has proven effective at increasing efficiency and sales (Ragins & Greco, 2006). In the admissions or marketing offices of small colleges (which would fall within the B2C definition) this commercially-recognized tool is but one innovation that could

facilitate greater lead generation and nurturing, perhaps resulting in increased enrollment.

Marketing. For businesses, marketing includes advertising, consumer contact, and product/service promotion intended to increase market share and business revenues. In an educational context, it includes the various practices involved in attracting students to a school (Kishwaukee College, 2009).

Small College. Schools with around 1,000 students or less, average assets of less than $50 million, and endowments of about $1 million (McDonald, 2014).

Social Media. Formal or informal locations such as chat/relationship services and applications or online websites, particularly those on the Internet such as Facebook and LinkedIn, that are used for information gathering and exchange, and are highly influential, particularly among the younger population, including that of pre-college and college age (Hawkins, 2013).

Sustainability. An entity's ability to maintain itself without depleting its resources. In the college context, this would imply having sufficient endowment or income from sources including reliable enrollment numbers to cover operating expenses (The Economist, 2014).

1.9 Summary

The face of education in the United States has changed in the past century, leaving small colleges in a quandary. They must determine ways to market themselves and increase enrollment in order to compete with other post-high school option. Small colleges, with an enrollment of fewer than 1000 students (Singh, 2010), currently are at a crossroads concerning their financial stability. They often lack resources to meet operating costs (Hicks et al., 2014; Mills, 2014), which challenges this financial stability in the context of competing with a host of other post-secondary options that are proving attractive to modern students: community college programs, online programs, technical or specific professional training, the military, larger institutions, or direct entry into the job market (Keller, 2014). The purpose of the proposed qualitative case study, which incorporates elements of transcendental phenomenology and thematic analysis, is to examine the impact of marketing options on college selection, and CRM tools on marketing efficiency, using selected theories of marketing options and efficiency. Interviews and will be used to gather information, which will be thematically analyzed borrowing principles from transcendental phenomenology. Once the research is completed, the researcher will offer both theoretical and practical conclusions and recommendations for this significant problem that has never been addressed within the theoretical constructs and frameworks contained herein. This study will add to the body of knowledge and provide useful information to those concerned with the fate of small colleges, on either an academic or practical level.

2. Literature Review

This qualitative study's purpose is to examine the impact of marketing options on college selection, and CRM tools on marketing efficiency, using selected theories of marketing options and efficiency. Perusal of recent scholarship and writing makes it clear that small colleges depend on college selection, which in turn, is dependent upon marketing options. "Nationwide higher education institutions are facing multiple financial challenges due to declines in student enrollment, budget cuts, and the rising cost of higher education" (Hicks et al., 2014, p. 142). These hit very hard on small colleges. For example, in relationship to a small state technical college in Kansas, on study states that college selection, resulting in enrollment, is vital to a small college's ability to gain sufficient revenue to survive (Mills, 2014). Theories developed for businesses regarding internet marketing (Marek, 2014), social media marketing (Lu & Hsaio, 2010), enrollment management/ marketing (Schee, 2015), structured enrollment management/marketing (Schee, 2014) and use of CRM to assist marketing effectiveness (Tileaga, Nitu, & Nitu, 2014; Trainor et al., 2014) provide a basis for this research, which will analyze the impacts of these theories on specific small liberal-arts colleges in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. To date, reports of a similar nature have been published regarding one small liberal arts college in the South (Keller, 2014), and the Kansas technical school (Mills, 2014). Current school closings depicting the need for examination of marketing theories for small colleges include a small woman's college in Virginia (Szotak, 2015), and religious schools in Florida (Higher Ed, 2015) and Tennessee (Tulis, 2015).

In sum, this study connects to literature concerning marketing in a business context that links its effectiveness to commercial success (Hajli, 2014; Karadag, 2015; Marek, 2014); further studies and articles support this same correlation involving students (Sashittal & Jassawalla, 2015), with particular emphasis on innovative marketing techniques and tools such as internet, social media, and software designed to manage customer relations (Tileaga, Nitu, & Nitu, 2014). Such tools enhance response time and perceptions of personal concern, invaluable for small colleges which are expected to provide more one-on-one attention than larger, impersonal institutions (Schee,

2010). The following literary review is thus predicated on these two issues raised within the research questions guiding this study: the effect of marketing options on college selection and the effects of Consumer Relationship Management tools on college marketing efficiency.

2.1 Documentation

There was a time in America when the word "college" was synonymous with liberal arts education. For some time, the existence of colleges has been precarious due to a variety of threats. Over a century ago, Oakley pointed out that the founder of Stanford, David Jordan, confidently predicted that with time 'the college will disappear, in fact, if not in name. The best will become universities, the others will return to their place as academies-return, that is, to being advanced-level secondary schools' (Oakley, 2005, p. 2). The implication was that eventually there would be no demand or room in academic circles for schools that did not prepare students to *be something.* And to some extent, Jordan's prediction is coming true.

Today, many liberal arts schools, especially small colleges with fewer than 1000 students enrolled (McDonald, 2014) are struggling to keep pace with competitors such as highly successful online programs (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2015) larger, well-endowed universities that offer professional training, community colleges, technical schools, and other institutions that train students for a profession or job (Jepsen, Troske, & Coomes, 2014; Keller, 2014). Even at maximum enrollment, schools with small numbers of students who rely on tuition to pay 50 to 75 percent of their operating costs are finding themselves it difficult to pay faculty satisfactory salaries, keep libraries and facilities up-to-date, without leveraging themselves to crisis levels (Mills, 2014). One answer may be found in recent business trends demonstrating the success of technological and other innovative marketing techniques and strategies to interest consumers and boost sales (Marek, 2014)

2.2 Small Colleges Throughout History

Although the first small colleges began often as elevated secondary schools (*cf.* Williams College, Oakley, 2005), there has been tension between the ultimate purpose of post-secondary education in America ever since its inception. This dichotomy of educational purpose was heightened following World War II, when many veterans returned from war equipped with the G.I. Bill to finance their educations. While this may have seemed good news for small or liberal arts-focused colleges, within the span of a few decades it became apparent that the beneficiaries of this educational boon were universities and technical/vocational schools:

As recently as the mid-1950s, liberal arts colleges constituted around 40 percent of the total number of institutions of higher education, and they enrolled about 25 percent of all undergraduates. By the early 1970s they had come to account for only about a quarter of all institutions and enrolled no more than eight percent of all students. Over the subsequent decades the loss of ground has continued, if at a slower pace, and the decline involved has not simply been proportionate. Between 1967 and 1990 some 167 private four-year colleges disappeared (Oakley, 2005, p. 5).

2.3 College Selection

Financial issues typically, often the result of lessening enrollment or college selection by prospective students, are to blame for such shutdowns, and the closing of small colleges continues to this very day. Although larger and well-endowed schools are also facing budget issues, small colleges are hit particularly hard. Earlier this year, two well-known, respected small colleges announced plans to terminate operations. Century-old Sweetbriar College, a respected all-women's institution in Virginia, and Tennessee Temple University, a unique Zionist Christian school in Chattanooga, both determined they were unable to meet operational costs depending primarily on tuition (Bidwell, 2015; The Economist, 2014).

2.4 Marketing Options

To expand upon the first research question, focusing on marketing options and college selection, in terms of these events then, and drawing from recent literature on this very issue, Mills has asked what it is that impacts, in his words, a small college's "viable sustainability," (Mills, 2014, p. 640), or its operation without exhausting existing resources. Mills speculates various components to comprise an answer to his (and this study's) inquiry: academic excellence; enrollment; athletic programs that generate revenue; alumnae participation; large endowment (2014). Conversely, he posits conditions that accelerate failure of small (and in his case rural) colleges.

It could be due to declining enrollments, vanishing state funding, or challenges with day-to-day finances and cash flow that lead to collapse. One of the essential factors that may help small colleges develop marketing based on theories posited both as a positive that aids a small college success and a negative that contributes to its failure by Mills (2014), is college selection, or enrollment. If small colleges depend upon tuition to cover many

of their substantial operating costs, including faculty salaries, then higher enrollment would yield more tuition. It has been estimated that "tuition, fees, and room and board generally account for two-thirds or more of the revenue at small private colleges" (Chabotar, 2010, p. 7).

The literature indicates that small colleges must first distinguish themselves from other options, such as larger universities, trade/vocational schools, or no post-secondary education at all. Currently, status (perceived academic quality) and specialization seem to be a key factor in college enrollment. Much of this is attributable to perception. For instance, students connect future employment directly with college degrees. In order to land a job in the IT industry which employs a number of college graduates, many students assume they require a college degree computer science (Kleiman, 2014, p. 1). It is paramount that small colleges alert students to the fact that a general degree is of high value, even in today's IT-saturated world.While many may feel compelled to treat college as a means to an end rather than an opportunity to learn for the sake of learning, there is still the option, even for majors in technical fields,

2.5 Marketing Theories Related to College Selection

There are a number of marketing theories that can be considered to impact college selection and five have been selected specifically to form the theoretical framework of this research. Below appears a brief summary of each of these, with details concerning specific studies that support them, followed by a more detailed discussion and application:

(1). *Internet Marketing Theory* used by businesses was central to the study of Hajli (2013) and the work of Professor Marek (Marek, 2014), and supports proposition one. Hajli's study addressed the significance of internet marketing in a sample population in England through online surveys. Marek studied marketing theory as it might affect strategies employed by businesses of limited size and resources, correlating to the situation of small colleges at issue herein. The research and results, presented in the literature review herein, support the use of internet marketing. By extension, it can be theorized that small colleges should design and target their internet marketing in order to promote college selection that benefits them.

(2). *Social Networking* theory as deduced and researched by Lu & Hsiao (2010) provides a theoretical basis for proposition two. This work explored such issues as how personality type would affect use of social media, and could be linked to business choices. Aspects of this research will be included in the qualitative research to assist in ascertaining how social networking and personality affect the likelihood of colleges' spurring enrollment through online methods for particular individuals. In this vein, colleges should aggressively seek social media exposure and track activity concerning their institutions for prospective marketing targets. Dominant personality types at a specific institution could help guide marketing: interactive sites for extroverts and less-engagement sites targeting introverts. The results of this study also concluded that perceived value differs for introverts and extroverts.

Knowing the extent and type of internet use of differing personality types of prospective clients (or enrollees), therefore, could help institutions design sites with specific requirements to suit their target markets. Social media theory in marketing was also examined by Agnihotri et al., (2012), theorizing that social media helps spread "word-of-mouth" comments that can positively or negatively impact consumer behavior, or, for these purposes, college selection).

(3). *Enrollment Management/Marketing* theory was developed by Schee (2010). He looked specifically at marketing in the context of college selection, and tested theories regarding practices that would increase marketing effectiveness, such as internet use and designated staff contacts for prospective students (Schee, 2010). Vander Schee's results determined that students were more likely to enroll in a school where they had a solid contact and personal relationship with someone who was available consistently to answer their questions. He specifically recommended that colleges designate staff members to liaise with prospective students (2010).

(4). *Structured Enrollment Management/Marketing* theory, also espoused by Schee (2015), went further than his earlier theory. Structured management encompasses the entire school and its functions in every department as they relate to marketing to improve enrollment. Vander Schee proposed intra-school communication to avoid duplication of effort as well as ensure each prospective student receive prompt and satisfactory attention (2015).

(5). *CRM-supported Internet Marketing* theories are relatively new, due to the recent surge of CRM usage in business. In this work, two recent theoretical studies will be examined that support the research of this study: that by Tileaga, Nitu, & Nitu (2014) and by Trainor (2014). These first three researchers theorized the usefulness of internet marketing supported by CRM tools, and studied internet usage among various demographic showed CRM facilitated internet and social media marketing effectiveness. Therefore, the results confirmed that

college-aged individuals spend considerably more time online than any other demographic, by both age and career level (Tileaga, Nitu, & Nitu, 2014, p. 122). Their study supports internet marketing theory options in a college context substituting college selection for consumer choice or purchase.. Identifying demographic groups and connecting the usefulness of CRM towards their internet use will be one aspect of the present study.

Another researcher to examine an internet marketing theory, along with a social media marketing theory, both supported by CRM, is Trainor, who worked with several colleagues including Agnihotri, cited previously. They published an empirical study utilizing a structural equation modeling approach to indicate the positive impact of social media use by numerical analyses that showed higher internet and social media use in younger individuals compared to those of older generations; especially extensive is use among college students (Trainor et al., 2014). Then they examined the positive impacts of CRM on marketing (Trainor et al., 2014), which will supports this current research as well by demonstrating the usefulness of record-keeping of internet marketing views. Indeed, Vander Schee, and his colleagues have shown that tracking views of college Facebook pages, for example, can assist schools in tailoring their marketing efforts to be more effective and to receive more "hits" (Messer et. al., 2015). Both of these studies relate to proposition four.

In sum, the demographics and needs of the target market inform what theories to consider for marketing effectiveness. For the purposes of this study, where the target is college-bound students, three sources have been selected as relevant for further study: internet-based marketing, social media-based marketing, and contacts-based marketing. Theories regarding efficiency of marketing as impacted by use of CRM tools are also considered.

2.6 Internet-Based Marketing

In commercial settings, it is universally accepted that effective marketing will increase consumer contacts, resulting in increased sales, customer loyalty, and higher profits/revenues, often through internet use (Hajli, 2014; Trainor, 2014; *see also* Pardot, 2014). Trainor found that students were influenced by social media and internet use in making consumer decisions. Likewise, the results of Hajli's research showed that internet usage was a prominent factor in decision-making of consumers. Therefore, corporations nationwide and globally, employ internet marketing theories that are designed to contact the largest potential client base, and then to address their needs as swiftly as possible (Karadag, 2015). According to Hajli (2014), businesses often construct new strategies that emphasize both internet and social media functions, and which present diverse opportunities for marketing success, including the following: providing support for clients through social media (Ali, 2011; Ballantine & Stephenson, 2011); making word-of-mouth comments more likely (Chen et al., 2011); helping increase purchasing (Agnihotri et al., 2012). Also strategies may be put in place that helps businesses share information with each other or customers (Lu & Hsiao, 2010) or familiarize uses with brand identity (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012).

This literature indicates that a highly efficient method for colleges, or for anyone seeking business with college-aged customers, is to utilize business marketing theories which enhance internet use. One of the major factors affecting commercial marketing today is the shift in customer behavior. This phenomenon is known as Buyer 2.0 (Borges, 2009), a term indicating consumers who are increasingly researching digital, online (Web 2.0) or channeling across several sources prior to purchase or commitment. In 2014 Acquity Group (an internet sales corporation) discerned through a study that 94% of those considering purchasing goods or services undertake online research before doing so for their own purposes, and more than half employ the internet for at least half of their corporate purchases (Acquity Group, 2014). Specifically relating to tourism marketing, the use of internet research prior to decision-making by potential patrons has been the subject of academic research, indicating use of online sources has steadily risen in recent years (Martin & Woodside, 2011). Web2 buyers have more information than previous generations of purchasers before they contact businesses, and they demand prompt replies that directly respond to their questions or contacts. According to one writer, individuals who utilize social media sites are disappointed with responses that more than a day (Wood, 2014).

These new, better informed potential clients have prompted businesses to step up their internet marketing strategies in the business world. The same theories, giving birth to various internet and social-media related strategies, could be studied and possibly adapted for use by small colleges hoping to reach potential students.

These studies relate to hypotheses one and two concerning use of internet and social media marketing.

2.7 Social Media-based Marketing

Importantly, interaction through social media, whereby individuals with shared values can spread their opinions instantly, whether positive or negative, if favorable, will increase the provider's reputation for trustworthiness.

Companies are aware that social media and the web's social networking is highly popular worldwide, and can use this to their benefit to develop marketing strategies in sync with company values that build trust impact customer' willingness to make purchases online (Hajli, 2014). His study found that trust was important, and contributed to a consumer's intention, but that perceived usefulness was more indicative of social media users' decision-making. This would indicate that use of social media can have a strong impact on successful marketing, especially if that use increases the perceived usefulness of the product (which in the academic instance would translate into positive college experience and post-college prospects). These same marketing techniques have been suggested and proven successful for college settings as well as business and industry (Marek, 2014; *see also* Davis et al., 2014; Hawkins, 2013; Kirk, 2010). Marek's study confirmed that small institutions would benefit from integrated marketing (several forms, including online) and finding their own niche among larger companies, a concept that could apply to college marketing (2014). Hawkins (2013) studied ways to reach more college-bound individuals, and based on her results of what media that age group uses frequently, proposed strategies such as using phone apps to reach younger markets (Hawkins, 2013).

Examples of research providing a basis for inquiry to address hypotheses one and two include that completed by Tileaga, Nitu, & Nitu (2014). Their results determined that college aged individuals rely heavily on social media and internet usage for information. Sashittal & Jassawalla (2015) and Cunningham (2009) also support this type of social-media based marketing, finding that social media was influential in the decision-making behavior of the participants in their studies. In particular, Tileaga et al. (2014) posit social media theories using demographic research whose results confirm that the pre-college and college age sector is particularly susceptible to such marketing (2014). Trainor's research (Trainor, 2014, which found that college aged students rely on social media interaction and content when making consumer choices, reinforces their findings as well. The number of students making college selection choices who rely on social media information and opinions is growing, a trend that can be tested through inquiries of students at small colleges on a specific regional basis through this study. These studies relate to hypotheses one and two concerning use of internet and social media marketing.

2.8 Contacts-based Marketing

Developer of both the enrollment management theory and structured enrollment management theory as they relate to marketing Associate Professor of Marketing at Aurora University Brian Vander Schee advocates an obvious approach for small colleges to encourage students to choose them would be to capitalize on the inherent advantages that small colleges possess over other choices during the recruitment/admissions process, many of these related particularly to personal contacts (Schee, 2010). Increased personal contacts that arise due to the small class size, lower faculty/student ratio, and perception of personal attention that one would expect to be a benefit from attending a small college, if replicated during recruitment, would inure to the institutions benefit. Schee's findings were surprising. Unfortunately, Schee's study revealed that, in many cases, just the opposite was true. Despite the reduced numbers of students to deal with, small college admissions staffs were often slower to respond to inquiries than those of larger institutions, due to lack of resources and fewer employees overseeing comparable work. Schee noted that, in cases where recruitment issues were spread to other employees within the small college, or where an enrollment officer or personal contact specifically tasked to oversee recruitment was appointed, better service was the result (2010). His position aligns with one commonly espoused in the world of business, that consumer choices are influenced by relationships created through contact and connection with marketing or sales personnel (Karadag, 2015; Marek, 2014), both of whom studied small companies and discovered that strategies that emphasize diverse marketing and personal contacts were successful for the majority of their sample populations.

More personal or quicker response for a media-savvy generation through telephone applications (apps) can promote college information sharing and distributing (Hawkins, 2013). This supports the proposition relating to the importance of staff contacts. Indeed, beyond phone applications are the even more personal in-person techniques, which may develop from website or social media leads or elsewhere. Some colleges focus on students within their own community, or capitalize on their regional status and offer planned campus visits for prospective students, an effective marketing tool encouraged by local school districts to inform their students of potential opportunities (Barcinas, 2014; Barnes, 2014). Also, onsite visits to high schools by representatives and alumnae, and feedback to admissions officers from local alumnae on prospective students add the personal touch that Mills (2014) and Shee (2010) both advise in their theories regarding college selection. Smaller organizations often group together in order to benefit from economy-of-scale, and this concept can be used by small colleges. They may group together in cooperative ventures, an idea espoused by Mills, which can support interest in their members through association and occasionally joint-study programs, such as consortiums (2014). For example, in an attempt to remain viable and increase financial stability, Sweet Briar College in Virginia participated with

six other small colleges in such a venture (SBC, 2015), unfortunately without success, as the college recently closed its doors. In any event, leads can be generated and nurtured through use of these specific strategies and techniques, some of which involve close personal contact, rather than interaction online or through automated means.

2.9 Marketing Impacts on College Selection

Thus both business marketing theories and those based on educational constructs form the theoretical framework for this research. The academic purposes, examining the impact of marketing options on college selection, and CRM tools on marketing efficiency, is founded on recent literature testing theories related to both research questions and all four hypotheses. Underlying this research, focusing on marketing options affecting college selection and CRM tools that can improve marketing efficiency, is a body of recent literature suggesting that small colleges are having difficulty competing with other post-secondary options, such as larger, high quality (and better-endowed) universities, trade schools, online schools, the military, or direct employment (Jepsen, Troske, & Coomes, 2014).

Recent marketing steps taken by businesses have recognized the emergence of a more aware consumer, who depends on independent research via the internet or social media to inform decision-making (Pardot, 2014; Ragins & Greco, 2003). This has also shown to translate to an academic setting, which college-aged individuals being among the most avid users of social media and the internet as shown by the demographic results in theoretical studies (Lu & Hsaio, 2010; Tileaga, Nitu, & Nitu, 2014). Just as businesses are adapting to this consumer transformation, small colleges may benefit from developing and implementing innovative marketing techniques that may boost enrollment, enhancing financial stability, and warding off closures that have become a sad fact of the American academic landscape even within this year (MacDonald, 2014; Szotak, 2015).

Thus, current literature suggests that various marketing options will impact college selection. Many on-campus ideas that can be used in marketing efforts include enhances student opportunities, both in the classroom and living conditions (Hawkins, 2013), establishing sports teams that both attract attention (marketing) and can produce revenue (Mills, 2014), and offering adequate faculty compensation to foster a better attitude that would trickle down to students and their families and friends (Chabotar, 2010). Basically, however, the concepts for maintaining or increasing financial stability that result from college selection are dependent, in large amount, on marketing. Unless students are aware of what a small college has to offer, information made available through successful marketing, they will be unlikely to consider enrolling in the college, no matter how strong its academics and student lifestyle is. This can be facilitated in a college campus by appropriating and applying business approaches to marketing and customer relationship management, a concept that Pember, Owens and Yaghi found successful (Pember, Owens, & Yaghi, 2014).

2.10 CRM Tools Used with Internet Marketing

Another marketing theory pertinent to the college selection process involves increased internet presence, including social media sources, coupled with Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software tools, studied in context of internet and social media by Tileaga, Nitu, & Nitu (2014) and Trainor (2014) as well as others. These CRM tools manage contacts through a system of tracking, record-keeping and replying to any online inquiries by internet users has been shown to be valuable and improve business operations in many contexts, and might be useful if implemented aggressively by small colleges (Hajli, 2014; Pardot, 2015). By making information available online, such as eye-catching value proposals (which are compact yet informative online advertisements) (*see* Laja, 2015) or viable alumnae magazines (Hawkins, 2013), small colleges can create an identity underscoring the concept of perceived usefulness (PU), which is an essential first impression factor in online contact, according to studies by Hajli (2014). His research confirms that, once a consumer attention is caught, service that is prompt and builds trust will lead to positive outcomes in consumer decision-making. In addition, enhancing online advertising by putting into effect innovative products as CRM software and market automation tools, schools will have a greater capacity to identify or produce leads, which, to quote Marketo (a leading CRM developer) constitutes the initial marketing experience "of stimulating and capturing interest in a product or service for the purpose of developing sales pipeline" (Marketo, 2014). Leads in business are prospective clients; in education they are prospective students. CRM has proven to enhance internet marketing/social media in many contexts in studies, including one undertaken recently by Trainor with over 300 participants, (Trainor et al. 2014).

CRM also functions in the realm of lead scoring, the business practice of assessing the quantity of time that should be devoted to specific leads. Demonstrating the potential impact that lead scoring can provide on revenue performance, in the survey "Lead Scoring and Prioritization: The Path to Higher Conversion" of Aberdeen

Group (Michiels, 2008), researchers discovered that 80% of businesses who are ranked highest in their fields utilize lead scoring to effect lead qualification process. These are just some of the steps that small colleges could borrow from consumer industries, specifically regarding online marketing, that might be effective in increasing their application numbers/enrollment base and potential number of students who matriculate.

2.11 Summary

Recent literature indicates a concern for the financial stability of small colleges that warrants study (Chabotar, 2010; McDonald, 2014; Mills, 2014). The purpose of this study is to examine marketing options through various theories that impact college selection, or make marketing more effective. Review shows that tuition-dependent small colleges are facing survival issues stemming from inability to garner sufficient enrollment to generate adequate revenue (Chabotar, 2010; McDonald, 2014), and some are ceasing operations for this reason (Szkotak, 2015).

Small colleges present a distinct alternative to larger institutions, technical/vocational schools, online universities, the military and other post-secondary options including immediate employment (Jepsen, Troske, & Coomes, 2014; Oakley, 2005). These other options, however, present a challenge to small colleges who by definition have fewer than 1000 students, often endowments under $1 million (McDonald, 2014), and must rely on tuition to meet up to 70% of their operating expenses (Chabotar, 2010). Tuition is generated by enrollment, and enrollment can only increase if prospective students are aware of the opportunities available at a particular institution. Therefore, a review of current literature indicates that innovative marketing techniques and strategies currently employed successfully in business settings (Karadag, 2015; Marek, 2014) may be necessary and should be explored in order to attract consumers (prospective students) who may then choose to enroll in a small college. Articles also stress the importance of the internet, social media (Hajli, 2014) and service orientation (Schee, 2010) for small colleges seeking to enhance their financial stability through marketing designed to increase enrollment. Consumer relationship software that can relieve college personnel of busywork and allow more time for lead nurturing also proves to be a fruitful area of research (Gleansight, 2010).

As set forth in the purpose and problem statement above, there is a need for this research prompted by current events and ample literature that exists that support the pursuit of this research without pre-empting it, its underlying purpose, and the questions presented herein. These will be used as a basis for a study utilizing qualitative design to explore the validity of four propositions and alternative derived from both the purpose and the questions:

Proposition 1: Internet marketing options positively affect college selection.

Proposition 2: Social media use positively affects college selection.

Proposition 3: Staff contacts with prospective students positively affect college selection.

Proposition 4: Use of Consumer Relationship Management CRM) positively affects college marketing efficiency.

The third section of this proposal will present the methodology to be used for data collection and analysis in this study. As stated above, the methodology of this study will follow a qualitative design involving interviews of current and former administration or faculty from small colleges, and questionnaires answered by current small college students, all conducted within the Eastern region (New England/Mid-Atlantic) of the United States.

3. Research Method

The researcher has chosen a qualitative design as the optimal approach to this problem and its purpose. Small colleges today face a problem. They must determine ways to market themselves and increase enrollment in order to compete with other post-high school option. Small colleges, with an enrollment of fewer than 1000 students (Singh, 2010), currently are at a crossroads concerning their financial stability. They often lack resources to meet operating costs (Hicks et al., 2014; Mills, 2014), which challenges this financial stability in the context of competing with a host of other post-secondary options that are proving attractive to modern students: community college programs, online programs, technical or specific professional training, the military, larger institutions, or direct entry into the job market (Keller, 2014). Thus this study was prompted by the risk facing small colleges, including among others the Gibbs Division, as described to the researcher in a personal interview (Cipolla, personal communication, March 4, 2010). Cipolla was an administrator at this New Jersey college group which closed several years ago. Without this study, the potential success of applying certain marketing theories and practices to assist small colleges attract more students to assist with defraying expenses and remaining solvent, will be untested, especially for colleges in the area of study (Mid-Atlantic United States).

Thus, those affected most by this study are those interested in marketing theories for small colleges unable to sustain enrollment and meet costs that are closing (Bidwell, 2015; McDonald, 2014). With enrollment being a main revenue source for such schools, numbers must be maximized if small colleges are to remain viable and sustainable. Methods to increase enrollment are afforded through new and innovative marketing techniques and strategies, some borrowed from the world of commerce, including Customer Relationship Management software and automation tools (Hart, 2006), and recognition of a change in consumer trends that include reliance on the internet and social media (Hawkins, 2013; Tileaga, Nitu, & Nitu, 2014). Schee (2010, 2014) has written several recent scholarly articles concerning the issues raised in this dissertation, but not in this context. This is a problem worthy of further academic research and review.

The purpose of the proposed qualitative case study, which incorporates elements of transcendental phenomenology and thematic analysis, is to examine the impact of marketing options on college selection, and CRM tools on marketing efficiency, using selected theories of marketing options and efficiency. Therefore, the research will focus on theories that involve both marketing options and efficiency, and how they relate to specific small colleges in the New England/Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, in order to elicit information that will assist in ascertaining impacts of marketing options on small college selection, and analyzing marketing approaches that attract students. Because as the literature suggests, small colleges appear to be in danger of closing due to high operating costs, increasingly successful competition, and insufficient enrollment, a marketing strategy to help gain and keep students would contribute to effective marketing options for building small colleges. Such options will be explored in the context of examining theories related to college selection, developing a workforce educational partnership with the community, implementing efficient, CRM-supported internet marketing, including social media, while maintaining a quality small college operation.

This study will be undertaken through qualitative research using the tools of both interviews and questionnaires to elicit information pertinent to the problem, purpose and questions posed herein. Students currently enrolled in a small college setting in the Eastern region (New England/Mid-Atlantic) of the United States will provide the population sample for questionnaires. Current or former administrators or staff from small colleges in the same geographic region will also contribute their perceptions via interviews. Both groups will address issues of the impact of marketing on college selection, and the school officials can also shed light on the effect of enrollment on the financial condition of small colleges within the framework of their own experiences. Marketing theories which have been studied in various contexts promulgating strategies, characteristics, or techniques that may be employed to positively impact college selection will be identified or developed that have implications on a wider scale than just the particular institutions or persons involved in this study, but could inform those similarly situated in other locales as well as to apply these theoretical approaches to address this very real problem. The academic questions posed herein have not been addressed in this specific context, making this research both new and informative.

The purpose of the proposed qualitative study is to examine the impact of marketing options on college selection, and CRM tools on marketing efficiency, using selected theories of marketing options and efficiency. This is timely due to the possibility that small colleges can no longer maintain financial stability unless they employ improved such marketing techniques that stimulate enrollment. By conducting this research qualitatively through questionnaires and interviews that require participants to draw upon their own experiences to respond, and by exploring innovative marketing theories that promote college selection favorable to the marketing college, the researcher intends to address the research questions posed and answer each proposition set, either supporting or disproving it or the alternative. The research questions and their correlated proposition sets will direct the nature of the research tools and specific inquiries in this qualitative study.

Qualitative methods will be used in this study. Qualitative research has advantages over quantitative methods that render it preferable for the purposes of achieving the objectives of this research study (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research allows for experiential recounting, not the empirical data-gathering of quantitative studies. In addition, the research design used herein is modeled with the intention of removing researcher bias and presented theoretically and thematically to allow categorization and generalization. Thus, in the case of this research study, the advantages of a qualitative design outweigh those of a quantitative design. Therefore, the study shall be conducted using a qualitative design.

This selected methodology will be explained in detail. Specifics of the procedure will then be introduced, including tools of information gathering (interviews and questionnaires and protocols attaching to each); means of participant selection and gathering, in alignment with expert practices (Polkinghorne, 2014; Van Dessel, 2013); and means of analysis (Creswell, 2013). The research, being qualitative, will be guided by the research questions and propositions, developed in conjunction with the problem, purpose statement, and theoretical framework:

3.1 Research Method and Design

Objectivity is optimal in all research. Among qualitative methods, there is one form of qualitative design that eliminates, to the extent possible, researcher bias: transcendental phenomenology. This is an unusual qualitative type of methodology that has influenced content analysis of data tremendously. The following is an in-depth explanation of how qualitative research that incorporates transcendental phenomenology elements can be undertaken eliminating researcher bias, which desirable in any study. The purpose of going into so much depth about this method, which will be used in formulating the questions but only serve as a compliment to the thematic data analysis, both of which are qualitative methods, is to underscore the extent to which it is possible for qualitative research methods to be objective.

When conducting scholastic research, questioning and understanding are inextricably linked. When conducting that research from a context of phenomenology in general, the underlying paradox is reaching the underlying essence of any issue without the taint of researcher bias. German philosopher Edmund Husserl incorporated these concepts, but diverged from traditional research methods, including other forms of phenomenology, in his development of the philosophical and methodological tenets known as transcendental phenomenology.

Since Husserl's work is based on phenomenology in general, it does not employ scientific experiment or quantitative analysis to discern insight (Husserl, 1931). Rather, it relies on qualitative revelations uncovered by narrative techniques, especially interviews and questionnaires such as those proposed in this study. Transcendental phenomenology, however, transgresses what is possible in traditional narrative research, as delineated by Creswell (2006). According to Creswell, qualitative research is well-suited to narrative information-gathering practices. Under his formulation, narrative is the method to obtain data from the participant (subjective information) and the phenomenon is the object of the study (objective information).

Whereas traditional narrative research can focus on one individual or a limited number of individuals, transcendental phenomenology usually involves as subjects a group of individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon, in this case association with small colleges. Transcendental phenomenology reveals an object or concept's essence without involving the researcher's preconceived notions. Thus qualitative research, approached using the transcendental phenomenology methodology, provides for a result that transcends the narrative and analysis through dismantling, accomplished by two major processes or functions inherent in Husserl's philosophy: Epoché and bracketing.

These two processes are crucial to transcendental phenomenology. Epoché is Greek for "to put away" or "refrain from." Once the researcher gathers information, he or she employs bracketing. It also involves setting aside presuppositions, judgments, and biases, but doing so through a process known as reduction. The transcendental phenomenologist takes in information from participants mostly in narrative form, in this study through interviews or questionnaires. Tillman explains that bracketing involves temporary suspension in the belief that phenomenon being explored exist outside the research. Thus, all attention is drawn to the essential trait or essence of the experience, without interference from beliefs of existence or perceptions (1967). The residue left after bracketing or reduction is that primordial, pre-structured, pre-judgmental essence of the phenomenon, i.e., the pure form of being (Crowell, 2002).

It is through epoché and bracketing that transcendental phenomenology is able to surpass other forms of qualitative research in producing results concerning the true essence of the phenomenon being studied.

In sum, transcendental phenomenology results in a product that evolves from narrative-type input. It will not be replicable as empiric research may be. In this study, data analysis will be performed by thematic analysis, which is very close to Husserl's clustering concept. The point is to avoid researcher bias.

A blend of Creswell's narrative option and Husserl's transcendental phenomenology will be used for data collection, to achieve maximum objectivity, using interviews and questionnaires. Questions will be formulated with as little bias as possible; to approach the stage of epoché that Husserl believes is necessary. Basic narrative techniques will be utilized, but results tabulated in a manner utilizing thematic analysis, which is more in accord with Husserl's clustering that analytic analysis. Most prevalent answers will be ascertained through open coding and given weight due to that fact alone. Yet for practical reasons, questionnaires and interviews will be distributed on a wider scale than Polkinghorne describes, more in sync with Creswell's approach, with thematic analysis, resembling clustering in that it selects repeated words and phrases, and is as bias-free as possible, will be utilized. This is not a case study, because the researcher will include inquiries to personnel and students at several institutions. This study is of the qualitative genre, using interviews (narrative) and questionnaires; results will be analyzed by bracketing (transcendental phenomenology) and thematic analysis. Thus this study is qualitative, but its tools for gathering information and analysis represent a hybrid drawing from narrative,

thematic, and transcendental phenomenology methods to achieve the most thorough and unbiased results possible.

3.2 Population

The population group of study for both interviews and questionnaires will be derived from the Eastern/Mid-Atlantic region of the country because this is the region where the researcher works and has contacts, and one that has not been studied before for these issues at the small college level.

3.3 Sample

The researcher will interview twenty current and former small college administrators and staff from several different schools in accordance with appropriate size of interview pool given by Polkinghorne, who maintains that interview sizes of between five and twenty-five are acceptable for qualitative academic research (Polkinghorne, 2013); The people selected for this study will be interviewed in person to facilitate openness and rapport with the researcher. If their schedules do not permit personal meetings, however, they will be interviewed using the same questions by telephone. The researcher has contact information for former employees that were past colleagues, and can obtain information from current employees online. As far as the questionnaire portion goes, the researcher will distribute questionnaires to 400 students, a number believed representative and reasonably studied by the researcher and supported as academically sufficient by Van Dessel, using a method to insure 95% level of confidence and account for margin of error(Van Dessel, 2013), who are presently enrolled in small colleges. Actually, Van Dessel's method suggests fewer than 400 participants in a study of this size, so the researcher is exceeding her required number of participants. According to questionnaire preparers, there are ideal numbers to use given the total population and response rate. The questions asked these students will involve marketing options in line with theories presented and student characteristics or needs within a small college environment that could increase enrollment will be presented to the sample, thereby indicating those marketing theories that positively impact college selection. This will be significant on a theoretical level to address the issue of small college selection and innovative marketing.

3.4 Materials/Instruments

The researcher will use two methods of inquiry in this study. The first is interviews and the second is questionnaires. In the interview portion of the study, the researcher will speak with 20 consciously-selected administrators and faculty; in the questionnaire portion, the researcher will gather responses from students at selected institutions regarding small college selection, and marketing strategies. The interview questions, randomly distributed, are located in Appendix A. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix B. Selected inquiries drawn from the research questions and hypotheses, which can be viewed in the appendices, constitute the bases of both these instruments.

The purpose is to collect meaningful data from participants and ensure saturation (Lane & Arnold, 2011). Saturation occurs when data collected from participants becomes redundant and bringing new participants will add nothing new (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013), which should be achieved via Polkinghorne's suggested standards (Polkinghorne, 2013) and careful selection of interviewees. Interviews with current administrators and staff at small colleges will add up to date information about these issues. These persons meet experiential criteria necessary for insightful qualitative research. Administrators, such as Chief Executive and Financial Officers integrate the strategic and operational levels within the organization (Balogun & Johnson, 2004) because the visions and goals of the strategic levels of directors and deans in a college environment often encounter daily problems operationally in the business front lines, such as admissions, career services and financial aid. In addition, the researcher will include historical data on how the colleges, such as the Gibbs College Division experienced changing conditions over a period of years yet failed to adapt or succeed and eventually closed. Because of the changes over the years, Gibbs failed to market their programs appropriately and enrollment suffered.

4. Data Collection, Processing and Analysis

There will be preliminary information contained in a protocol presented to interview participants (administration, faculty and staff at selected small colleges) found in Appendix A. The researcher also has developed a series of questions and prompts in order to elicit information from those interviewed specifically to respond to the respective hypotheses. The areas of marketing theory upon which this research is founded will be asked in individually: internet, social media, staff contact. In addition, the interviewees will be asked about their familiarity with CRM, whether or not their college utilizes it, and whether or not they believe it is or would be beneficial.

Face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews are spontaneous events that can lead in the direction of the interviewee's expertise. For this reason, the questions and probes are open-ended and can be followed up with more specific inquiries. The interview questions are listed in Appendix B.

Using small colleges in New England and the Mid-Atlantic region, an unstudied area for this type of study, the researcher will administer interviews to 25 administrators and staff members. These will be current or past officials from such small colleges. This particular sample should be adequate; according to methodologists such as Polkinghorne (1989), for this type of interview narrative research to be valid an interview pool or sample from 5-25 is considered sufficiently reliable, if the individuals have direct experience that they can recall and articulate (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

In order to gather insight into enrollment choices and how they are impacted by marketing, the researcher will administer questionnaires (including multiple choice and open-ended questions) to 400 students (based on Van Dessel's system explained previously and expounded upon later) currently enrolled in a small college setting in the geographic region of New England/Mid-Atlantic United States. The students will be asked to rate the level of influence from 1 (least) to 5 (most) for each marketing option tied to a specific theory: internet marketing per Marek and others, social media marketing per Agnihotri et al. (2012), and of Lu & Hsaio (2010) and others, staff contacts per Schee (2010), and others, as discussed in the literature review and theoretical framework.

The form prepared will be administered to current students at selected small colleges on the Eastern seaboard will focus on questions that respond to the propositions. The first question has ranged answers concerning how students learned about or gained further information about their college prior to making the decision to attend. There is an open-ended question if the students care to elaborate. Other questions are designed to find supporting information about factors influencing enrollment at small colleges, to help develop responses to all of the hypotheses. These questionnaires are located at Appendix B of this document.

The researcher will contact students from two small colleges, gathering 200 questionnaires from each college to total 400. For non-empirical research to be valid, Polkinghorne pointed out that tools of information gathering must be reliable (measure what it intends to or asks what it intends to with consistent results), and that answers that are similar are not the result of chance (Polkinghorne, 475). Researcher Giorgi based requirements for qualitative study on more quantitative-type views: content, criterion and construct (Giorgi, 2002). Validity through question review, or judgement of the responders during the interview due to phrasing, word choice, posture, and demeanor (Shank, 2006) are also useful. One description of this method is "thick description," which goes to the root of the interviewee's intention, not just what he or she says upfront (Ponterotto, 2006). As indicated by Johnson (1997), a qualitative researcher can consider ideas and explanations studying research participants by using investigator triangulation.

5. Assumptions

Several assumptions contributed to the foundation of this descriptive qualitative study. The first assumption was that participants would be willing to respond to the survey questions honestly, meaningfully and based on their experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The aim of any qualitative study is to collect meaningful data from participants and ensure saturation (Lane & Arnold, 2011). Saturation occurs when data collected from participants becomes redundant and bringing new participants will add nothing new (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013).

The sampling process in this study will focus on the quality of participants who have to show an understanding of the issue understudy due to their selection (intentional for interviews/random with criteria for questionnaires) (Jones et al., 2006). The participants in this study will have to meet a specific set of criteria because of the nature of this study that requires this kind of purposeful sampling strategy—connection to small colleges (Schumacher & McMillian, 1993). Protocols ensure that the participants know they have the option to decline or participate voluntarily in this study, and must to take part.

The second assumption was that the study sample of 20 interviewees drawn from a pool of administrators and staff at small colleges in the geographic region will be representative of their class, in order that this intervention may be successfully replicated or used as to develop information elsewhere. The third assumption was that participants in the study engaged in sufficient or adequate contact with the topic to answer meaningfully (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

6. Limitations

The limitations of the study include the following. First, the implementation of the study's findings and the transferability of the study are limited to college personnel that have similar characteristics to the ones examined

in this study. Second, some of the participants did not know the researcher prior to this study, which can lead to incomplete information gathering due to lack of familiarity. During the interviews, the researcher will be able to ask follow-up questions as needed to give participants an opportunity to elaborate and engage in further discussions. Participants will be urged to provide as much information as possible in their responses. Since the choice of samples in qualitative studies is usually purposeful (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006), knowing some of the interviewees ahead of time will facilitate openness. Confidentiality and anonymity, as well as disclosure of academic purpose will also facilitate this aim Salkind (2008) noted that researchers could easily ensure anonymity if the records and data collected are not linked with names and maintain confidentiality when anything that is learned about the participant is held in the strictest confidence.

7. Delimitations

The delimitations, or the inherently built-in components of the study that affect and have an impact upon its application, include the following. First, the participants included persons associated with four small colleges in a specific geographic area, which means that the viewpoints of the participants were the only information used to represent those of any teachers, staff, administrators or students and others who deal with such small colleges in similar circumstances. Second, to facilitate the best representation possible, the researcher will be able to ask participants follow-up questions to the interview, and include an open-ended question section in the questionnaire, to allow participants to clarify their answers and provide complete information from that available.

8. Ethical Assurances

This study will commence only after a permission to do so will have been obtained from the relevant college authority or student. Besides, the researcher will first ensure that the study will comply with any possible or operational, legal and statutory provisions regarding the collection, handling and disposal of data. It is further important to note that the consent of the respondents and the schools involved will be sought before anyone will participate in the study. No one will be forced to participate in the study; every respondent will asked to participate in the study out of his or her own free will. In relation to the foregoing fact, the respondents will be assured that they will be able to stop their participation in the study at any point without fear of being admonished. However, they will be requested to participate fully if possible and not abandon their portion mid-stream. The researcher will also explain to the respondents the primary purpose of the study and guarantee them that the data will only be used for such a purpose. After the completion of this research study, the data will be safety kept or a period of three months and thereafter be destroyed.

At times there may be ethical concerns regarding whether or not subjects in studies respond truthfully or behave naturally. The very fact that one is participating in a study can influence behavior or responses (such as enhancing tests results is known as the "Hawthorne Effect" (Pearson, 1997). In qualitative studies, as opposed to empirical research, this can be controlled because there are no variables to manipulate: the data gathered through narrative means or inquiries and variables occur naturally (Creswell, 2003). The data collection process will take into account the social conditions, relationships, and situational considerations of middle management (Creswell, 2003).

9. Summary

The proposed study will provide an in-depth analysis, using literature and qualitative research, to examine the relationship of five theories concerning marketing as it relates to small college selection and marketing efficiency through use of CRM. Two research questions, in turn, are the basis for four correlating hypotheses, presented in sets with alternative forms, which will be proven or disproven by the study. The literature review provides scholarly, academic support for each question, which will be addressed directly through interviews with approximately 20 administrators, faculty and staff from small colleges as well as questionnaires administered to 400 current students from small colleges. The colleges will be from the Eastern seaboard of the United States, and are not among those found in current literature regarding this issue. Thus this is new information and analysis.

More specifically, a qualitative study uses a specific method of collecting data and explores in depth a transaction, a process, and an activity over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2003). The format used by the proposed qualitative case study is best to research theories regarding marketing at small colleges, some of which are closing because of low enrollment and financial difficulties, and how improving such marketing might affect college selection and enrollment. The proposed qualitative study will use interviews and questionnaires to question college personnel and students to answer as the research questions. Particular attention will be given to selected marketing theories and their impact on enrollment decisions. The geographic area from which

participants will be drawn is the Eastern region (New England/Mid-Atlantic) of the United States. The participants in the research will be chosen due to their current or past association with small colleges.

Since the study will utilize qualitative methods, the data to be obtained shall be analyzed qualitatively, in which case a content analysis method, similar to clustering in transcendental phenomenology, will be utilized. The first step will involve the process of data transcription; it is during this procedure that the data obtained through questionnaires and interviews will be harmonized to make the analysis process to be easier. Then, an induction approach to thematic analysis will be applied during the initial stages of analysis, during which major issues will be noted as they arise within the texts. After the first reading, a second reading of the texts will be done to enhance a micro-analysis of the collected data. During the process, open coding will be done by identifying the major themes that will count toward the achievement of the research study objectives.

The next step will involve sorting of items of research interests into content-based proto-themes. This step entails the categorization of content themes into groups of common topics related to the subject of the study. The content themes will then be examined with a view to attempting initial definitions of those themes as they appear within the data. This will mean trawling back through the data to check how different themes will have been defined and also to consider alternative redefinitions where necessary.

The last step in the data analysis process will involve the construction of the final form for every theme that will have been identified. The coding of each theme will then be finalized after which it will be reported according to its frequencies within the data. This will conclude the mixed methods approach to analyzing data qualitatively collected through interviews and questionnaires.

In sum, two instruments tied to research questions and propositions will yield information related to marketing efficiency at small colleges. This research can be the springboard or catalyst for further academic research concerning marketing efficacy and use of the internet and internet-related software to enhance college recruiting efforts in ways discussed here or otherwise posited.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol and Questions

Preliminary Information Presented at Interview:

> *Thank you for participating in this study. I will record or tape our conversation, and only I will have access to this information, for my own academic research purposes. Everything will be destroyed within an allotted time after my study is complete. I am asking that you sign a consent form as well acknowledging that you are participating voluntarily and may discontinue the interview at any time. I do not expect this to take more than an hour.*
>
> *My research concerns marketing (options that affect college selection or enrollment) at small colleges. You have been selected due to your current or past role as an administrator, staff member, or faculty at a small college. The primary questions and hypotheses I will address deal with these issues:*
>
> ***What is the effect of marketing options on college selection?***
>
> DoInternet marketing options positively affect college selection?
>
> Does Social media use positively affects college selection?
>
> Do Staff contacts with prospective students positively affect college selection?
>
> ***What are the effects of Consumer Relationship Management tools on college marketing efficiency?***
>
> Does use of Consumer Relationship Management CRM) positively affects college marketing efficiency
>
> **Please keep these questions in mind as you frame your answers and responses during this interview.**
>
> **Thank you for your participation!**

Sample Inquiries for Administrators/Faculty/Staff (these will be administered in person (preferably), via telephone or through written questionnaire):

> **A. Interviewee Background/experience**
>
> What is/was your position?
>
> How many students are/were enrolled at your institution?
>
> How long have you been/were you employed there?
>
> Briefly describe your role (office, committee, classroom, etc.) relating to students.
>
> How are/were you involved in recruiting students? Discuss.
>
> Did/do you have contact with applicants? Discuss.
>
> 1. In your experience, is internet marketing used by your college?
>
> In what ways?
>
> How effective do you believe it is on influencing college selection?
>
> Discuss.
>
> 2. In your experience, is social media marketing used by your college?
>
> In what ways?
>
> How effective do you believe it is on influencing college selection?
>
> Discuss.
>
> 3. In your experience, have you had pre-admission contacts with students? Describe.
>
> 4. Does your school designate a pre-admission staff contact for prospective students? What do you believe the effect of doing this would be on influencing college selection? Discuss.
>
> 5. Are you familiar with Customer Relations Management (CRM) software tools and their use? 6. In your experience, does your institution use CRM to keep track of prospects, inquiries and leads? If so, discuss. If not, do you think it should? Discuss.

Post Interview or Questionnaire Comments and/or Observations

(Bracketing):

Appendix B

Questionnaire Protocol and Questions

DATE: _____

PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS REGARDING IMPACT OF ENROLLMENT

AT SMALL COLLEGES

Dear Participant:

As a Ph.D. candidate, I am seeking information that will assist me in examining marketing theories that affect college selection.

You have been asked to participate due to your affiliation/enrollment with a small college, and I am asking you to take time to answer the following questions relating to your experience in this area. This is a voluntary, confidential questionnaire.

I sincerely appreciate your taking the time to answer these questions to the best of your ability and ask you return the completed questionnaire to me.

Thank you very much in advance for your participation!

Sincerely,

_____

Researcher

Questionnaires for Current Small College Students

Grade in School: _____ Gender: _____ Age: _____

1. Please rate from 1 (least) to 5 (most) the effect the following marketing options had on your college selection:

Internet Sources: 1   2   3   4   5

Social Media: 1   2   3   4   5

Word of Mouth: 1   2   3   4   5

Personal Contacts with College: 1   2   3   4   5

Conventional Media: 1   2   3   4   5

2. Please rate from 1 (least) to 5 (most) the effect of other factors on your college selection:

Location: 1   2   3   4   5

School/class size: 1   2   3   4   5

Cost/availability of financial aid: 1   2   3   4   5

School reputation/academic quality: 1   2   3   4   5

Areas/opportunities for study: 1   2   3   4   5

Friends/relatives/peers: 1   2   3   4   5

Others (describe):

3. Of the schools you considered, rate this school in terms of the following, from 1 (least) to most (5):

Quick response time to inquiries: 1   2   3   4   5

Personal follow-up: 1   2   3   4   5

Accuracy of information received: 1   2   3   4   5

4. In order to assess what type of internet marketing options might be most effective towards reaching you, please rank your personality type?

Extroverted   1   2   3   4   5

Introverted   1   2   3   4   5

5. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding what led you to choose the college that you are attending? Please discuss in detail:

Thank you for your participation!