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Tim Spurrier
University of New England

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Marketing Approaches Used in Independent Schools: Analysis of the Perceived Effectiveness of
Marketing in Hawaii Independent Schools

By

Tim Spurrier

BS Towson University 1982
MA Towson University 1987
MA Central Michigan University 2013

A DISSERTATION

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Tim Spurrier

MARKETING APPROACHES USED IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS: ANALYSIS OF THE
PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF MARKETING IN HAWAII INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined Hawaii independent schools' administrator's perceptions of the effectiveness of marketing, intended message, and the media used to communicate to increase brand awareness and enrollment. Economic and competitive pressures have created the necessity for independent schools to employ marketing plans and strategies to distinguish the schools from their competitors and influence enrollment management. Hawaii independent schools are dominated by the reputation of four large schools in the Honolulu area, which has produced pressure on smaller schools to create a niche in the market. This study produced data from parents of enrolling students concerning the school's attributes and marketing tools that effectively influenced their decision to enroll their child. The motivation behind this study was to produce research to assist school leaders as they face the challenges to remain viable while enrollment trends are not encouraging.

Incorporating Fishbein's Multi-Attribute Theory to guide the framework for the research allowed for questions to be designed to determine school administrators' and parents' perceptions about the message the school creates by determining desirable attributes. In addition to determining the attributes that frame a school's brand, this study examined the marketing methods that were employed to create the consumer action of enrollment. Through surveys distributed to Hawaii independent schools inquiring to administrators about their perception of

marketing and one-to-one interviews with eleven small school administrators and parents, the study produced data that can be useful when creating a strategy. The significant finding from this study was that school leaders and parents both responded that Relationship Marketing produced a stronger awareness of a school's attributes and had a positive influence on enrollment. The relationship with a school was produced by positive and purposeful word of mouth, open houses, events, personal tours, and social media. While enrollment causation is difficult to attribute to one factor, there is substantial evidence that there is an association between incorporating a relationship marketing strategy and enrollment. The data in this study supported the perception by administrators that a robust marketing strategy could provide schools with tools to contend in a competitive market.

University of New England

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Educational Leadership

This dissertation was presented
by

Tim Spurrier

It was presented on

August 1, 2018

and approved by:

Michelle Collay, Ph.D., Lead Advisor
University of New England

Brianna Parsons, Ed.D., Secondary Advisor
University of New England

Margaret Friedman Ph.D., Affiliated Committee Member
Chaminade University

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Independent schools have had a historical role in educating students throughout the world. Economic pressures and school competition, at various times, have threatened the sustainability of independent schools. This study examines the marketing approaches used by Hawaii Independent Schools (PK-12) and what the school's administration and consumers perceive to be the effectiveness of their marketing techniques and its impact on enrollment.

Hawaii has a thriving and competitive independent school climate, which requires marketing strategies to attract parents to enroll their children in a particular school. It is a common practice that independent schools create marketing strategies which they believe will have an impact on enrollment. The goal of marketing is to address the characteristics of a product or organization that are desired by a consumer (Drucker, 2014; Kotler, 2009). In the case of an independent school, the use of specific marketing strategies is intended to create brand recognition and instill confidence that the attributes of an organization create an action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Therefore, independent schools create marketing strategies which they believe will influence the attitude of a stakeholder and create value which will result in enrollment increases in their school.

The goal of this study was to produce qualitative data that examines and identifies marketing messages and media, which effectively influence enrollment growth of independent schools in Hawaii. A survey designed to identify the perceived effectiveness of specific marketing and branding efforts was distributed to all executive, administrative leaders in the 92 Hawaii Association of Independent Schools (HAIS). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrators from eleven small HAIS schools to enhance and add depth to the survey

data. In addition to the administrator's interview, one newly enrolled student's parent from each of the participating schools took part in a one-on-one interview. The participating schools selected a parent to take part in the interview. The selection of small independent schools is based on the market pressures they face distinguishing their school from other schools of similar size and tuition in Hawaii. Small schools of fewer than 300 students account for 81% of independent schools in Hawaii statewide. Hawaii is a unique market as evidenced by data provided by the National Association of Independent schools which reported in 2012 that 62% of schools on the mainland United States have a student population over 300 students (Demirbag, 2014). Small schools are often the most vulnerable to fluctuations in enrollment and finances (Demirbag, 2014; Lawrence, Bingler, Diamond, Hill, Hoffman, Howley, & Washor, 2002). Therefore, the incorporation of effective marketing techniques in small Hawaii independent schools is critical to enhancing enrollment and ultimately increasing the chance for economic sustainability.

This study looks at three areas of marketing that influence enrollment in Hawaii independent schools. The first area is the marketing message and media, administrators perceive to be effective, followed by the influence of specific techniques parents identify which influences enrollment, and finally, the action taken by the parent regarding enrollment. The first area studied is the marketing message and media administrators at independent schools in Hawaii perceive to be the most impactful in connection to increasing enrollment. The internal perception by administrators of the success of specific marketing techniques influences their message and enrollment strategies. Marketing budgets and enrollment strategies are often set on perception, rather than data (Oplatka, 2007).

The second area this study focuses on is the attitudes of prospective parents of enrolling students and the marketing techniques they say influence their decision to either enroll their child or select another option. This information was obtained from the data each school collects in their admissions packet, which commonly asks, "How did you hear about us?" Specific enrollment marketing techniques which are commonly cited by parents such as, word of mouth, social media, print advertisement, radio and television advertisements, open house events, and school tours, are being examined through the lens of Fishbein's Multi-Attribute Model (1977) concerning active influence on a parent's decision to enroll their child in school (Symmonds, 2010). The knowledge function of Fishbein's theory suggests that a consumer's attitude helps to inform their decisions or actions. Marketing research is designed to identify consumer's attitudes and what communication avenues and messages may influence their perception (Drucker, 2014; Kotler, 2009).

The third area of focus is based on the action taken by the enrolling student's parents. The success of a marketing strategy requires an action by a consumer (Drucker, 2014; Kotler, 2009). The determination of attitude in relation to intentions and behaviors will influence the perception of effective marketing techniques (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Therefore, the use of specific marketing messages and media can be identified as having some relationship to creating the action of enrollment of a student and how strong the parents weigh the value of the school for their child. The goal of a school marketing strategy is to increase consumer awareness resulting in enrollment. The marketing plan aims to emphasize the attributes a school offers with a clearly defined mission and the parents place value in the school's offerings enough to enroll their child based on their attitude about the school.

With declining enrollment trends since 2008 and the increased competition from the public sector, it is vital for independent schools to demonstrate that they have value in the marketplace. Attracting attention to a school's attributes through effective marketing allows prospective enrollees the opportunity to weigh their options (Symmonds, 2010). Research shows that enrollment trends depend on the value proposition that stakeholders place in the quality and the differentiated education independent schools can provide (Daughtrey, Hester, & Weatherill, 2016). Independent schools face the challenge of communicating their value proposition and the characteristics that distinguish their school from the competition (Pagano, 2009). Value proposition when choosing an independent school can be defined as the importance some place on the quality of education in regard to the financial obligation (Pagano, 2009). The task for small independent schools is to create a message to potential stakeholders that the school's attributes create value for their child over other independent, charter, or public educational institutions. Research consistently shows that the attributes a school offers create appeal for parents. Parents are looking for personal attention to be given to their child, low student/teacher ratio, access to faculty, academic reputation, safety, and a nurturing environment (Symmonds, 2010). Since these attributes are cited most often as desirable to prospective parents, it is essential that independent schools promote the value of their specific brand to the public.

The economic downturn beginning in 2008, as well as a trend in declining enrollment since the beginning of the 21st Century, has placed pressure on Independent schools (Gilmore & Rush, 2013). The National Center for Education Statistics reported as of 2015, 10 percent of students in the United States attend private schools. As stated previously, parents often value the small class sizes, personal attention, and perceived academic quality when selecting an independent school over a public institution (Symmonds, 2010). Even with the perceived values

held by parents of school-age children concerning independent schools, it is anticipated that private schools will see a drop to 9% of the total school market share by 2021 (Kena, Musu-Gillette, Robinson, Wang, Rathbun, Zhang, & Velez, 2015). Small schools are the most vulnerable regarding enrollment recovery due to limited marketing budgets and often smaller cash reserves (Cheney, 2010).

While there have been other times in history where independent schools in the United States have faced economic pressures, the recession starting in 2008 produced a trend where school choice moved away from private education. Due to economic pressures and a greater selection of school options, small independent schools are more likely to experience challenges with their financial health and maintaining enrollment objectives (Daughtrey, Hester, & Weatherill, 2016). Furthermore, independent schools that did not fare well after the economic downturn in 2008 and experienced a trend where stakeholders viewed tuition costs to be less affordable, found that the attributes of charter schools and home-schools provided better options for their children (Buddin, 2012). As the economy rebounded, the research suggested that independent schools serve consumers who perceive that the value and the quality of the education outweigh tuition costs. Independent schools rely on creating a brand that is worth the money a parent spends when they enroll their child (Gow, 2010).

Private schools date back to the beginning of colonization in the United States. During the colonial times, schools for children and universities were not public schools, but were privately governed institutions (Kennedy, 2016). Independent Schools are often referred to as private schools, because they are run separately from the public-school system. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) was formed in 1962 and is the largest membership organization of non-public schools in the United States. There are currently 1672 NAIS affiliated

schools with 730,425 enrolled students (NAIS, 2016). These numbers do not include private schools with an exclusive affiliation with a religious organization or no relationship to the NAIS membership group.

Hawaii Association of Independent Schools (HAIS) is a local chapter of the NAIS, and the affiliated academic institutions were selected for participation in this study due to their predominance in the Hawaii market. According to the National Association of Independent Schools, 20.4 percent of school-age students attend private school in Hawaii (NAIS, 2014). Forty-one percent of kindergarten to 12th-grade students in Honolulu, Hawaii attend an independent school (Demirbag, 2014). HAIS is a membership organization which represents 92 private schools in Hawaii and 36,977 students in PK-12 grades (HAIS, 2015). The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) is the accrediting body for independent schools in the western region of the United States, including Hawaii. All WASC regionally accredited independent schools are members of the HAIS. Regional accreditation ensures that independent schools meet operational criteria, including a marketing and admissions policy following accepted good practices of WASC (Bennett, 2004). There are only a few independent schools in Hawaii that are not affiliated with the HAIS. This study focuses on Hawaii independent schools with regional accreditation.

Setting

In comparison to other regions in the United States, Honolulu, Hawaii has a relatively diverse population and selection of independent schools. The variation in the size of schools, academic pedagogy, religious affiliation, and cultural influences, allows for a study that creates a representative sample in a competitive marketplace. While Honolulu has a range of independent school offerings, the market has been dominated by large schools with national reputations.

Large schools are defined as over 300 enrolled students for this study. According to the HAIS Enrollment report (2015), Punahou, a K-12 independent school has 3,762 students; Kamehameha K-12 has 3,192 students, I'olani K-12 has 1,890 students, Mid-Pacific Institute K-12 has 1,553 students, and Maryknoll K-12 has 1,362 students. The larger Oahu schools have a 37 percent market share of independent schools in Hawaii (Demirbag, 2014). The larger schools in Honolulu have a profound impact on school choice for prospective students. The reputation of the larger schools and limited enrollment opportunities makes it a necessity for smaller schools to create their own distinct identity by marketing their unique attributes to prospective students and their parents. The market pressures have made it difficult for small schools to maintain or grow enrollment.

Due to pressures caused by the 2008 downturn in the economy and the growth of tuition-free public charter schools, Hawaii independent schools produced distinct brands and created value to remain competitive. Hawaii schools experienced a decrease in enrollment by 8% from 2007 to 2013. That trend changed in 2014/15 when Hawaii independent schools saw an overall increase of 5% (Demirbag, 2014). The increase was the first in enrollment in seven years. These statistics are based on an overall increase of HAIS schools but do not detail the distribution of enrollment gains. It can be speculated that the increase was due to an improving economy, but the overall gains still represent a 3% net loss of enrollment when compared to pre-2007 enrollments. According to the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools Enrollment Report in 2014/15, forty-two Oahu schools reported enrollment remaining the same or saw a slight increase, while 33 schools saw a decrease in students. The most substantial increase in enrollment occurred in the Honolulu district with a 0.7% increase. This district represents the largest population of independent school students in Oahu with 20,288 students. It also

represents the island's more competitive market with 39 of the 75 independent schools located in this district.

As stated previously, the largest private school institutions in the state operate in the Honolulu district. The location is significant because, despite twenty-two schools in the Honolulu district having 300 or fewer students, the larger schools have dominated the marketplace due to academic and social reputation, alumni legacy, and endowment. Neighbor island schools saw an increase of 2.8% in enrollment in 2014/15. All outer islands reported gains in enrollment in 2014/15, where there was an increase of 13.2 % in Molokai. 7.8% in Kauai, 2.7% in Hawaii, and 1.8% in Maui. Thirty-seven out of forty-three independent schools on the outer islands have 300 or fewer students enrolled (Hawaii Association of Independent Schools, 2016).

This study is important because it presents research and analysis of the perceived effectiveness of the marketing message and media employed by schools in Hawaii. Qualitative data was collected and can inform school leaders on how to proceed when planning a marketing strategy with the desired outcome resulting in increased enrollment and brand awareness. With economic and competitive pressures placed on independent schools, in particular, small schools in Hawaii, the findings inform school administrators how to establish a strategy to impact the sustainability and possible growth of their school in the marketplace. The study focuses on a variety of independent schools in Hawaii and surveys administrators and parents as to what they perceive to be the impact on enrollment when using specific marketing tools to create a consumer action. Relevant literature in Relationship Marketing (RM), Transactional Marketing (TM), specific marketing techniques, consumer attitudes, and enrollment trends are the focus of the study to determine what techniques are perceived by school administrators to have the most

significant impact on enrollment. A survey was conducted to determine the administrator's perception and actual effectiveness of the marketing techniques used by the schools about brand awareness, enrollment, and retention. Schools selected to participate in the survey were asked if they collect parents' responses about what marketing techniques were the most effective in attracting them to apply to the school (Hobsons, 2015). Since this is a common question on independent school applications, admission directors could provide this data.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceived effectiveness of using specific marketing and branding strategies to increase retention and enrollment of students in independent schools in Honolulu, Hawaii. The research was conducted by gathering qualitative data on specific marketing messages and media used by Hawaii independent schools through a survey disseminated to school administrators using the HAIS Head of Schools distribution list. The study focuses on a variety of independent schools in Hawaii and surveys administrators and parents as to what they perceive to be the impact on enrollment when using specific marketing tools to create a consumer action. A survey designed from relevant literature in Relationship Marketing (RM), Transactional Marketing (TM), specific marketing techniques, consumer attitudes, and enrollment trends was conducted to determine the administrator's perception and actual effectiveness of the marketing techniques used by the schools concerning brand awareness, enrollment, and retention.

Semi-structured interviews with twelve administrators and twelve parents from small Hawaii independent schools, were performed to add depth to the survey and discussion of the perceived effectiveness of the marketing message and media which they employ. The schools in this study report if they have developed a marketing plan highlighting their unique brand and the

apparent effectiveness measured regarding enrollment. While it may seem obvious that developing a marketing strategy would result in determining a school's specific brand and should result in increased enrollment, this study aimed to give precise data and analysis of the methods used and the observed results of specific marketing techniques. It may not be a given that schools have a well-informed marketing strategy or have developed a recognizable brand.

The Hawaii Association of Independent School members that took part in this study were asked to provide information on how and why they implemented their specific marketing techniques. They also were asked to identify the demographic profile of their customer base and how they reach their potential stakeholders. It is essential to identify how the schools gather information and generate leads. In a previous study published in 2010 by the research group Symmonds and Associates, twenty thousand independent school parents were asked about which marketing techniques expanded their knowledge about the value of their school. In that study, parents cited campus tours, website, print materials, open house, and personal contact, as the most effective marketing techniques (Symmonds, 2010).

Through a marketing strategy schools create and define their unique value proposition to potential students (Daughtrey, Hester, & Weatherill, 2016). Independent schools often struggle with marketing resources and personnel. Small independent schools have struggled to create a market share (Oplatka, 2007). This study analyzed marketing techniques which may prove to be useful in creating value for individual schools. The unique offerings of a small independent school will often go unnoticed unless a marketing strategy is in play and its messaging is tailored to an identified audience. This research allows educational leaders the chance to see how the implementation of specific marketing techniques may influence the attitude of potential stakeholders. Many school staffs hypothesize that when a marketing technique is useful,

enrollment of a student will occur. With economic and competitive pressures placed on independent schools, in particular, small schools in Hawaii, the data informs school administrators how to establish a strategy to impact the sustainability and possible growth of their school in the marketplace.

Problem

The problem guiding the study is that many independent schools' financial revenue comes from tuition, through developing a marketable brand and a detailed marketing strategy to increase enrollment. Independent schools on average rely on 75 percent of their revenue coming from tuition payments (Kena, Musu-Gillette, Robinson, Wang, Rathbun, Zhang, & Velez, 2015). Assumptions by school administrators as to why parents enroll their children in specific schools often occurs without marketing data. School staffs are not often equipped with the knowledge of assessable, quality, marketing techniques when determining enrollment trends.

Often independent schools do not have the means to employ a genuinely clear marketing strategy without professional help from outside sources, causing them to depend on their current school staff (Daughtrey, Hester, & Weatherill, 2016; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004). Many small independent schools informally use Relationship Marketing as one of their strategies to increase stakeholder awareness. The financial aspects of a Relationship Marketing campaign aim to increase enrollment and retention, which often drives the economic success or failure of independent schools in competitive marketplaces, such as Honolulu, Hawaii.

Identifying the effectiveness of the marketing message and media to influence consumer attitudes toward enrollment allows a marketing plan to be constructed addressing the unique branding of independent schools as they face internal and external economic pressures (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown 2004). Much of the research in the marketing of schools has focused on

enrollment and retention at the university level. There is a deficiency in research addressing marketing techniques in independent schools and its relationship to influencing enrollment and ultimately economic sustainability.

Questions

The research questions are guided through the lens of Fishbein's Multi-Attribute Theory (1997).

What marketing message and media, if any, is used in a school's strategic marketing plan that can be perceived by administrators and prospective parents as effectively influencing consumer attitude toward a school's brand?

What marketing message and media used by Hawaii independent schools are perceived by the school's administration to be the most effective for increasing enrollment?

What were the marketing messages and media cited by parents in making their decision to select an independent school in Hawaii?

Conceptual Framework

The study is guided primarily by the theories of attitude and Fishbein's Multi-Attribute Model (1977). These concepts assume that attitudes are influenced by attributes presented in a manner that creates value for a consumer. Fishbein's theory suggested that attitude affects intention and leads to an action or behavior. The strength that the attribute has on an attitude can be measured by the action it produces. Behaviors may be predicted through the collection of data on the school administrator's perceived view of the effectiveness of specific marketing strategies aimed at creating value for prospective parents of students. Attitudes can be identified and consumer intentions can be determined, which should result in an action. In the case of parents considering an independent school, the theory proposes that the parent has an attitude about the

school and an effective marketing technique presents the school's attributes. The attributes create or reaffirm an attitude which results in an action. Effective marketing filters the information forming consumer attitude and informs the decision.

Research shows that Relationship Marketing (RM) and Transactional Marketing (TM) theories influence strategies which influence attitudes and enrollment (Laga & Eggert, 2006; Moliner, Sánchez, Rodríguez, & Callarisa, 2007). Consumer attitudes are formed by ego, social acceptance, or reflect values. Through the use of the survey on the perceived effectiveness of marketing techniques which employ TM or RM and one-to-one interviews, specific marketing techniques can be determined as to its influence on enrollment. Value is produced by the marketing technique that best communicates the school's attributes and the action of enrollment is the desired outcome (Moliner, Sánchez, Rodríguez, & Callarisa, 2007). Thus, the act of enrolling a child in a specific school is the dependent variable.

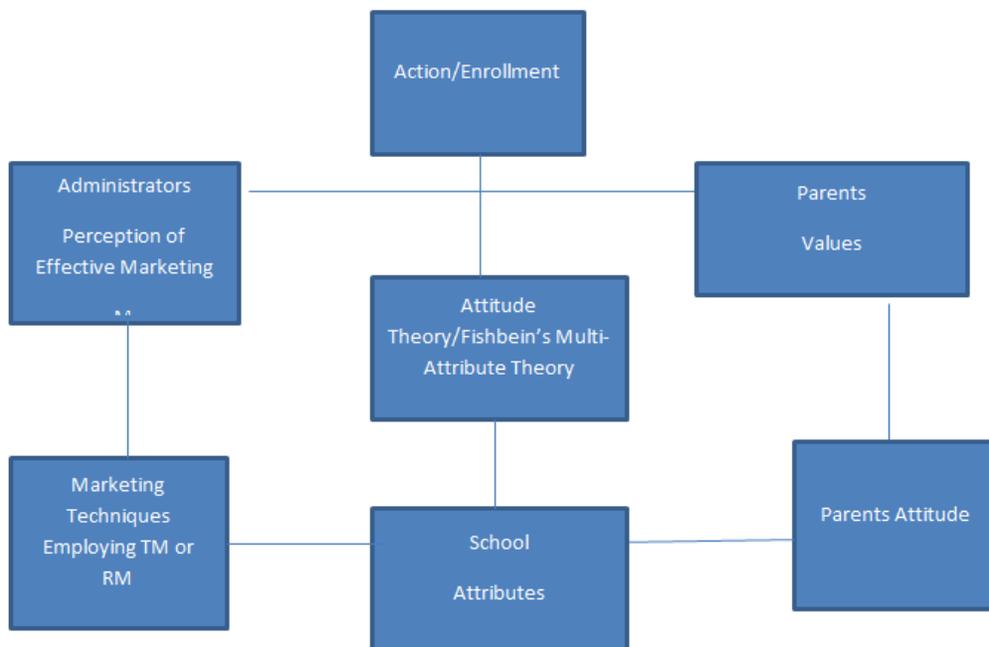


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Mitchell & Olson, 2000).

Assumptions

In this study, the assumption is that specific marketing techniques are used and that they have an impact on enrollment. It is assumed that the practical use of marketing will result in the economic growth of independent schools in Hawaii. A well-developed marketing plan, which emphasizes the unique attributes of independent school education, may result in a school gaining students. School administrators were surveyed to determine how many schools have developed a formal marketing plan. Many schools lack a marketing plan entirely, yet still attract a number of students. The perceived value of a school, size, or to the historical reputation of a learning institution may have an influence (Kena, Musu-Gillette, Robinson, Wang, Rathbun, Zhang, & Velez, 2015). The lack of a targeted marketing plan may cause a weakening of an independent school's position in a competitive market. Without a process in place to identify the demographic characteristics and the needs of the stakeholders that the school serves, there is little chance for economic sustainability. Independent schools, and in particular small schools or those without historical recognition, must establish their brand and create a niche market for their product.

The second assumption of this study is that small schools in competitive markets must incorporate a process that establishes a purposeful relationship with the stakeholders to increase and retain student enrollment. According to Oplakta and Hemsley-Brown (2004), relationship marketing allows schools to have an identity and establishes a bond between the student and the school. With a connection established, a student is more than likely going to correlate the relationship between the satisfaction of their needs and the desire to become or remain enrolled. Stability in retention numbers and growth of enrollment through a defined plan to create and

maintain relationships affords an independent school budget consistency. The ability to forecast enrollment and retention allows a school to create long and short-term strategic planning.

The third assumption of this study is that small independent schools place the importance in their unique role in the independent school marketplace and believe that they offer an experience that larger schools do not have the capability of providing. While educators have historically questioned the validity or ethical implications associated with marketing schools, administrators see the need for a plan that accurately portrays the essence of the academic institution (Falck & Woessmann, 2013; Kerby, 2013). It is important that a study of the specific marketing techniques schools employ and the perceived impact the strategy have on enrollment would serve as a guide for those independent schools wishing to persuade parents to enroll their children.

The fourth assumption is that specific marketing actions taken by a school can affect the attitude of a potential stakeholder and create an action. The action the school is hoping for would be the enrollment of the student in the school. Employing Fishbein's (1977) Multi-Attribute Theory stakeholders' attitudes about a school or its perceived brand will influence their choice. The consumer or, in this case, the prospective enrollee's parents, will look at the salient attributes and evaluate their beliefs about the qualities. They will then appraise the importance of those attributes and make a decision (Smith, Terry, Manstead, Louis, Kotterman, & Wolfs, 2008). It would be assumed that a school's marketing effort would address the attributes most desired by the consumer in an effort create a positive attitude and result in a student's enrollment.

Limitations

The research has been carefully prepared to overcome limitations in the methodology and scope, although several issues may be unavoidable. The data collected from the independent

schools purposefully selected to participate in this study are located in a competitive, geographically isolated environment. In addition to the geographical distance from the mainland United States, Hawaii is often viewed as unique due to the relatively high percentage of students attending private school, as opposed to the national average of students attending independent schools (Kena, Musu-Gillette, Robinson, Wang, Rathbun, Zhang, & Velez, 2015). The results of this study cannot be generalized or show trends that may be used for similar schools in different markets. The data may lack a comparison between the practices of independent schools using specific marketing techniques successfully and ones that are less successful due to the unique character of Hawaii schools.

As is the case in some marketing research, it is difficult to demonstrate a direct correlation between the perceived effectiveness of a technique and a change in consumer attitude. There are often several factors which influence a change in attitude that creates action. There are several situational factors which influence attitude that may be difficult to demonstrate in this study. Social factors, such as family ties to a school or pressure created by friends, cannot be determined by looking only at the perceived effectiveness of marketing techniques. Economic factors or the perceived value often influences enrollment. It would be difficult to determine if those factors override the desire to enroll a child in an independent school unless the price point was one of the school's marketable attributes. There may also be limitations surrounding the knowledge of school administrators about marketing and they may not have an awareness of industry theory or application techniques (Oplakta & Hemsley-Brown, 2004).

The Significance of the Study

Independent schools have experienced increased market pressures since the economic downturn in 2008. Academic leaders are faced with administering schools using business and

marketing practices to remain economically viable. Schools need to create a process of communicating and creating a programmatic uniqueness to remain relevant in the independent school marketplace. The external perception of the brand that a school develops will have a direct correlation between economic sustainability and enrollment (Giannakis, Harker, & Baum, 2015; Oplakta, Hemsley-Brown 2004; Willows 2008).

Larger or traditionally prosperous independent schools have the resources to hire marketing professionals to develop their brand messaging. They may also have a status or market position where brand messaging is carried forward by historical reputation. Small independent schools often rely on the willingness of the school leaders to incorporate marketing as a part of their strategic plan. The problem facing educators is that marketing has not been a focus of study or widespread professional development relating to education, thus leaving them unprepared to implement a successful campaign (Oplatka, 2007). An analysis of the types of marketing techniques independent schools incorporate and the perceived effectiveness in creating a consumer attitude that prompts enrollment will allow schools to form their marketing strategy. A changing market requires an analysis of independent schools messaging concerning brand, demand, program, and value.

Definition of Terms

To better understand the purpose of this study, it is first necessary to identify what marketing is and how a marketing plan is developed. Marketing is a process of determining what a consumer wants or needs and the development of a system of communication which results in how a product or service fulfills a stakeholder's demand (Perner, 2010). Marketing research and strategy determines what the desires of the consumers are and what price they are willing to pay to satisfy their needs. The marketing process develops the concept, value, mode of

communication, and the delivery that is anticipated by the consumer. The consumer's needs establish the function and offerings of a business or service organization. Understanding the stakeholder allows an organization to persuade or assure a client, student, or customer that their product or service satiates the desired outcome (Drucker, 2014, Kotler, 2009).

Marketing involves developing a method of research to determine what goods or services a particular community desires. The research informs a provider with the demographics and the potential for a market share of the potential stakeholders. A marketing strategy would determine who the competitors are and what other brands have already developed (Drucker, 2014, Kotler, 2009). Examining how others perceive the competitor's brand allows for the marketing plan to address the consumer's preferences and attitudes. In regard to an academic institution, the parent of a child planning to enroll them in a school may already have a preconceived idea of what they are looking for in an academic institution. The image they have in their mind has created an attitude which may or may not be changed. Marketers try to determine if the stakeholder has an accurate feeling of a school or conceives a strategy to change their attitude toward a more favorable impression. The marketing plan addresses the attitude of the consumer and ideally changes the behavior and beliefs so that favorable action occurs (Perner, 2010).

For the specific purposes of this study, the fundamental concepts are defined as such:

Market – is identified as a collection of products, consumers, and geographic locations which can be identified and analyzed for gathering useful information (Baker, 2007).

Marketing – is a process which identifies a strategy to collect data and implement a plan which creates an exchange between consumers and producers. This process identifies the value of the message and the outcome of the transaction (Baker, 2014).

Branding - the brand is the message an institution portrays about its value and striking image through a credible communication (Jones & Bonevac, 2013).

Relationship Marketing – is a theory which holds that developing a strong personal bond between a product and an institution will create loyalty. The bond between the two parties in the relationship creates value for all parties involved in the transaction (Peck, Christopher. Clark & Payne, 2013).

Transactional Marketing – is the practice of making a one-time transaction without concern for long-term or renewable relationship (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown 2004).

Independent Schools – are schools which are governed and financed through non-government agencies and are driven by a specific mission

Perceived Value – is a term used by independent schools and other industries which measures the meaning an individual receives from experience or environment and the cost of the goods or services (Prebensen, Chen, & Uysal, 2012).

Student Retention – a strategic plan to manage currently enrolled students in a school until completion of the program (Hoerle, 2016).

Social Media – is a platform for web-based inbound and outbound communication which encourages real-time interactions (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013).

Niche Schools – are schools which focus on one particular section of the market that has a high potential to connect with a unique pedagogy or mission (Fox & Buchanan, 2014).

Elite Schools – are schools which are perceived as historically, geographically, demographically, and scholastically well-established learning institutions (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009).

Consumer – is a person who identifies, trusts, and commits to a brand or service (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013).

Value Proposition – is an attribute of an independent school created through the services provided, the mission, or the vision which gives value to a consumer (Major, 2015; Pagano, 2017).

Conclusion

Chapter 1 introduces the topic, purpose, assumptions, research questions, significance, conceptual framework and consumers involved in this study. Background information is given about the independent school organizations participating in the study. The rationale that specific marketing techniques may be linked to an attitude change held by potential enrollees in independent schools is discussed. Fishbein's Multi-Attribute Theory (1977) is described as the lens used to explore the quality of the techniques used by the independent schools with enrollment being the dependent variable.

Chapter 2 will review the current literature regarding marketing and academic institutions and the use of the various practices and theories. Chapter 3 will detail the methodology of the data collection and how the results will be analyzed. Chapter 4 will report the results of the study. Chapter 5 will explore future study, recommendations and conclusions.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review examines the marketing and branding impact on enrollment in independent schools in the United States and international schools. The objective is to look at the current research and apply it to a study on marketing and branding efforts and its perceived effect on attitude change, with enrollment at independent schools as the outcome. The objective of the literature review is to identify research to determine the marketing and branding techniques used by independent schools which have impacted enrollment trends. The problem for many independent schools and in particular, small schools with less than 300 students, is that they survive by being economically sustainable through enrollment and retention of current students. Developing a marketable brand and a detailed marketing plan is essential for sustainability. The economic goals of a marketing campaign aimed to increase enrollment, is that it often drives the financial success or failure of independent schools in competitive marketplaces, such as Honolulu, Hawaii.

The literature review includes studies that examined marketing techniques which use the internet and specifically social media to increase communication with potential stakeholders. Research has consistently pointed to enrollment as being a significant factor in the economic success or failure for small independent schools. A school's reputation or brand creates a niche in the school market, which appears to drive enrollment. Small schools in competitive markets face budgetary stress, due to internal and external fiscal pressures. Marketing and branding of educational institutions have become a major focus in regard to increasing enrollment and telling the story of a school.

Previous research on school marketing and increasing a focused approach to branding are discussed in the literature review. The review also looks at the specific marketing techniques schools incorporate in their branding and delivery of curriculum. The fundamental questions that have been addressed in the literature define the purpose of marketing and the positive and negative outcome of enrollment and school quality (Giannakis, Harker, & Baum, 2015). There is currently a lack of research on independent kindergarten to 6th-grade schools in the United States concerning marketing and its impact on enrollment. Many of the studies have been conducted at the university level and, while there are similarities, there are also differences. The history of marketing and the branding of schools will be analyzed to pinpoint trends and acceptance of those practices in the educational setting. The objective of the literature review is to articulate the findings in the literature as a basis for this study and for future research.

The literature review looks at research about the different channels used in marketing models such as Relationship Marketing (RM) and to a lesser extent, Transactional Marketing (TM). Fishbein's Multi-Attribute Theory (1977) will be discussed, as it guides this study. Fishbein's model demonstrates the influence of marketing techniques on attitude changes. The review of the research aims to give analyses and synthesizes marketing theory, as well as the impact a school's brand has on enrollment and retention efforts. Studies have been conducted that demonstrate tendencies in the use of social media and text messaging, to increase interaction with potential students or their families (Major, 2015; Stewart, 2015).

The primary audience for this research is independent schools who are in the process of creating a branding or marketing plan. Examining the findings may provide independent schools with trends and practices which will influence enrollment. The literature review provides a review of some of the marketing research in regard to academic institutions from 2000 to 2017.

Unique Branding of Independent Schools

According to Baker (2014), marketing is a process by which organizations obtain information and create a strategy to determine the value of what stakeholders or customers want. In education, marketing seems to be a concept that while not new, has risen in importance since the early 1990s. Baker (2014) believed that marketing is an older activity, but has recently been deemed as valuable. As a business discipline marketing is considered as new and evolving with the introduction of social media and the expansion of the internet.

Baker (2014) stated that a philosophy for any business must include a concern for customers' wants and needs. The goal of marketing would be to build a relationship with the stakeholders of an organization. The branding of a school would be the image that is produced in the minds of the consumer about the organization. Read and Bick (2014) argued that educational marketing is based on organized objectives and involves a plan, a system of analysis, designed programs, and an exchange of values. Baker (2014) described marketing as an interactive service which delivers a message to a consumer. The organization determines what the consumer wants and then puts procedures together to deliver the service to the stakeholder. Understanding the desires and expectations of the consumer prepares the organization to deliver on a promise of service. Marketing efforts must then identify the means of delivery of the message, whether it is through media, technology, or personal contact that they deliver the communication. The response of the consumer determines the quality of the marketing. An organization must develop a process and channel for communication, where people contribute and receive messages. The goal is for consumers to convert the message into an action (Stone & Woodcock, 2014). The

consumer would place value on the attributes of an organization and select the product or enroll in the institution (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977).

Baker's (2014) recommendation would be to establish a marketing plan that would focus on people and their wants and needs. In business, as well as other organizations the fundamental concept is to position the services or goods provided as something unique. In education, schools position themselves by the market and the delivery of services that they provide. Read and Bick (2014) suggested that education not be a concrete product that can be tested by the senses, but rather a feeling of quality and perceived results. The methods and quality of the delivery of the curriculum, size of the school, the ratio of students to teachers, and athletics, are just a few characteristics schools portray to position themselves in the market.

A person's attitude toward an organization or product is the focal point for a marketing effort. In education, according to Trivitt and Wolf (2011) teachers and customer service quality is the most excellent marketing tool a school has to attract students. Trivitt and Wolf's (2011) study categorized the marketability of a school to prospective parents as being dependent on the academic reputation, the location, and the price. The positive or negative impression made through media, word of mouth, or personal visits and the distinct qualities of a school, influences potential stakeholders. The external perception and the recognized significance of a school often determine enrollment (Giannakis, Harker, & Baum, 2015).

Baker (2014) also contended that the valuation assigned to the organization is a function of marketing. The economic value of the organization, such as the tuition, creates perceived value. The reliability of the message and the benefits a school offers a student increases brand awareness, motivating the enrollment numbers (Giannakis, Harker, & Baum, 2015). The marketing of a school, for example, focuses on the parents/students' needs and ability to pay. If

the school has proprietary value and the cost is affordable for the market, then the story of the institution is told to the specific stakeholders they desire to attract. The consumer, in this case is the parents of a student, agrees that the benefit of paying for a private education is worth the price. Baker (2014) would agree that marketing any business is dependent on the value the consumer places on the product. The theory endorses the idea that people place value on something that is proprietary and has reproducible methods so that it is ensured to have a sale or a transaction. In education, this would translate into new enrollments and retention of current students.

Attributes of a Small School

Incorporating the attributes of a small school allows a prospective parent to weigh the options and the benefits compared to a larger school. Cain, a researcher from the National Education Association released their findings after 30 years of research which concluded that, “small schools are safer, offer better teaching, which resulted in higher academic performance” (2005, p. 1) The report also found that students from small schools significantly outperformed counterparts at large schools on standardized achievement tests. The attributes of a small school appeal to parents who are looking for a school environment which focuses on student achievement, has smaller class sizes, happy students, personal attention, curriculum adaptability which meets different learning styles, and an environment where children feel safe (Cain, 2005). Small schools have proven to connect to students and their families, which allows for a community environment (Supovitz, & Christman, 2005).

Cain (2005) concluded that small schools recorded increased attendance, high teacher satisfaction, happier students, improved student-teacher relationships, higher achievement in college, and provided students with greater leadership opportunities more than larger schools

could provide. Smaller schools have proven to embrace innovation, learning can be enhanced, and students can participate in more activities (Cain, 2005; EF Academy, 2015; Kinnaman, 2007, Supovitz, & Christman, 2005). Incorporating the attributes of a small school allows prospective parents to weigh the options and the benefits against a larger school.

Case Studies and Anecdotal Accounts

According to Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004) the school's management teams generally take responsibility for marketing a school. They found that administrators saw the need to promote their schools in competitive markets. While their findings indicated that school administrators felt that it was imperative to conduct marketing, there was not a consistent agreement that schools need a coherent marketing plan. The lack of a marketing strategy is in contrast to Baker's (2014) contention that marketing needs to have a systematic design to collect data and report how a plan is designed to answer the stakeholders' needs. Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004) argued that schools often do not set up a system to record parent's desires or feedback in a manner that lends to comprehensive data analysis. Without systematic research, Baker (2014) argued that an actual marketing plan fails to be relevant in branding an organization.

Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004) suggested school administrators often use informal information gathered through conversation to position their school in the education market. Therefore, the feedback that principals gathered allowed for unconfirmed information, which led to an unsystematic approach while comparing themselves with other schools in competitive markets. Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown's (2004) study concluded that schools often used undependable practices of marketing research and division of findings, failing to put together a coherent and systematized marketing plan.

Student Experience Management

The quality of the student experience in the early stages of the admissions and enrollment process is dependent on the presentation of the school. Read and Bick (2014) argued that the focus of education marketing is in the relationship that is built between the services a school offers and the prospective student and their family. Since education is not tangible, the branding and marketing of a school must focus on proven results. A student will present a specific demand, and a school must be able to supply the outlet to meet the need. Stakeholders will view a school by the product (student) that it turns out and the attention that was given to the services a pupil required. Read and Bick (2014) suggested that schools are known for their social life, academics, or sports, for example. Marketing to their audience allows a school to ethically recruit students who will have their demands met and will continue to produce positive feedback to future prospective students.

The service a school offers is a factor in school choice. Stakeholders will explore the perceived benefits of a school. Aspects of the institution such as student/teacher ratio, class sizes, facilities, school environment, quality of the teaching staff, athletics, technology, and administration, are factors in a student electing to attend a school (Oplakta & Hemsley-Brown 2004; Willows 2008). The quality of the experience a student and their family affects the admissions process. Willows (2008) suggested that the quality of the communication and consistency in the brand messaging have a direct influence on the decision to attend and retention of a student.

Brown and Mazzarol (2009) suggested that there is a lack of research that focuses on student satisfaction. The assumption in marketing is that, to create a strategy to attract and retain students, a satisfaction indicator must be established to connect services with consumer approval.

In the case of a school, a system needs to be established to determine if satisfaction will create loyalty. Students who are loyal or profoundly identify with the school will likely stay enrolled until completion (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009). The student's level of satisfaction is dependent on the level of agreement that the brand message or promise has been, or is being, fulfilled (Giannakis, Harker, & Baum, 2015).

According to Read and Bick (2014) a school's use of social media, website, and emails, reflects a school's brand and attracts students. In addition, word of mouth, both positive and negative, has a tremendous impact on the perception of a school (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown 2004). The reputation of a school can be enhanced or damaged by word of mouth, and strategies to address the occurrence and to control it need to be included in a marketing plan. The perceived value of a school takes into account the tuition, the socio-economic status of students, and location when families make their decision to enroll (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004; Willows, 2008). The brand a school establishes has an impact on the student's experience.

Relationship Marketing in Education

A prominent theory in marketing is called Relationship Marketing (RM). The basic idea of RM is to establish a sense of familiarity with an organization or product so that stakeholders or customers establish a relationship. This method of marketing is gaining traction in the educational institution marketing arena. Despite the vast increase in marketing research that has been published in the past decade, few contemporary analysts review or synthesize content within the domain. Peck, Christopher, Clark and Payne's (2013) research on RM outlined several methods for increasing brand awareness in all types of organizations. The authors describe a six-step strategy on how to build successful stakeholder relationships. The first two steps speak about creating value for the customer and the organization. The next two steps discuss managing

the relationship with the stakeholder and networking. The final steps are aimed at enabling relationships to be maintained and to grow through strategic planning and integrating quality services. The authors of this study are highly respected in the field of marketing and show valuable data that help nonprofits as well as commercial industry. Their work outlined the four Ps of marketing, that is: Product, Price, Promotion, and Place. Applying their methods to educational institutions may give a better understanding of the market and the methods of communication needed to convey a school's message.

Relationship Marketing Theory (RM) holds that every marketing encounter involves communication that creates a relationship between the stakeholder and organization (Baker, 2014). RM has been tested and reaches a higher level of scrutiny as opposed to an informal unsystematic approach used by many educational institutions (Oplakta & Hemsley-Brown 2004; Willows, 2008). Schools have typically used anecdotal information to guide their marketing strategy. RM is widely held as the predominant theory that guides small organizations when developing marketing plans. RM grew from the Social Exchange Theory (SET) which according to Baker (2014) is applied when a stakeholder places a value on a new behavior based on their interactions and needs.

The Social Exchange Theory holds that the benefits of a behavior outweigh the costs. Applying SET to an enrollment opportunity at a school would be dependent on the relationship established with the potential student or family. SET established that a prospective stakeholder would value the cost, the product, the location, the potential for advancement, and the recognition a student receives from enrollment at a particular school, which would outweigh the benefits of attending another competing school. The correspondence of value and the processes

that influence it, weigh heavily on the progression of enrollment. A potential stakeholder will assess the value of a particular offering and determine if it will create a behavior change.

The exchange of money and enrollment at a school would imply a behavior modification. SET suggested that reciprocity occurs when there is mutual acceptance (Pervan & Johnson, 2002). In the case of a school, the social and educational services are offered, and the student accepts what is being tendered by the academic institution. Relationship marketing research suggests that connections are maintained as long as the values are advantageous to the participants in the exchange. Trust, commitment, and time are essential elements in RM and are essential to continuing the exchange process (Pervan & Johnson, 2002).

The theory of relationship marketing refers to a business strategy to make stakeholders aware of the services an organization provides and gives them the feeling that there is one secure choice. The established relationship encourages future growth for both parties. The relational aspect of this type of marketing establishes a theory that familiarity produces the desired outcome. When this is applied with an educational institution, the desired outcome is higher enrollment and increased retention of current students.

There has been an increase in the number of studies on marketing and branding since the 1990s about how they impact enrollment. Powell and Rey (2015) questioned the “marketing practices such as research, appropriate targeting, and segmentation should be integrated for greater understanding of current and prospective students, and how lifelong relationships with these segments can be established and nurtured” (p. 10). The authors also concluded that developing a personal relationship with the students would enhance their academic experience and retention rates. Serving the students’ needs can be better accomplished if the academic

institution knows what challenges students face. Through marketing, the college can address those needs and build lasting relations which should enhance admissions and retention.

Marketing and branding are means to identify student needs and answer the question of how the message of a school creates a reaction from the stakeholders. Vander Schee (2010) contended that students and parents expect the promotional materials about a school to reflect the true nature of the institution. There is a perception that a college education will be individualized and each student will obtain their own experience at the school that they select. Vander Schee (2010) suggested that college admission departments often employ relationship marketing (RM) as their admissions overarching strategy. The RM model instructs admissions counselors on the benefits of using personal communication and frequent interactions with potential students during and after enrollment.

Relationship marketing has been used in sales of products and organizations for years. Powell and Rey (2015) explored the effects on student recruitment when employing relationship marketing in minority-serving institutions (MSIs) in the United States, such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The authors contended that HBCUs had employed a personal and nurturing approach to attracting and retaining students for years, but still face declining enrollment and retention. Their study looked at marketing efforts and asked if the endeavors reflected the changing profile of non-traditional students who attend HBCUs. The ability to establish a student experience management program allows schools to study the market and create a response to desired outcomes.

Powell and Rey (2015) questioned “marketing practices such as research, appropriate targeting, and segmentation and whether they should be integrated for greater understanding of current and prospective students and how lifelong relationships with these segments can be

established and nurtured” (p. 10). The researchers also concluded that developing a personal relationship with the student would enhance the academic experience and retention of students. It can be concluded that serving the students’ needs can be better accomplished if the college leadership knows what challenges are encountered by students. Through RM the college faculty and staff can address those needs and build lasting relations, which should enhance admissions and retention. The literature supports the theory that RM develops a level of trust and a desire for a long-term commitment from the organization and the stakeholders. In turn, stakeholders return their loyalty and increase word of mouth about their satisfaction. The question that needs to be answered is if the RM theory will apply to lower school’s enrollment strategies.

The RM model allows small colleges to compete against larger universities, because the theory holds that students want a personal relationship when selecting a college. Vander Schee’s (2010) study puts forward the idea that the RM approach increases the creation of student value and that the college should match the perceived needs of its students. RM is intended to be carried out for the years the student is at the college. The process is ongoing over the lifetime of the relationship and is aimed at retaining the student. Vander Schee (2010) studied the RM model implementation at two small colleges and saw an increase in admissions and retention. The study also demonstrated improvement in admission counselors’ job satisfaction when developing and continuing a relationship with the students.

After reviewing the literature presented here, there appears to be a gap in research that revolves around the relationship marketing model regarding independent K-12 schools. Vander Schee (2010) described some of the basic practices of RM in colleges only. The goal of RM is to get feedback from the consumers through surveys as a way to create databases and improve services. The data can be used to test market pressures to determine appropriate

responses and create better practices. Building the relationship also establishes active profiles for social media. A system can be put in place to listen to and monitor satisfaction and the desires of the stakeholders. The literature seems to support the theory at the university level that RM generates live or warm leads for future students. Leads are often generated by current students who have an emotional attachment to and relationships within the school.

The application of the RM model is tested further in this research involving the application of marketing techniques in independent K-12 schools in Hawaii. The research aims to examine what the effects of establishing a high touch relationship with students and parents have on the satisfaction rate of these stakeholders concerning new applications and re-enrollment. RM aims to provide an environment where a school establishes an atmosphere of caring and trust. If the school leaders value the stakeholder's attitude toward their brand, will this translate into higher enrollment and retention? The literature is consistent that RM has an impact on admissions and retention at the university and college level, now the question that needs to be answered is, is RM being used in independent K-12 schools and what is the perceived effectiveness of this technique?

Admissions and Enrollment Strategies

Cheney (2010) argued that the school's brand is developed by how people relate to and remember the mission and core values. A memorable experience can be accomplished when an admission and enrollment strategy is developed that communicates through personal, digital, or print means, an expression of the school's identity. The positive experience a prospective student and their family receives will attract and retain stakeholders. Gow (2010) contended that independent schools have a reputation for academic and supportive experiences, but also conjure up images of elitism and exclusivity. Cheney (2010) suggested that a school's brand needs to be

an accurate portrayal of how the institution is seen from the outside. The strategy would include choosing the best resources to communicate the vision and mission of the school.

According to Read and Bick (2014), Relationship Marketing includes creating an external and internal process before a student and their parents spend time on campus. RM starts with developing a process to establish the needs of the student. Price, quality of academics, social life, location, facility, and best means of communication, need to be established to develop a relationship with the prospective student. Managing the relationship includes knowing what attracts the student and how the school will deliver on the promise of quality education.

Willows (2008) stated that a school's strategic plan needs to address word of mouth and formulate techniques that tell the story of the students, parents, staff, and teachers. The goal of the plan would be to attract and respond to the needs of prospective students. With the expansion of social media, word of mouth extends to the written word in texts, tweets, and blogs. A strategy that includes a vast array of communications and listens to feedback needs to be actively pursued to enhance the experience. A school's brand needs to be relevant and accurately portray the organization's reality (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown 2004).

Willows (2008) argued that an enrollment and retention plan looks at the relationship a student establishes with the school and the comfort or discomfort they feel going through the process. The collection and analysis of data should allow for an ethical relationship to be established. Through the relationship between the school and the prospective student, an alliance is established, and a better fit is created. Baker (2014) described this occurrence as having the product meet the needs of the demand. Willows (2008) suggested that critics claim that marketing and branding do not have an impact on the economics of a school; however, numerous

studies have shown noticeable progress in admissions, philanthropic donations, teacher recruitment and retention.

The Secondary School Admissions Test Board (2014) stated that 70 percent of prospective applicant families attend at least one open house before applying to an independent school. There are many different strategies that inform the open house concept. Some schools conduct monthly, quarterly, and yearly open house events (Neiberger, 2010). The open house is often a significant budget item and requires time, promotion, and the identification of the potential prospect's needs (Oplatka, 2007). Depending on the market demands and culture of a community and school, the most commonly used open houses can take place in the day when students are present, in the evenings with teachers and administrators, or on weekends for special events. The goal of the open house is to generate interest for prospective parents and ultimately result in an application for enrollment. The parent's objective is to get a feel for campus life, academics, and the people at the school (Neiberger, 2010; Newberry, 2012).

The objective of the open house is to influence the attitude of a prospective student or parent. Choosing a school is an emotional, as well as a logical, decision. The open house should be designed to create a positive image and be informative (Oplatka, 2007). Research conducted on potential applicant families found that eight out of ten parents found an open house effective in their decision process and wanted an event to be designed to include the academic program, student expectations, and the school's unique culture (SSATB, 2014). Teachers also felt that open houses were a valuable tool in giving information about their school to prospective applicants. The creation of an atmosphere that is friendly, inviting, and personal allows for the prospective stakeholders to acquire an image of a school and determine if it fulfills their needs (Oplatka 2007; SSATB, 2014).

Campus Tours

Campus tours have proven to be a useful marketing tool for promoting personalized attention and sharing information about the school's environment. Ninety-four percent of parents took at least one school tour before applying their child to a private school (SSATB, 2014). According to Newberry (2011), the best method of giving one-to-one attention is the campus tour. The act of presenting a warm welcome with an admissions representative, current parent, or a student guide, allows the prospective applicant the chance to view the school in a natural setting and get a feel for the people.

Seventy-seven percent of the prospective parents of applicants applying to private schools in the US identified that they were given a tour by a student representative (SSATB, 2014). The goal of the tour is to portray the care a parent expects from private school education and the attributes the school can share with them to help in the decision process (Newberry, 2011). The most successful tours feature meeting the Head of School, teachers, and critical school stakeholders. Since sixty-six percent of parents will tour at least three private schools before making a decision, the presentation needs to create an accurate picture of what the student experience will be like and match the parent's needs (SSATB, 2014).

Word of Mouth

The goal of a marketing campaign is to get their consumer to sell the organizations product, because they are satisfied and want to share their pleasure with others. The most effective marketing technique is word of mouth (Neiberger, 2010; Newberry, 2011). Stakeholders who are happy will often spread a positive message about an organization or product and act as an advertisement to attract others. Referrals from current families and alumni are the most commonly cited source of the first contact on applications for admissions

(Newberry, 2011). Parents and students act as representatives of a school and often have a significant influence on the enrollment process. Schools utilize parents to act as ambassadors and spread a positive message (Sernovitz, Godin, & Kawasaki, 2006).

Word of Mouth marketing for a school is the act of sharing a current student's experiences with other potential enrollees. Stakeholders are attracted to an organization that shares their values and beliefs about academic performance (Neiberger, 2010; Newberry, 2011). They trust others who share their values and have similar expectations (Sernovitz, Godin, & Kawasaki, 2006). Actual academic performance of a school has proven to be secondary to the positive impressions of the school's reputation from a someone's peer group (Jessen & DiMartino, 2016). Communities form around a brand or identify with a logo, symbol, or social group. These brand communities have a powerful influence on word of mouth. People identify with a school brand and share their impressions with others. The desire to belong to the community often becomes stronger than the actual academic data during the decision-making process (Beal & Beal, 2016). Both the physical location and the perceived status of a school influences interpersonal communication and influences enrollment (Oplatka, 2007).

Retention Strategies

Relationship Marketing encourages the establishment of a personal association between the student and the faculty and staff (Powell & Rey, 2015). The use of RM as a strategic plan for retention has established that schools retain students, increase enrollment, and create donor connections in higher education (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown 2004; Powell & Rey, 2015). According to Fontaine (2014), a study of students in Punjab revealed that when educators treat students with kindness and empathy, students identified with the school and tended to stay loyal. The study discovered that retention increased when there was a responsive system in place for

administrators and teachers with their students. With this approach, educators can determine how best to respond to the needs of the students. The relationship between a school brand and its student creates a definite economic impact. Student retention caused by the identification of a brand creates a competitive advantage for a school (Bowden, 2011).

Transactional Marketing in Education

Well established independent schools with historically strong brand recognition have often looked at marketing as an afterthought, instead of an important section of their master plan (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004). The most common method used in the past, by historically economically stable schools, has been the Transactional Marketing Theory (TM). With TM the goal is to sell a product and increase numbers. The theory does not focus on retention or repeat business. The assumption is that if a school has a strong following and has a high demand for admissions, there is little effort made to recruit. A prospective student knows the brand and desires to attend. Once the student is enrolled, retention is up to the student. Schools with waitlists know that there is another student available to replace the current attendee. The goal of the transaction is to sell the service or product as if new each time. According to Peck, Christopher, Clark, and Payne (2013) this method has been considered to be a traditional marketing strategy. It requires the organization to fulfill a need, but is not concerned with the relationship that exists with the customer.

In education, this approach has been used by schools that were not concerned about massive market pressures. An example would be a well-established school that runs at capacity each year. The stakeholders need to be aware of what is offered, but the school is not that concerned with altering the program to fit a need. A top independent school with a waitlist may not see the need to market to or accept students with learning differences or financial need,

because they can fill spots with traditional, full tuition paying students. The transaction only has to occur once. If the student is accepted into kindergarten in an established K-12 school, unless there are problems, they may not have to ever go through the application process again. The TM model is what these types of schools may employ, because the demand is higher than the available seats in a class.

According to Palmer, Lindgreen, and Vanhamme (2005), TM is considered traditional mass marketing and is seen in developed markets. In the school setting, a transactional exchange would occur when an institution has established their market share, and there is minimal fluctuation in the ratio of applications to acceptance rate. The TM approach would remain in effect while there is little change in the competitive environment. Palmer, Lindgreen, and Vanhamme (2005) suggested that schools would maintain a seller-buyer mentality while their market share is considered dense. In this setting, the brand would have to sustain interest without changing marketing strategies.

Admissions and Enrollment Strategies

Schools employing TM are often associated with being “elite” and tend to have the external perception of accepting only top students (Cook & Frank, 1993; Drew, 2013). A school that operates knowing that application for acceptance is based on reputation tends to produce promotional material that perpetuates their elite status. Cook and Frank (1993) argued that top candidates like to associate with other top students. An admissions policy which allows only high-ranking students creates a competitive imbalance for schools deemed to be non-elite. Established elite institutions often will not look at other schools as competition, but instead, as being in a second tier. Schools with a transactional mentality maintain admissions policies based on space availability and only accept accomplished applicants. The transaction of admissions at

the elite schools takes place in the student's first year. While the student is responsible for tuition annually, retention from the school's perspective would be secondary, as there will often be a new applicant on the waitlist to fill an open spot. In this case, the customer will come to the organization with little prompting other than the schools continued promotion of their superior status (Drew, 2013).

Ethical Marketing

Gow (2010) suggested that the marketing of schools is based on the stakeholder's subjective view of what is right. Oplatka (2007) found that school administrators, as well as teachers, had doubts that marketing and education are compatible. The lack of compatibility is in contrast to their feeling that marketing and branding were necessary, as long as the truth was presented and the market did not alter the curriculum. Oplatka (2007) found that educators were not clear if marketing portrayed the moral characteristics of schools. Educators believed that schools needed to be engaged in some form of marketing to be competitive, as long as their lead school administrator controlled the message. The question that appeared most often in Oplatka's (2007) study came from educators who questioned the validity of what was marketed and what takes place in the school. Educators often questioned if marketing efforts presented an accurate impression of the school.

According to Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004), a school creates a strong case for their brand during times of adversity. When an institution is threatened, either internally or externally, a school that is committed to its brand will be mission-driven and true to its foundation. Educators become aware when standards are compromised and will step in to make sure the mission of the school is not lost to market demands. Educators control the message and do not give into pressure.

Gow (2010) contended that educators are fearful that marketing can cheapen education and take the focus away from the mission. Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004) found that educators question the ethical standards of marketing and demand safeguards against schools being untruthful in their presentation of themselves and competing schools. The researchers pose several questions about the degree of criticism one school can portray about another while marketing themselves. Educators look internally, according to Brown and Mazzarol (2009), for a clear brand position in the market, the institution's strengths and competitive advantages, and distinct objectives that satisfy an observed demand.

Oplatka (2007) suggested that school principals need to uphold moral and ethical values. There is fear that the market will dictate the future of a school and adjustments will be made to pander to particular audiences. Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004) found that educators in England were concerned that schools would target particular markets. Gidney and Gidney (2008) proposed that historically, schools engaged in sexist advertisements to attract a female audience while ignoring gender bias in schools. Educators fear that marketing would alter the mission to attract or discourage particular gender, ethnic, or special needs students, to increase school revenues.

Acceptance of Marketing in Education

Marketing and branding of schools have received some resistance from educators at all levels according to Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004). Educational institutions do not always view stakeholders as customers (Natale and Doran, 2012). Neiberger (2011) suggested that marketing education to recruit students cannot be treated as if the school was conducting a business venture. The researchers highlight the ethical dilemma that is associated with looking at students as a means of revenue. In higher education, they point to the economic impact students

feel and their desire to get a degree without the goal of getting an education. Natale and Doran (2012) contended that the pressures of budget cuts and a decline in enrollment forced colleges to market to under-qualified students to attract enrollment. The position they take in their study is that the students are not always qualified to attend higher education, but are granted admission because the schools are catering to market pressures.

The idea that students become a commodity, as Natale and Doran (2012) contend, is not new or confined to universities. Kerby (2013) concurred that educators have traditionally viewed marketing as an attempt to lower standards to attract students to popular forms of study that may not have deep academic roots. Natale and Doran (2012) pointed to the percentage of students graduating with business degrees and tailored academic studies, instead of from traditional liberal arts programs. The authors argue that by creating market demand majors, schools do not provide students with higher level thinking skills. The contention is that not only do students receive an inferior education, but teachers are also left unfulfilled. Their research focuses on the benefits that universities receive from an economic standpoint, but do not acknowledge the adverse effects on academics. Future research needs to be conducted to see if the same feelings exist in K-6 schools. With trends in independent schools moving to 21st Century Learning, will educators see this as a byproduct of marketing or will they see it as a tool to better educate their students?

Kerby (2013) suggested that an educator often has an unfavorable view of the marketing of an educational institution. In his study on St. Joseph's Nudgee College, Kerby discussed the impact marketing had on educators at the boys' boarding school, founded in 1897. The concern facing the school was to maintain or see growth in their market share in the education community. Their research explored the contrary responses educators have toward adopting or

selling education as a consumer product. Educators raised concerns about changing the culture of a school to meet market demands. The study was conducted using a qualitative narrative approach. The research was done by interviewing and collecting narratives which gave information about the emotional impact of marketing the school, on teachers and administrators at the St. Joseph's Nudgee College. The resistance of educators to change curriculum or to alter the focus of the school mission to meet changing demographics caused school admissions and marketing directors to have philosophical differences with teachers. Marketing tactics prompted an internal and external question to find common ground in doing what is best for students, while still providing a service that is attractive.

There is a belief that marketing education as a product cheapens the institution. Natale and Doran (2012) believed that higher education had reduced the individual accountability of receiving an education and now focuses on the needs of society. If it is true that the effects of marketing have decreased the quality of education at the university level, what would be the impact or the ripple down effect on lower school education? Their study questions the marketing of universities as a place for job preparation, instead of academic achievement. If this is true, will market pressures change the focus of lower schools to job-related skills? The question would need to be raised to K-6 teachers if they see a change in the academic focus as schools begin to develop programs to address market requirements. While the two previously mentioned studies examined universities and boarding schools, there appears to be a shortage of studies done in the lower grades on teachers' perceptions about being a part of the marketing process.

Deceptive Marketing

Natale and Doran (2012) also pointed to the promotion of for-profit universities and charter schools as an example of how marketing lessens the reputation of an educational

institution. Deming, Goldin, and Katz (2013) suggested that the rise of for-profit universities in the United States backs up the theory that marketing does have a negative impact on the quality of education. Their study details the marketing effort of the universities to tailor their programs to match consumer needs. The schools use a franchise type process of duplicating the curriculum and available times that courses are offered. For-profit universities often compete with community colleges for similar students. These schools market to non-traditional students who may not qualify for a state or private university. The marketing strategy targets female and minority applicants. The authors point out that there is an emphasis on programs in healthcare and technology coinciding with an expanding job market. The programs are often brief and tailored to the student's needs. The schools use federal financial assistance as a promotional tool to attract students. Research has found that some of the tactics used by the school while recruiting students encourage fraudulent behavior (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2013). The intense focus on financial assistance overlooks the fact that the courses often are more expensive than community colleges and the graduation rates are often lower.

While for-profit schools have not become the norm with K-6 schools, preschools are often part of a more extensive business or franchise model. There are also charter and public schools that have contracted with for-profit educational management companies. It will require further research to see if the impact of these types of schools has affected the marketing of traditional lower schools. Deming, Goldin, and Katz (2013) suggested that the harmful effects of for-profit education could play a role in cheapening the academic outcomes for students. Would the perceived value of the education decrease if the school focused on the profits rather than education?

Marketing Indicating a Lack of Prestige

Falck and Woessmann (2013) disagreed that there is an educational quality cost to marketing. They explored how using entrepreneurial methods affect Catholic private schools. The use of traditional business methods and marketing techniques affect a school's strategic plan. Schools which stress business management techniques, rather than traditional student recruitment methods, have shown that competition to recruit students has increased. The side effect of this entrepreneurial focus on schools has been an increased awareness by students of business practices and increased their desire to pursue careers in management. The researchers conducted a cross-sectional study and found similar results in all locations. The authors concluded that private school competition and the awareness of school differences increases cognitive awareness of the school's intended brand by their stakeholders (Falck & Woessmann, 2013). While this study does not address direct marketing, it does stress the importance of the differences a school's environment has on enrollment choice.

School choice has created unique marketing and branding efforts to attract students. Lubienski's (2006) article discussed how competition between schools to attract students in the private and the public sector had shifted from marketing to stakeholders in failing markets, to an approach that aggressively targeted students who came from other high achieving schools. The author suggested that after studying private, public, and charter schools, marketing efforts that were done to promote diversity and innovations distinguished individual schools. School administrators seem to understand that providing students with services which meet their needs increases revenue. Lubienski (2006) contended that there are some who view promoting school choice as nothing more than a means to equate students to dollars.

Marketing of Independent K-6 Schools to Increase Enrollment using Niche Marketing

Niche marketing of schools argues that programmatic choice comes from an attempt to meet specific market pressures to attract students. Educational reformers had proposed that promoting the school's strengths and unique academic offerings would attract students from failing systems. Lubienski (2006) found that reformers were more interested in horizontal moves of students to specific programs that were still within their districts. The idea was to allow the market to improve school choice, but not take students from their communities. Lubienski (2006) suggested that schools had made program changes to attract better students. The competition became vertical with students moving to the school that best fulfilled their needs. The marketing of the schools was aimed at getting the best and the brightest instead of attracting students from failing schools.

Schools which have a niche market have a built-in marketing tool. In Honolulu, Hawaii, where this research was conducted, there are fifteen faith-based or Catholic schools, a Waldorf school, seven Montessori schools, a Dewey-based progressive school, four single-sex schools, and three learning disabilities schools within a ten-mile radius. Each school has a unique brand and reputation. Schools are competing in the same area to reach out to their niche market. While Hawaii independent schools compared to their counterparts throughout the United States are unusual in that there are a high number of independent schools in a relatively small radius, the diversity of the population requires greater choice. Another question that needs to be answered is if the market has altered the academic offerings of the K-6 schools to meet the demands for economic reasons? If this is the case, the question arises, did the changes have an immediate impact and what is the projection for the future?

Davies and Quirke (2005) described the educational market for niche independent schools in Ontario as competitive. The researchers used qualitative data to look at how schools have been established that are not deemed elite, historical, or have a religious affiliation. The authors interviewed school administrators, teachers, and parents of students, and asked what market value niche schools have in the broader education realm. Davies and Quirke's (2005) research pointed out that the strain caused by market pressures may alter the quality of the education and the mission of a school. The findings in the research establish some cause for concern. Parent demands for a particular service or imposed performance objectives of the niche school may constrain innovation and school growth. The weakening of the formal structure of the school may happen because parent pressure may overwhelm the original mission.

Davies and Quirke (2005) contended that niche schools in their study are independent and only a few are considered feeders to larger market setting schools. The feeder schools' mission is to prep students for an experience at the "elite" or historical school. Oahu has four major K-12 market players, Punahou, Kamehameha, I'olani, and Mid-Pacific. These schools have no official feeder schools; however, many small K-6 schools in Honolulu have had success marketing their acceptance rate in the larger schools. The schools do not mirror the four receiver schools programmatically but advertise that their students are prepared to transition. According to Davies and Quirke (2005), there are only three feeder schools in Toronto. All other schools "avoid competition with those schools, conceding to be not in their league. Instead of adopting tried and true elite practices, they are reducing their class sizes and are developing unique themes and services" (p. 298). The market that they describe in their study is based on unique offerings. They contend that the small schools only offer what their stakeholders demand.

Social Media

McWilliam (2012) suggested building strong brands by using the internet to unlock communication with stakeholders, which strengthens the argument for organizations to use social media to promote themselves. The author contends that using the internet for brand promotion is accomplished when the organization, “customizes messages as it identifies the individual by name, rewards the individual for his or her continued support and interest, and recognizes the passage of time and a strengthening of the relationship” (p. 1). These concepts can apply to schools by forming sites that encourage people with common interests to participate in online discussions. The research he conducted states that brand recognition is strengthened when groups are formed that are open to broad appeal. The organizers of the online communities need to focus on inclusion and codes of behavior. The central concept of this the study is that online communities can strengthen brand messaging as part of a multifunctional marketing and communication strategy.

According to McWilliam (2012), the content of the messages on social media, articles on a website, e-newsletters, case studies, videos and articles on other websites increase the value of the brand. These platforms would suggest that the social media channels are weakening mass media marketing, such as television and radio. In the K-6 market, parents rely on messages from schools to know what to expect in the following days, weeks, months, and years. The researcher implies that establishing these internet communities creates a relationship with the institution. McWilliam (2012) appeared to advocate for RM as part of the marketing and social media plan for schools. The question that arises from his work is, if the internet becomes the primary form of communication, will the relationship take on an impersonal appearance? The high touch that

is associated with RM may need to be adjusted as stakeholders use different channels to communicate. Laroche, Habibi, and Richard, (2013), used a quantitative approach to explore the questions associated with the effectiveness of social media and brand messaging. The research focused on organizations that are both for-profit and nonprofit. Their research targeted social media providers such as Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace and sent an opinion poll asking each participant questions related to brands that use their services. They received 441 responses which they believed to be an adequate sample. The results of the study showed that "social media acts to provide benefits to its members, to facilitate information sharing and to enhance customers' bonds to each other, it cements the customers' relationships with the brand, the product, the company and other customers" (p. 81). This study provides information which can further efforts for schools to create and maintain brand loyalty and communication with stakeholders. The limitations of this study may be that it does not account for the dynamic changes that occur in social media for future brand and marketing benefits.

The methods of communication have changed over the past ten years. Sessa (2014) produced a quantitative study on strategies used by universities to identify social media use when attracting students for enrollment. The researcher used a survey of 189 universities in the United States and Canada. Sessa was a fourth-year doctoral candidate when she conducted her research on the methods of communication to reach Millennials. She found that 100 percent of universities in her study used some form of social media to communicate with potential students. Studies have demonstrated that social media increased from 69 percent to 100 percent of universities using social media over the course of five years. It was also found that 100 percent of those who responded to the survey replied that they used Facebook to communicate with possible candidates (Barnes, 2009; Stewart, 2015). The respondents also cited that Facebook was

very useful in reaching potential students with general information. A limitation that was found in her study was that universities did not often have a designated social media manager. Sessa (2014) argued that without a social media manager, it was difficult to get robust data.

Laroche, Habibi, and Richard (2013), and Sessa's (2014) research concentrated on universities. Both studies demonstrated the need for diversity when using the internet. Websites, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, Tumblr, and Instagram, are now used as a significant form of messaging. Schools have a plethora of new options that allow them to produce engaging content in a variety of media forms. Can K-6 schools use these outlets to build their brand by using more channels of communication?

The other question that arises from the literature is if there is still a need for traditional forms of marketing. In universities, there seems to be a mixed message. Brochures still seem to be valuable in recruiting students, as there seems to be an emphasis on glossy publications. There appears to be a need for tangible items to help in the enrollment decision process. Further research should indicate if there is a need to continue with print media to attract students. With younger students, parents are likely to be a part of a technology savvy generation. The question that arises is if there is value in traditional forms of marketing for younger stakeholders.

According to Wilkins (2012) research indicated that paper products create an image for schools. Marketing materials must demonstrate an image that students and parents find appealing. The material has to meet the needs of the stakeholder. Wilkins (2012) contended that visual images at two schools in London reflect the diversity of the population and the educational opportunities at both schools. The article looked at each school's demonstration of their unique offerings and culture and contended that visual design has a specific purpose in influencing the stakeholder's choice of schools.

Marketing material needs to be concise and visually appealing to the consumer or applicant (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2013; Sessa, 2014; Wilkins, 2012). Social media appears to have an advantage in that messages and branding can be done as market demands change. Brochures, posters, and video can quickly become outdated. Promotional material needs to project an image that creates a relationship between the potential stakeholder and the school, and have an economic impact (Bowden, 2011). In a K-6 school, there will be a turnover of students as they move on to receiver schools and employees may change from year to year. Wilkins (2012) suggested that a person may hold onto something that has a powerful visual image that speaks to a school's brand, while a social media site may not have the repeated message that leaves a long-term memory.

Future marketing will depend on diversity as the market expands (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2013; Sessa 2014). Channels such as Buzzfeed and Pinterest create viral images. How schools use the potential for image-based content will depend on the stakeholder's response when enrolling their children in specific schools. Successful blog posts that receive the most social shares also usually have a common characteristic: they pepper in some well-placed pictures to break content up and emphasize specific points. Another example is infographics, which combine images with a minimal amount of text to explain a topic and provide statistical information or data from research studies. It will be essential and useful for schools to have a tool that they can measure how enrollment is generated in the future (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2013; Sessa 2014).

Stakeholders have a choice in the type of education they select. Alexa, Alexa, and Stoica, (2012) explored the use of marketing to attract students to universities in Romania. While this research does not appear to relate to marketing strategies to increase enrollment in K-6 schools in

Hawaii, their research concludes that the internet can radically change the information a school gives to potential students. The research advocates for openness of information, which allows a school to satisfy its primary target audience's needs. The potential consumer needs to know what an institution offers and how it wants to receive the information (Powell & Rey, 2015). There may be the debate that marketing and branding alter the quality of education, but the reality is that a school is a business that depends on enrolling students. The means, the channels, and the message of a school's marketing strategy need to be studied further and significant data has to be collected to determine what will attract possible consumers to consider enrollment.

Competition

According to Powell and Rey (2015), schools use supply and demand as a foundation for addressing their marketing strategies. Schools in competitive markets look to brand themselves in unique ways, which provides an assurance of quality or distinct offerings to their potential stakeholders that other schools cannot replicate. Essential marketing objectives are formulated with a clear awareness of competition in the market (Bowden 2011). Brown and Mazzarol (2009) argued that competition provides sharp distinctions among schools. A school's positional value in the market is dependent on the need that it fulfills. Schools with unique qualities or a long history often have a brand that is distinctive and attracts a segment of the market. The external perception of an institution can be altered by other schools in the market (Bowden 2011). The reputation of a school often gives a prospective applicant a feel for what it offers. The quality of the marketing messages gives a school an advantage over others that rely on reputation (Wilson & Carlsen, 2016). Schools which have specific offerings are affected by the value stakeholders place on the benefits opposed to the cost of enrollment (Powell & Rey 2015).

Marketing strategies are formulated to address competition and brand awareness. The marketing materials produced by a school influence choice. Information that is made and given by a school to a potential applicant should supply complete data to make the decision a more straightforward process. Often the data provided by schools eliminates particular students (Lubienski, 2006). Marketing materials display the attributes a school finds to be the most appealing or valuable to their potential applicants, but often is geared to specific students. The danger occurs when a marketing strategy leaves out information which could divide the applicant pool by race or economic class (Wilson & Carlsen, 2016). Marketing aims to distinguish the favorable characteristics of an organization, without eliminating prospective candidates on any other basis than the value people place on the specific attributes (Lubienski, 2007).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed demonstrates a need for quantitative and qualitative data that display the impact of marketing and branding on the economic sustainability of small K-6 schools. Designed methods of gathering data that can be replicated and analyzed using statistical procedures will be helpful for schools to incorporate when writing a marketing plan. Future research will also have to address the limits to the qualitative data that have been presented in the current literature. There is a need for better descriptions of research design and sample size to be useful to track effective techniques to increase enrollment. While difficult to do, an association will need to be established to examine how marketing has an impact on enrollment.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted in two phases. The first phase of the study was conducted using a survey distributed to 92 administrators from member schools affiliated with the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools (HAIS). Data was gathered through the survey given to the administrators about their perceptions of the effective use of their school's marketing message and media influence toward brand awareness and consumer attitude regarding enrollment. The second phase of the study included one-to-one-one interviews with an administrator and separately, a parent from eleven small Hawaii private schools to collect qualitative data on the perceived effectiveness of marketing and branding message and media effects on enrollment at independent schools in Honolulu, Hawaii.

A sequential exploratory strategy using both a widely distributed survey and interviews was employed to gather qualitative data regarding marketing, design, planning, methods, implementation, and brand awareness. Collecting data from the selected schools' use of a marketing plan afforded the opportunity for the researcher to incorporate an analysis of the techniques used to determine if a change had occurred starting with data before and during the use of the plan (Box, Jenkins, Reinsel, & Ljung, 2015).

The first phase of the data collection was accomplished using a survey inquiring about participants' perceived effectiveness of the marketing techniques used to attract potential enrollees in Hawaii independent schools. The survey was distributed to school administrators at the 92 HAIS schools through email. The 92 names and email addresses were made available for this survey through the administrative office at HAIS. Distributing the survey in this manner provided an accurate and current email list of participants, the ability to personalize the invitation

to contribute to the survey (see Appendix A) and to send reminders as the due date was approaching. There was a 56 percent completion rate of the survey distributed to the HAIS administrators (Johnson & Owens, 2003). The surveys provided data that was gathered and analyzed to deliver full descriptive answers to the research questions (McPeake, Bateson, & O'Neill, 2014).

The next phase of the research was conducted using a one-on-one interview of eleven small independent Hawaii school administrators and a parent from each of those schools. The one-on-one interviews were conducted in two separate sessions at each of the eleven schools. The interviewer and the administrator conducted one session and the second was conducted with the interviewer and the parent. Their school personnel identified the parent as having recently enrolled their child. The schools selected with the assistance of HAIS to take part in the interviews had some form of a current marketing plan, had three hundred or fewer enrolled students, and are in the Honolulu area. The eleven schools were afforded the option to remain anonymous. While the broader survey of all HAIS schools set a base for what was perceived to be effective marketing techniques that are used in attracting students, the one-on-one interviews allowed for a more in-depth look at what the eleven similarly positioned school staffs perceived to be effective marketing concerning enrollment. Conducting interviews in the eleven schools provided data that describes the perceived correlational link between marketing and enrollment. The respondents further described and analyzed what, why, and how marketing techniques were implemented and how the desired results were achieved. The interviews (see Appendix A) provided rich details and added depth to the data collected in the surveys. Conducting interviews allowed for similar and contrasting results to be analyzed for the eleven schools.

The use of an exploratory survey and one-on-one interviews addressed the following research questions and guided them through the lens of Fishbein's Multi-Attribute Theory (1977):

What marketing message and media, if any, is used in a school's strategic marketing plan that can be perceived by administrators and prospective parents as effectively influencing consumer attitude towards a school's brand?

What marketing message and media used by Hawaii independent schools are perceived by the school's administration to be the most effective for increasing enrollment?

What were the marketing messages and media cited by parents in making their decision to select an independent school in Hawaii?

Setting

The goal of the survey was to collect data from a wide variety of schools affiliated with HAIS. The gathering of data that presented common or different usage of marketing techniques, the perception of brand awareness, and enrollment development, allowed for an establishment of a baseline that was further addressed in detail within the one-to-one interviews. The interviews were conducted at eleven small Hawaii Independent Association member, K-6 schools in the Honolulu District. Due to the nature of the study and the desire to collect sensitive enrollment data, the names of the schools, administrator, and parent names are not included in the study. The collaborating institutions provided a private space to conduct the interviews. Informed consent forms outlined agreements to protect participant identity, and all participants' questions were addressed. Interview access to participant information and data was maintained on a secure network and strictly protected. If any participant felt uncomfortable in the one-to-one interview

or potential situations that may have arisen in the school, such as confidential personnel or performance matters, they could have withdrawn from the study.

The sites for the interviews were purposely selected because of their similar student capacity of 50-300 students. Each school chosen had an established academic and social identity. While the schools could be competitors in the Honolulu marketplace, there has been a long history of cooperation between HAIS schools. HAIS schools have historically and uniquely shared information. While there may be some resistance to sharing sensitive enrollment data, there is an established ethical relationship and expectation between HAIS administrators of cooperation. These relationships allowed for the sharing of sensitive data with the researcher. The schools may also use the data from the study to analyze their programs.

Participants

Surveys were distributed to the lead administrator of the participating 92 HAIS institutions by email. The survey asked for data regarding the perceived effectiveness of specific marketing techniques and brand awareness. Perceived effectiveness in this study is defined as specific marketing messages and media that demonstrate an association between attribute awareness and enrollment. The survey was not directed at parents of enrolled or prospective students but inquired about data the school collected to get their consumers' perspectives. Often enrollment data will include responses on how a parent heard about the school and what factors influenced them to enroll their child. This data often guides school administrators in developing marketing plans based on the parent's attitude toward the school's attributes. The survey was designed to be anonymous. There is no information anywhere on the survey that individually identifies the institution or an individual.

The one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with a lead administrator or person knowledgeable about marketing from within the eleven selected schools (See Appendix B). Each participant was given an involvement letter (See Appendix E) which described the purpose of the study, confidentiality requirements and expectations of their contribution. As previously stated, the participating schools' administrative teams and the researcher already had a professional relationship through their affiliation with HAIS.

The parents selected by their participating school were in their first year of involvement with the institution and identified by the school administration. The interviews were conducted at the location of the participating school in a private setting on campus. The participating schools submitted the names of the parents who were willing to be interviewed. The criteria for selection of the parents included their child being an applicant enrolled for the first time, not related to an employee of the school, and not a member of the board or officer in the Parent/Teacher Association.

Since the parents were new to the school, they had a fresh perception about the marketing message and media that informed them about the school's attributes. Each of the school's participants were invited to a meeting where the purpose, the methods of data collection, and the importance of the study were discussed.

Data and Analysis

A qualitative exploratory strategy was employed to gather and analyze data. The data was collected, coded, and categorized manually using a Word Document and Excel spreadsheets. Interviews were recorded on audio tape and responses were transcribed in a Word Document. The narrative data was cut and pasted to an Excel spreadsheet for qualitative narrative coding. Data rows were manually assigned and categorized using responses from the survey and have a

cell in a matrix and were color-coded to enrich "at-a-glance" analysis. Some qualitative data was gathered with the surveys which were distributed and completed by email. The data collected from the survey responses was recorded and maintained in an Excel spreadsheet. The numerical ratings of each question collected from the survey data was placed in a cell in a matrix to allow for analytic induction (Saldana, 2015). The use of Excel and specifically, the descriptive statistic routine, offers a broad range of built-in statistical functions that were utilized in this study.

Narrative coding was selected for the first phase of the research to allow topic questions to be addressed by capturing the participant's perceptions and realities (Saldana, 2015). While the first phase of coding summarized sections of narrative data, the second phase employed pattern coding. The pattern codes allowed for explanations of data and identify emergent themes. The use of pattern codes in this marketing study examined common elements in social and human perceptions (Saldana, 2015). After the first two phases of coding had been repeated several times, category relationships were used to establish connections between the classifications. As the concepts and following categories emerged interrelating themes within the data were broken down into "meta" categories (Saldana, 2015). A hierarchy of categories and subcategories was established to suggest the impact and frequency of the data.

The school administrators and parents took part in a short individual semi-structured interview (See Appendices C & D) that gathered marketing and brand information on their attitudes about the school's attributes and what techniques influenced enrollment. Each participant was asked for and granted informed consent to be recorded during the interview. The interviews were recorded on an Apple audio device and participants were allowed to review the audio recording transcripts. The purpose of the questions was to get each person's perspective of their school brand, their awareness of a marketing strategy, and perception of how the school

attracts and enrolls students. The parent interviews focused on their attitude toward the school, desired attributes, and the effectiveness of marketing strategies which resulted in enrollment.

The qualitative data that was gathered examined what methods of marketing were used and the perceived effects. Interpretations of the collected data focused on specific marketing strategies commonly used at each school. The internal data collected from each school was compared to the perception of the administrators and consumers at each school. The data collected was gathered to determine if schools developed a message about their product features or attributes, their price, and their location. The data was analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the relationship of the attributes to parent's desires and the formal means of communication. Analysis of the various forms of marketing messages and media employed by schools, such as the use of social media, mass-market media, and personal relationships was conducted to determine the perceived value of each strategy in promoting school attributes.

The exploratory survey (see Appendix A) asked for responses about what methods of communication the HAIS institutions employ to market their brand and their perceived impact on consumer attitude. The information obtained from the survey explored how the marketing strategy was being carried out and the perception of effectiveness resulting in enrollment. The data shed light on what school administrators perceived to be what the parents valued in their school. The survey was conducted before the interviews so that it informed questions about marketing strategies and enrollment. The survey had a deadline of three weeks after the dissemination of the questions. The sample size and the personal follow up by the researcher may have encouraged a higher than standard return rate.

The survey focused on the strategies and practices of the participants' marketing efforts and how they perceived that they influenced consumer attitude. The focus of this section of the

study was to explore any trends or outcomes after a marketing plan has been implemented. The survey also explored if the school employed a defined marketing strategy. The one-on-one interviews included data shared by the school with their marketing plan, execution strategy, and enrollment. It was vital to the study to have parent participation to add depth to the conversation about what they perceived to be valuable in what influenced their attitude toward the school and their reasons for enrollment. Parents participating were asked through a semi-structured one-on-one interview what their pre-inquiry admissions attitude and knowledge was about the school and what attributes they desired in an independent school. The parents were presented with specific marketing messages and media and then asked to describe which method the school used that best conveyed the desirable attributes and the influence of the school's brand on the enrollment of their child. The dependent outcome variable was enrollment.

The independent variables were the marketing techniques and the method of communication used to influence consumer attitude toward enrollment. A score of each survey question was tabulated using a five-point scale to determine the effectiveness of the use of social media, personal relationships, print media and broadcast media. The score was tracked over the time before and during the marketing plan. The control variables for the study were the attributes a school chooses to market as their unique brand and what form of communication was the most effective in creating an attitude change or action. The formula used is based on Fishbein's Multi-Attribute Model (1977):

$$A = \sum_{i=1} b_i e_i$$

where,

A = attitude toward the school (brand)

b_i = belief in the brand's possession of the attribute

e_i = evaluation of the attribute as being good or bad

Example: The survey questions were scored on a five-point scale so that they could be recorded, analyzed, and coded for perceived effectiveness:

Using the numbers from the following scale to evaluate the effectiveness of each characteristic:

TV advertising:

Ineffective

Effective

Neither

Extremely	Moderately	nor	Moderately	Extremely
Effective	Effective		Ineffective	Ineffective
+2	+1	0	-1	-2

Potential Limitations

While it was difficult to prove causation between marketing, enrollments, and branding, an effort was made to display data which can help establish an association between specific messages and media in future strategic planning for independent schools. The data provides mostly anecdotal evidence and was presented in a manner that does not conclude relationship, but stresses the school's and parent's perceptions of the influence of the form of marketing communication used to create enrollment. Consumers' direct reaction to the marketing efforts could prove an association but do not account for extenuating factors. Therefore, a direct reaction

could be assumed when the consumer enrolled their child because they responded to a specific form of communication about a particular attribute the school claims and immediately decided that the school was their preferred choice. It was not always possible to get specific answers from consumers about what was the direct influence in deciding to enroll or not enroll.

The qualitative data were examined to determine which methods of marketing were used and the perceived effects on enrollment. The collected data was analyzed for evidence of specific marketing strategies commonly used at each school. The internal data collected from each school was compared to the perceptions of the administrators and consumers at each school. The data collected was coded into categories of relationship marketing and the formal means of communication. Various forms of marketing, such as the use of social media, mass-market media, or personal relationships, were categorized to analyze the perceived value of each strategy in promoting school attributes.

Conclusion

Based on the study's purpose, conceptual framework, and research questions, the qualitative methods of collecting data through an exploratory survey and one-on-one interviews contributed to the academic literature and applicable practice of marketing for independent schools. The structure of the research is aligned with past studies and literature and adds to academic discussions and future inquiries.

Independent school leadership teams should benefit from the data and analysis in chapters 4 and 5. The specific insights gained from the surveys and interviews should inform independent school leadership teams about which marketing techniques would best enhance their brand and attract students. Perceptions of the effectiveness of specific marketing practices and a possible correlation to enrollment may benefit schools when leadership teams develop a strategy that

creates a positive consumer attitude and attracts new students. The data from this research examines what marketing techniques were most successful in creating brand awareness and ultimately enrollment.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived effectiveness of using specific marketing and branding strategies to increase retention and enrollment of students in independent schools in Hawaii. The research was conducted by gathering qualitative data on specific marketing message and media used by Hawaii Independent Schools through a survey disseminated to school administrators using the HAIS Head of Schools distribution list. The study focused on independent schools in Hawaii and surveyed administrators from the HAIS affiliated schools. Interviews were also conducted with lead administrators and a parent from each school to get qualitative information to enhance the survey results. The research focused on the participants' perceptions of the impact on enrollment at Hawaii independent schools when the schools used specific marketing tools to create a consumer action.

The data gathered looked at three areas of marketing that influenced enrollment in Hawaii independent schools. The first area was the marketing message, and media administrators perceived to be effective, followed by the influence of specific techniques parents identified which influenced enrollment and finally the action taken by the parent concerning enrollment. The research questions used to guide this study were as follows:

What marketing message and media, if any, is used in a school's strategic marketing plan that can be perceived by administrators and prospective parents as effectively influencing consumer attitude toward a school's brand?

What marketing message and media used by Hawaii independent schools are perceived by the school's administration to be the most effective for increasing enrollment?

What were the marketing messages and media cited by parents in making their decision to select an independent school in Hawaii?

The area of concentration for this research study was the perceptions by administrators and parents of the practical use of marketing techniques to inform parents of the school's attributes and to inform parents' decisions to enroll their child. The study was designed from the research questions to have administrators describe their knowledge of the school's attributes, marketing plan, implementation, and effects on enrollment in an exploratory survey. The survey was sent to 92 HAIS member schools, and eleven schools were selected to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, to obtain in-depth qualitative information. The schools participating in the interviews provided the lead administrator and one parent for participation. The interviews were conducted at the participating schools and the administrator and parent were interviewed separately. Participants' and institutions' names and specific geographic location information in this research were omitted to ensure privacy.

Participants

Table 1. *Self-Identified Job Titles of the Survey Participants*

Lead Administrator (Head of School/President/Director)	91%
Principal/Dean	4%
Marketing Director	8%
Admissions Director	8%
Support Staff	0%

Table 2. *Current School Enrollment of Participating Schools in the Survey*

1-300	50%
300-600	23%
600-1000	12%
1000-3000	12%
3000+	3%

The exploratory twenty-six question survey was electronically sent to all ninety-two HAIS member schools' lead administrators. The lead administrator could delegate the answering of the survey questions to another lead staff member or answer the survey themselves. The participants could also indicate that, as the lead administrator, they may have more than one role, including Principal/Dean, Marketing or Admissions Director. Having more than one role would explain why the total contains more than 100%. Table 1 indicates that ninety-one percent of those participating answered that at least one of their roles was that of a lead administrator.

Interviews with the participating small schools often indicated that the lead administrator is tasked with the marketing efforts conducted at their school. Larger independent Hawaii schools were included in the survey because of their perceived dominance and resources. The schools that participated in the survey were not asked to provide their city/town location or island. The schools were asked to provide a range for their current student enrollment.

The eleven schools chosen to participate in the interviews were located on the island of Oahu and had a student population of 300 or less at the time of the interview. Seven of the eleven administrators interviewed cited having to take on many roles as part of the job at a small school.

Marketing as a stand-alone job was not found to occur in any of the schools interviewed. The locations for the interviews were selected because the Oahu independent school market is considered to be competitive with 39 of the 75 independent schools located on the island with 20,288 students enrolled. Twenty-two schools in the Honolulu district, not including schools located outside of the city, have 300 or fewer students (Hawaii Association of Independent Schools. 2016).

It was essential to get background information on the lead administrator's knowledge of marketing and if their school had a marketing plan to be able to answer the first research question. What marketing message and media, if any, is used in a school's strategic marketing plan that can be perceived by administrators and prospective parents as effectively influencing consumer attitude toward a school's brand? It was essential to get background information on the lead administrators knowledge of marketing and if their school had a marketing plan.

The results from the interviews indicated that lead administrators had varying degrees of understanding of what marketing entails, although all saw value in having a strategic plan. One Head of School noted, "marketing by definition is the actual advertising, print, media, social media, online presence, but I guess now that you ask me it should be broader. It should come down to researching whom we serve, and what are our differentiating factors." Several echoed the sentiment of one of the participants who stated that marketing "must be internal and external messaging including social media, print, press releases, word of mouth, campaign flyers, and ads." Another administrator defined marketing as "knowing your product and identifying who will be a good match for the product."

Marketing Plans and Strategies

Table 3. *Schools Responding from the Survey Indicating they do/don't have a Formal Marketing Plan*

Yes 62%
No 38 %

Those school leaders participating in both the survey and interview were asked if they had a formal marketing plan. The survey indicated that 62% did have a formal plan. The one-on-one interviews with the administrators from the eleven schools indicated that only two of the schools had a formal written marketing plan that included market analysis, desired outcomes, and techniques for creating brand awareness. The nine other administrators interviewed responded that they had elements of a marketing strategy, but did not have the statistical analysis of their desired customer base or recommendations as to how to best communicate their brand. One Head of School said, “we have no formal marketing plan in place, but we review how to get our message across with our admissions people and talk about the trends they are seeing.” Another Head of School responded, “We do not currently have a formal marketing plan, but we have been talking about it. I do not believe there ever has been one and we can play with the word *formal*. We had brochures and TV commercials, but I think that was all on the job experiences, but not a cohesive strategy.” One of the small schools indicated that they did have a formal plan,

The current marketing plan evolved and is updated annually. It was done 7 years ago.

During our accreditation process last year, we updated it. We partnered with a masters

group from the University of Hawaii to do a comprehensive marketing study and developed a plan.

Beliefs about Personnel Needs for Marketing

Table 4. *Schools with a Designated Marketing Employee*

Yes 68%
No 32%

Table 5. *Administrator's Value of Hiring a Dedicated Marketing Employee*

Yes 75%
No 25%

The survey revealed that a significant number of schools who took part in that phase of the research had a designated a marketing person. None of the eleven administrators who were interviewed had an employee who was designated just as a marketing specialist. However, smaller school leaders often assigned marketing to themselves or another employee in addition to their primary role. There was often a relationship between the admissions office and marketing.

All of the Heads of Schools interviewed felt that the cost of having a designated marketing person was too high and felt they needed to combine the job with other responsibilities. Without the cost involved all administrators interviewed saw the value in having a marketing professional on staff. One administrator commented, "We all know we need to have some designated person, but it is hard to justify the cost to a board without seeing immediate results." The survey indicated that 75% of those participating perceived the value of having a marketing employee

Table 6. *Administrators that Have or Would Consider Employing Outside Marketing Professionals to Develop Strategy*

Yes 58%
No 42%

In Table 6, there appears to be a moderate consensus that an outside marketing agency could provide benefit to the school. A Head of School who currently had not used a marketing agency stated that they should "reevaluate using an outside firm, because what we have been doing has been going on for years. We should spend some time and get some help from someone who knows the market." Another school administrator commented,

In consideration of the size of my school, I'd like an outside agency, I don't want just to hand it off, like here's our problem, please fix it, but start with them to get the ball rolling and get everyone on our side activated and get them together and build the rest of the plan.

It comes down to if we have the resources to contract someone from the outside.

School Brands and Attributes

Table 7. *Administrator's Perceptions that Their Marketing Plan is Effective in Identifying Their Brand*

Extremely effective	9%
Moderately effective	73%
Neither/nor	14%
Moderately effective	4%
Extremely effective	0%

Table 7 displays the administrators' perceptions about the effectiveness of their school's marketing plan, and if the plan had an impact on identifying their school brand. The majority of the respondents felt they had an effective plan in place. The goal of marketing would be to create an impact so that consumers or other stakeholders would increase their knowledge of the school's brand and make an informed decision to enroll their child. In the survey sent to HAIS administrators, 13% of those who answered indicated that their school saw no impact, while 4% viewed their marketing plan as being moderately ineffective.

During the interviews, one Head of School responded to a question about the positive effects about branding, stating, "in this town, I am not convinced that marketing can be an effective tool to compete against 'the big 3.' It seems to be the lifetime goal for parents to get their kids into these schools, regardless of the actual education. They want the name brand." Another Head of School commented in an interview that, while he felt that the marketing plan gave awareness about the school, he was "not sure if it translates into enrollment." Another administrator added

Our marketing efforts are designed solely to inform people about the school who were previously unaware of our existence. It is our opinion that the value we provide is best communicated through the information we share and the relationships we can foster, and these attributes largely influence whether or not the people who inquire enroll and the people already enrolled remain.

Table 8. *Administrators' Perceived Attributes for Branding Their School*

Attributes	Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	Neither/Nor	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Teaching staff	81%	15%	4%	0%	0%
Academic Curriculum	62%	38%	0%	0%	0%
Relationships	57.69%	42%	0%	0%	0%
Teacher/student Ratio	52%	44%	0%	4%	0%
Access to Teachers	46%	50%	3%	3%	0%
Class Size	50%	46%	0%	4%	0%
Peer Relations	27%	73%	0%	0%	0%
Proximity to Home	40%	44%	12%	0%	4%
Price	39%	42%	15%	4%	0%
Financial Aid	35%	42%	19%	4%	0%
Athletics	15%	42%	35%	4%	4%
Social Status of Parents	12%	31%	19%	23%	15%
Religious Affiliation	8%	19%	50%	8%	15%

Table 8 displays what attributes the administrators who participated in the survey perceived to be the most valuable for parents when forming their opinion about a school's brand. The importance of knowing what the school offers and how it sees itself should guide the message of the marketing effort. The identification of a school's brand internally and externally is valuable in shaping enrollment management. The objective of identifying school attributes is to match what the school's consumers are searching for and providing a good fit for potential students.

The survey indicated that administrators perceived that parents would identify the quality of the teaching staff as being the attribute that would stand out about their brand. The quality of teachers was followed by the academic curriculum, relationships, teacher/student ratio, access to teachers, class size, peer relations, and proximity to home, as being the top eight attributes that would define the school brand. The survey also indicated that the attributes parents felt least defined the brand or influenced them into enrolling were; price, financial assistance, athletics, the social status of parents, and religious affiliation.

The interviews shed some light on the perception of the administrators concerning brand awareness and the attributes they felt shaped their schools. While none of the participants mentioned the teaching staff to be the most critical factor in their branding effort, all eleven said the quality of the teachers shaped potential enrollees' views of the school. One administrator stated, "we have some teachers here that are known as innovative and are highly visible, those teachers are highlighted when we bring people on campus." There was also a feeling that when a prospective candidate looked on the website, having a staff with strong educational backgrounds and longevity at the school enhanced the school's brand. "People recognize quality and reading the teacher's biography can either help or hurt you," commented a lead administrator. Another

contributor to the interviews added, “we surveyed what students like best and emphatically kids like their teachers so much and that is the reason they go to school here.”

Each of the participants pointed to the school’s curriculum or pedagogical affiliation as a crucial element in their branding efforts. Attributes such as academic rigor, progressive education, special needs, innovative approach, and gifted programs, were some of the terms used to contribute to the school’s brand. All eleven administrators agreed that inquiring potential applicants would ask for a definition about specific educational philosophies. Some of the schools identified as operating with a specific educational affiliation, such as Montessori, Waldorf, Dewey-based Progressive Education, and Child-Centered Learning. There was a common perception that students’ parents needed clarification about the type of education the schools deliver.

The administrators’ perceptions were that they needed to educate the parents. “We have parent coffees and evenings where we talk about progressive theories and define that it means experiential learning by doing,” stated a Head of School. Another participant commented on the parents’ perceptions of the school’s brand, “the community does think that we are a special needs school because we have a methodology that looks at the individual or our kids are physically active instead of sitting still in a classroom.”

Class size and the benefits of a small school were often mentioned as attributes the participants perceived parents wanted in a school. Words such as, close community, low student/teacher ratio, and nurturing, were used in nine of the eleven interviews. One Head of School commented, “because our school is small, and through our program students develop a greater amount of self-confidence.” Another administrator saw the small school environment as a deterrent to competing in the independent school market, “We are in an area of power people,

who want to send their kids to the big school. Those families look at small schools only if their child is different in any way and needs us until they can be accepted to the larger school.”

Safety was an attribute that was mentioned in all eleven interviews. “Parents always cite safety and security,” mentioned an interviewee. “We may be their first experience with school, and they want their children to be secure and happy in their environment,” mentioned another interviewee. Other attributes that were mentioned by the interview participants included school location, ease of drop off and pick up, religious affiliation, green space, and room to play. There was complete agreement from all the administrators that participated in the interview that their attributes were what guided their marketing. There was also agreement that, other than a few surveys, they had not collected hard data.

Table 9. *Administrators’ Perceptions of Their Knowledge of the School’s Target Audience*

Extremely good	35%
Moderately good	61%
Neither/nor	4%
Moderately poor	0.00%
Extremely poor	0.00%

A key component to a marketing plan is the identification of the target audience. A marketing study identifies the potential consumers from various areas of the community. Marketing research also develops a consumer profile and the types of communication techniques that will reach the target audience. As indicated in Table 9, 96% of administrators felt comfortable with their knowledge of their target audience. Yet, none of the administrators perceived that they had poor knowledge of their target audience.

During the interviews, it became clear that the participating administrators could define their current customer or parent base. One administrator from a small school with consistent enrollment stated that her students' parents were "working professionals from all over the island."

Many of the administrators noted that some data on demographic information was required for accreditation. Even without detailed data, there was a definite sense from the administrators that they know whom their schools served. One administrator cited evidence that her school drew "the vast majority of students from the three closest zip codes and are comprised of diverse nationalities." She stated that "we know who our market is and we know our families. This lets us tailor our marketing to be high touch."

Table 10. *Administrators' Perceptions of their School's Competitive Advantage*

Extremely good	27%
Moderately good	58%
Neither/nor	15%
Moderately poor	0%
Extremely poor	0%

An administrator's belief about their school's competitive advantage colors the way they view marketing for brand awareness and enrollment management. As can be seen in Table 10, a majority of administrators feel extremely or moderately confident that their school has a competitive advantage in the independent school market. It is also noteworthy that 15% of those that answered the survey felt that they had no relevant perceptions, either positive or negative, about their competitive advantage.

In the interview sessions, administrators pointed to what they perceive to be their niche in the market. Many pointed to their religious affiliation, while others cited a specific brand of curriculum, such as Waldorf, Montessori, and Progressive Education. One administrator stated they are the only Catholic co-educational school in the area that offers pre-kindergarten to 8th grade. There were several of those interviewed that thought their size was an advantage. An administrator at a school of 160 students felt that being a small school was perceived as an advantage to potential students. “Being a small school is our number one advantage. We can develop relationships and offer a high touch environment with a smaller staff that can highly personalize the experience for the students and parents.”

The community’s perception of the school played a key role on their view about having a competitive advantage. Another educator said, “we are blessed to have a good reputation and where the children go after they finish our program, speaks for itself.” An administrator at a school with a reputation for having a strong waitlist noted, “we only have twenty-seven slots open each year and high retention, so the perception is that it is challenging to get accepted.” She also noted that perception by the community sometimes works against the school. “Some people will not apply because they think that only legacy or parents with connections can get in and that is not the truth.”

While there were a few administrators that admitted that they could not compare themselves to other schools, they did feel they had attributes that specific consumers would find appealing. An administrator at an all-girls school suggested that “I am not sure we have a competitive advantage. We can stay competitive because of our outcomes. A graduate from here can be accepted anywhere, Ivy league, public research universities or small liberal arts schools. They can have the future they want or change the future.”

Media and Messaging of the School Brand

Table 11. *Administrators' Perceptions of the Effective Use of Various Forms of Media in Branding Their School*

Facebook	42%	42%	8%	4%	4%
Twitter	16%	32%	36%	8%	8%
Instagram	27%	46%	15%	4%	8%
Pinterest	0%	12%	58%	0%	30%
Blogs	0%	12%	58%	8%	22%
Podcasts	0%	0%	62%	0%	38%
Newspaper	8%	53%	19%	12%	8%
Magazines	12%	50%	22%	8%	8%

The marketing of a school's brand is developed by identifying the attributes and the academic pedagogy that distinguishes the particular characteristics of one school from another. While many other factors determine the messaging of a school, the type of media used to convey the communication is often determined by demographic information, personnel, and budget. Table 11 presents results from the survey indicating how effective the participants perceived eight types of common forms of media used in Hawaii. In this section, television, radio, and other forms of mass media were not included. The inclusion of these forms of media are incorporated in the enrollment section of this study. Schools predominantly use social media as an inexpensive method of conveying the brand messaging in Hawaii schools. The survey

indicated that Facebook was the most effective messaging tool included on the list of types of media.

Another significant finding in the survey was that each school participates in the Honolulu Magazine's Private School Guide. The magazine placement included either full page, half, or quarter page color advertisements and featured a story about the school and pictures highlighting attributes. In table 12 only 12% of those who answered the survey felt that their advertisement was highly effective, while 50% felt it was a moderately effective use of media in brand messaging.

The interviews confirmed the use of Facebook, as an effective means of communicating a branding message. An interview participant commented, "we use Facebook as a means to tell our story. We do paid advertising." All of those interviewed expressed that Facebook reaches a large audience and extends to the target market of parents and grandparents of school-age children. Another administrator commented that she had heard that "Honolulu has grown into the third largest social networking city in the country." The perception is clear that the use of social media by schools to influence the market and to establish their brand is widely employed.

The downside of the use of social media is the amount of time, money, and energy involved to stay current given the shortage of personnel. A participant in the interview stated, "We would love to have a person do all the posting to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. We don't have the budget to hire someone, so it ends up being me." The case in many of the small schools is that the Head of School or other lead administrators devoted time to posting on social media. The interview participant continued by saying, "I'm not sure it is the best use of my time." A common theme among those interviewed was that they needed a strong social media presence to be competitive in the Honolulu independent school market.

Ten out of the eleven administrators agreed with the survey prompt that it was necessary that their school place an advertisement in Honolulu Magazine, but only three felt it was worth the cost and had seen direct benefits. One administrator pointed out, “we do advertise in Honolulu Magazine each year. If we don't, it may look like we are hurting or have already closed.” Another participant said, “We know we have to do it, but they need to cut the cost. It seems like they are profiting from the schools and making much money from sales to parents.” The consensus from the participants was that the magazine helped from a marketing and branding standpoint, but there was little impact on attracting students.

Marketing’s Effects on Enrollment

Table 12. *Administrators’ Perceptions that Their School’s Marketing Plan has an Effect on the Growth of Enrollment*

Extreme growth	15%
Moderate growth	60%
No growth	25%
Moderate decrease	0%
Extreme decrease	0%

Table 12 displayed the administrators’ perceptions that their school’s marketing plan affected the growth of enrollment. As previously stated, enrollment in Hawaii independent schools has declined over the past ten years. The survey indicated that the administrators perceived that the marketing plan did have a positive effect on enrollment. Seventy-five percent of those who participated in the survey indicated that they believed that the school's marketing efforts did result in extreme or moderate growth. Administrators responded that 15% saw

extreme growth and 60% experienced moderate growth, while 25% showed no growth. No respondents indicated that having a marketing plan prompted enrollment to decrease.

As previously stated, enrollment in Hawaii independent schools has declined over the past ten years. Adverse enrollment fluctuations have not been the case at all schools. One small school that participated in the study had a 23% increase over the past two years. The school showed growth, had an outside agency conduct a formal marketing study, and developed a plan to increase school exposure and enrollment. The school had experienced fluctuations in enrollment over a ten-year period beginning in 2008. The administrator commented, “Since we know our audience, we don't waste a lot of money on unnecessary advertising.” The enrollment grew after carefully following a strategy that encouraged brand awareness, community involvement, building relationships, and taking interested families through the enrollment process.

The interviews gave differing points of view on the purpose of marketing strategies and intended outcomes. These perspectives may indicate that enrollment growth was not the goal at all schools, as one administrator commented, “Our marketing efforts are designed solely to inform people about the school who were previously unaware of our existence.” Some of the administrators who were interviewed had more applications than they had spots for incoming students; therefore, their marketing objective would differ from schools with enrollment deficits.

One administrator from a school that only admits a total of 27 slots, said she had proposed a marketing effort to “make sure that the public knows what we do as a school and to make predictions to see if the market has shifted.” Another Head of School did not see the benefits as a direct correlation to their marketing efforts. She commented that she was “not sure if having a marketing plan translates into enrollment.” One administrator responded by saying

their enrollment grew because “the research from our marketing effort allows us to know who our target audience is, and what parents are looking for in a school.” No administrators responded in either the survey or interviews that their marketing plan had a negative impact on enrollment.

Another Head of School also mentioned that having data helped form their marketing message and media use, “We know where they come from and for the most part, their professions.” Having data appeared to be relevant to the participants, although only a few had a formal data bank. Most of the administrators at the small schools indicated that they collected personal demographic information from their admissions forms. Each interviewee indicated that they asked potential parents to describe how they heard about the school. This information could then be used to develop marketing statistics that could inform a marketing strategy.

The small schools struggle with budgetary restraints in the hiring of marketing and in some cases admissions professionals. One school leader indicated that, until the current school year, she did the marketing and admissions on her own. While she hired an admissions director, she was still the person in charge of marketing. Another administrator from a school that admitted that their enrollment was steadily declining mentioned, “We should reevaluate because what we have been doing has been going on for years and isn’t working. I would like some help from someone who knows the market.”

During the interviews, only the admissions director mentioned the term, “price of acquisition,” needed to be considered when grading the effectiveness of marketing plan on enrollment. Indirectly, a lead administrator stated, “I’m not sure marketing plans and the use of media translates into enrollment.” Each of the eleven interview participants suggested that they

needed to have a more formal way to evaluate trends and needed a marketing strategy to understand data better and the media tools that would influence enrollment growth.

The Effective Use of Media on Enrollment

Table 13. *Administrators' Perceptions about the Effects of Television Commercials on Enrollment*

Extremely effective	4%
Moderately effective	12%
Neither/nor	68%
Moderately ineffective	8%
Extremely ineffective	8%

There is a debate about television advertising; it is questioned about whether it is useful in creating enrollment. The administrators who participated in the survey indicated that 68% did not perceive that television commercials had a positive or negative impact on enrollment. Another 16% felt that television commercials were moderate to extremely ineffective. The question that follows the data is why do schools advertise on television if it appears to have little impact on enrollment?

That question was posed to the eleven administrators who took part in the interviews. It may be hard to show causation when discussing the action of enrollment and television advertising. One administrator made the point that “few parents admit to getting the idea to enroll their child in a school because of television.”

All of those interviewed cited that the cost of television advertising for a small school made it relatively prohibitive. The schools that did advertise said their television advertising was

often affiliated with a school event that the public was invited to and not focused on enrollment. An administrator who said that their event acted to get the public on campus commented, “We advertise on television about the event and get a big turnout. We know we get many students to apply to school after they have been to the event, but we cannot say there is a correlation between the advertising and enrollment.”

Other administrators expressed the belief that the television advertising gave the school name recognition. A participant added, “the field is extremely competitive and expensive. Never convinced about effectiveness, but one only has to ask if there is no advertising, where would the school be?” Another administrator interviewed said, “I am not sure we get much return on the dollar with television, but we do let the community know we exist.”

Perceived value also may be a factor in whether a school advertises on television. An administrator at a small school with few yearly openings stated, “we have not felt the need to advertise on TV, because we do not think it makes sense. We get most of our applicants through referrals and alums.” Another participant mentioned, “We notice the schools that do television advertising because either they are introducing something new or they have a reputation for not doing well. We try to avoid it so that we do not put our program in that category.”

Table 14. *Administrators’ Perceptions about the Effects of Radio Commercials on Enrollment*

Extremely effective	0%
Moderately effective	19%
Neither/nor	54%
Moderately ineffective	12%
Extremely ineffective	15%

The perception of an association between radio advertising and enrollment seems only partially appreciated by school administrators. Table 14 is telling because no administrators who participated in the survey felt radio advertising was extremely effective and under 20% felt it was moderately effective in producing enrollment. The primary perception is that radio commercials have little to no impact on enrollment.

The interviews with the eleven administrators confirmed the data indicating there appeared to be minimal effectiveness of radio commercials with enrollment. Despite the feeling that radio had little impact on enrollment, eight of the eleven administrators interviewed had produced commercials to advertise either events or enrollment information. Some of the Christian schools took part in a tuition discount scheme through a local radio station, which encourages prospective enrollees to mention that they heard about the school on the station. If a prospective enrollee credits the station with the contact information, potential students could receive a percentage off tuition.

When asked about the effectiveness of the program one administrator stated, “We have experienced some success with this, but the advertisement just drives them to enquire, and most seem to have been aware of the school before they heard the commercial.” Perceived value again was cited by another Christian school leader who decided against participating in the program, “because it seemed to cheapen our product.”

Most of the administrators who participated felt the value in radio advertising came from providing a source of name recognition. The perception of several administrators was that a prospective enrollee would hear the name on the radio and that would cause them to search for further information. The actual advertisement would not be the driving force that caused enrollment, but would instead produce a call to action. One administrator commented, “very few

people say they heard it on the radio but might have heard it and then spoke to a knowledgeable friend.” The call to action to inquire about the school would not show causation for enrollment but may have sparked a future inquiry, which led to enrollment.

Table 15. *Administrators’ Perceptions of How Likely Interested Parents Look at the Website*

Extremely likely	65%
Moderately likely	35%
Neither/nor	0%
Moderately unlikely	0%
Extremely unlikely	0%

Table 16. *Administrators’ Perceptions that The Website influenced enrollment*

Extremely effective	23%
Moderately effective	65%
Neither/nor	12%
Moderately ineffective	0%
Extremely ineffective	0%

Websites are perceived to be a powerful tool to inform interested parents about the attributes, academics, and enrollment process at an independent school. Administrators also perceived the potential advantages of having a good website as indicated in Table 15. The results of the survey indicated that 65% were extremely likely to have viewed the school’s website when starting the inquiry process. The remaining 35% believed that parents were moderately likely to look at the website. While 100% of those surveyed were convinced that parents are

likely to view a school's website, Table 15 also produced data that indicates that administrator's felt strongly that the school's website influenced enrollment. The participants in the survey perceived that 88% found the website to be extremely to moderately effective in influencing enrollment. Only 12% surveyed felt that the website had no noticeable influence on enrollment and no participants felt that it was completely ineffective concerning enrollment.

The value of the school website for information gathering and enrollment was reinforced in the interviews with administrators. All eleven of those who participated in the interviews felt that their school's website had a strong influence on the enrollment process. As one interviewee stated, "I think it is the first place people look nowadays." Others agreed that it might be a major factor in providing information, but also cited other factors. One administrator commented, "people may say they like our website, or I saw it on the website, but we do not know how they got to the website. It might be word of mouth and then they went to the site to look something up."

A few administrators felt that if the interested parents were not from Hawaii, then their first contact with the school was the website. If they were from the islands, they might have heard about the school through a friend or drove by and saw the exterior of the school. One of the participants stated, "I do not think it is like I found our extracting company during a flood by just looking up and going down a list on Google. Once in a great while, it may happen, but I do not think people find schools that way." Many of those interviewed noted that they had little to no data to support their perception that the website influenced enrollment, but felt that it played a significant role.

The other notable perception of all eleven small school participants was that they did not like their current website. Comments such as, "not happy with our website" and "it is dated" was

often heard. Each administrator noted that the cost, time, and staffing, made the website difficult to build and maintain to their standards. Some noted that they have parent volunteers build the platform, while others noted that they spent a substantial amount of money to hire an outside agency to create their website. One administrator who created their website in-house noted, “we cannot keep it updated because of the lack of human resources. As soon as it was created, it was already out of date.”

Table 17. *Administrators’ Perceptions That Social Media Effects Enrollment*

Extremely likely	15%
Moderately likely	58%
Neither/nor	19%
Moderately unlikely	4%
Extremely unlikely	4%

During the survey and interview phases of this study, some form of social media was regularly cited as a marketing tool used by schools to increase brand awareness and enrollment. Websites were separated from social media during this part of the study, because most schools use their websites as a form of student and family engagement, such as initial Google searches, forms, applications, and calendars. Websites are also used as a place where potential consumers can look for links to social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, blogs, and many other platforms.

Table 17 displays that there are widespread opinions on the effect of social media on enrollment. Administrators answered the survey by indicating that the majority, of 58% felt that social media was moderately likely and 15% viewed social media to be extremely likely to affect

enrollment. While a relatively small percentage of participants perceived that social media was moderate to extremely unlikely to influence enrollment, there was a feeling among 19% of the participants that the school's use of social media had neither/nor any impact on enrollment.

The interviews revealed that all eleven administrators used various forms of social media to get their school's message out to potential enrollees. One participant suggested, "I do believe social media and the web are the best for advertising. For small schools, having a person maintain all these sites can be a challenge, but someone has to do it." While each participant noted that they used several forms of social media, the use of Facebook posts and paid advertising was cited by seven of the eleven administrators.

A theme that emerged when discussing social media was that the age of the parents of children in the early grades was getting younger. There was concern that the constant shifts in social media made it difficult to maintain a strategy. One administrator felt that "we try to hit all the platforms and hope we reach our target audience." As noted this can be difficult and time-consuming for small schools, with little staff. Another participant recently hired a communications director and had been presented with an alternative to their established methods. He commented, "She feels we need to get away from print media. Her feeling is newspapers are dead, and I believe it, but are we just going on a gut feeling or is there actual data to what is most effective?"

Relationship Marketing Approaches for Increasing Enrollment

Table 18. *Administrators' Perceptions That the School's Marketing Effort Creates a Relationship with the Interested Parent and Student*

Extremely good	13%
Moderately good	67%

Neither/nor	20%
Moderately poor	0%
Extremely poor	0%

The concept of establishing a relationship with potential enrollees through referrals was a tool that each participant said their school used to their benefit. Schools encouraged word of mouth to establish the first contact. Once prospective applicants were intrigued about the school from communication through word of mouth with a friend, neighbor, or colleague, the next steps appeared to be either further research through the school's website or to call for a tour. According to the survey participants, 80% of the schools incorporate word of mouth in their marketing effort to connect the potential enrolling family to a person, such as an admissions director, at the school. Once that is achieved the prospect can then select to form a relationship with the school or look elsewhere.

Designing a marketing plan for an independent school should indicate that the consumer is known and that the tools of marketing have been put in place to create a message to entice future communication and create an action. The administrators from the Hawaii schools who took part in the survey perceived that their marketing efforts created a relationship. Over 2/3 of those surveyed felt that their marketing effort created a relationship with potential parents and students. The administrators from the Hawaii schools who took part in the survey perceived that their marketing efforts created a relationship which led to enrollment.

The administrators from the Hawaii schools who took part in the survey perceived that their marketing efforts created a relationship. All eleven of the administrators who were interviewed for this study felt that creating and maintaining a relationship was a vital component

to attracting and retaining students. In the interview, only two of the eleven participants knew the term, “relationship marketing.” Although each agreed, at a small school, that approach was an essential element of how he or she recruited students. An interview participant stated, “word of mouth is an authentic grassroots marketing tool. The parent thinks, ‘does what I hear interest me?’ And, after going to the website, they come to the office and ask to speak about the school.”

The term, “high touch” was brought up by many of the administrators. One participant commented, “Building and maintaining a relationship is more important than any other method we use to enroll students.” Another administrator suggested, “as a small school, we do not have a huge staff, but we can be highly personalized from the first touch we have with parents.”

Developing a personal relationship with the potential applicants was a consistent response during the interviews. The admissions director who took part in the interview stated, “once we have contact, we follow up with phone calls, emails, and texts. We arrange an individualized tour, which produces a high yield of applications.” There was agreement among the administrators, that after the potential consumers had been on campus, maintaining a relationship was a useful marketing tool for creating lasting enrollment management.

Table 19. *Administrators’ Perceptions that the Open House Influences the Likelihood of Enrollment*

Extremely likely	31%
Moderately likely	42%
Neither/nor	19%
Moderately unlikely	0%
Extremely unlikely	8%

Getting prospective students and parents on campus is often the goal of independent schools. The ability to display the attributes of a school is perceived by administrators to be a useful marketing tool. The open house has been conducted in diverse forms and used as an opportunity to sell the school's culture and to explain the enrollment process. Some schools use traditional open houses, where prospective parents visit the school and meet teachers, while others use a school-driven event to attract an external audience. Open houses take on many different shapes and attract interested potential consumers to have a personal experience.

The question that was asked in the survey and interviews was "Did the open house influence prospective parents to enroll their child in your school?" Table 19 indicates that the survey respondents felt strongly that open houses were extremely to moderately likely to influence enrollment. However, 19% of the survey participants countered that they did not perceive one way or the other that the open house influenced enrollment and 8% believed that it was extremely unlikely that the open house had an impact on the process.

The administrators who were interviewed confirmed that open houses were useful tools, but also had different definitions of its meaning. Each of the eleven participants indicated that they had some form of an open house. Three of the administrators indicated that their schools used events to attract potential enrollees to campus and distribute school information. One of the interviewees commented, "we used to do traditional open houses and get a handful of applications from it. Now we have a fall festival, and it attracts around four thousand people. Sometimes it is the first touch we have with future students." At the events, prospective parents of potential enrollees get to experience the school's culture and receive information about the next steps in the application process. One administrator whose school holds an event stated, "we get to meet the prospects at the event and then arrange a personal tour." According to all three of

the administrators with an event, the key is to get a broader reach. “An event reaches people through our advertising, sponsorships, and community awareness. It includes people who have never thought about the school and now see it as an option.”

One of the Heads of School of a high school stated in their interview that they have a traditional open house, but indicated that they have student guides take prospective applicants around campus. “The chance to talk to someone in their peer group seems to appeal to most of the kids on the tour.” Another administrator commented that, “the most important thing is to get them to your campus. When they see the school, it has an impact. They are either going to love the place and curriculum or it is not going to appeal to them.” After looking at the data and collecting the responses, there is a strong indication that schools rely on the appeal of an open house and the chance to have potential students experience the attributes of the school.

Table 20. *Administrators’ Perceptions that Word of Mouth Influences a Parent to Enroll Their Child*

Extremely likely	92%
Moderately likely	8%
Neither/nor	0%
Moderately unlikely	0%
Extremely unlikely	0%

Administrators cite word of mouth as the most effective marketing tool that influences parents to enroll their child. In Table 20 of the survey, 92% perceived word of mouth to have been extremely likely to have influenced parents to enroll their child in school, while only 8% found it to be moderately likely. There were no survey responses indicating word of mouth did

not influence enrollment. The strength of word of mouth, especially in small schools, appears to be a marketing tool that is relied upon to attract potential students and ultimately create the action of enrollment. In the interview phase of this research, each participant cited word of mouth as being critical for their enrollment management.

Without hesitation, word of mouth was what each participant responded to the question to name the number one way a prospective parent hears about their school. One respondent stated, “based on anecdotal feedback from prospective families our strongest marketing is word of mouth, next is social media.” Many of the participants indicated that their best tool for spreading the word about their school was to teach parents to be ambassadors. An admissions director who took part in the interview commented, “We try to give parents key talking points so that when they are discussing schools to friends and neighbors, they have accurate information.” The general feeling by each of the administrators was that enrollment was based on emotion and general knowledge of the school’s attributes. The relationship established with the stakeholders appeared to be paramount in spreading the story of the school.

There was some debate if word of mouth could be controlled. One of Head of Schools stated, “You cannot depend on word of mouth alone, because it is uncontrollable.” The consensus amongst the interviewees was that word of mouth can be a positive marketing tool, as well as it can be a detriment to enrollment. “When something negative occurs at the school or someone leaves with bad feelings,” commented an administrator, “that can damage all the good marketing work you have done.” There was a strong perception that parents of students either currently enrolled or who had attended, would recommend the school as long as they felt they had a strong relationship with a teacher, staff, or fellow parents. The admissions director stated, “You have a personal touch with each applicant and maintain that relationship even after they

leave our school. We always ask that they speak well of us when they move on and we find for the most part that they do.”

There was a perception common to all of the interview participants that larger schools or those with a reputation for being difficult to get accepted into only need to use word of mouth as a marketing tool. One participant at a school with steady enrollment shared, “We do not do any advertising. The majority of our new applicants come through word of mouth.” Another administrator at a school with a waitlist commented, “The misperception is that students cannot get in. We encourage people in the community to tell friends to apply.” She went on to say, “Our website and printed materials are helpful, but the biggest seller for the school is our families, we always encourage families and trustees when they hear comments about not getting kids in that they say absolutely not. It is more about the right fit.”

As previously stated in this study, the Honolulu independent school market has been dominated by a few large schools with strong reputations for being selective in admissions. Many of those interviewed expressed the opinion that even with great word of mouth for their school, the competition from the “elite” schools made it difficult for small schools to grow. The lead administrator at a kindergarten to 12th-grade school referred to the larger schools when she compared her smaller word of mouth platform mentioning, “They have thousands of alumni spreading word of mouth, which we cannot compete against because of their bigness and legacy. It does not matter if we are the right fit for their child.” While this may be the prevailing attitude among schools in the Honolulu area, some of the small school leaders believe they serve a niche market and use the power of word of mouth to propel prospective applicants to take action.

Parent Participants in the Interviews

Eleven parents from the selected small schools in Honolulu participated in a semi-structured one-to-one interview. The focus of the interview was to determine the parent's pre-inquiry admissions attitude and knowledge about the school and what attributes they desired in an independent school. The parents were presented with specific marketing messages and media and then asked to describe which method the school used to best convey the desirable attributes. The parents were asked what message and media best influenced their understanding of the school's brand and what factors led to the enrollment of their child.

The parents who participated in the interviews had not gone through the process of enrolling their child or the child's siblings in their current school in the past. The purpose of picking the first-time enrolled families was to explore what their attitude was going into the process and what influenced them to enroll their child. None of the parents who took part in the interviews had other children at different schools. The administrator of the schools that participated in the interviews in the previous section of this study selected the parent participants. All the parents, except for one had heard of the school before the search process and acknowledged that they had an impression of the school before starting the enrollment. The one parent who was not aware of the school before the inquiry phase began, had not moved to Honolulu until a few months before school commenced.

The Attributes That Influenced Enrollment from the Parent's Perspective

Table 21. *Attributes Cited by Parents that Influenced Enrollment of Their Child in a Small Hawaii Independent School*

Student is Known/Relationship
Small Class Size/School

Safe Environment
Access to Teachers/Staff
Location
Pedagogy
Religious Affiliation
Placement in Receiver School
Peers
Price

In Table 21, parents cited attributes which influenced the enrollment of their child in their current school. The most commonly cited attributes for parents was that their child would be known on campus. All eleven parents strongly agreed that the strength of the school they selected was that teachers and administrators knew their child. One of the parents confirmed, “The size of the school and the fact that the whole school comes together every morning was a key factor and that there is a sense of community. That was very important to my husband and myself.” Parents were impressed that the teachers and staff knew their child’s name. “We liked that the Head of School greets the students each morning using their name,” asserted a parent.

All of the participants affirmed that the school's use of effective marketing showed the positive benefits of a small independent school and the personal relationships families form. Along with the small school environment, the participants indicated that they appreciated the small class size and the student/teacher ratio. The participants were unanimous in their opinion that large classes presented an impersonal learning environment. “If our child would have

difficulty, we were confident that they would receive the help they needed,” assured a parent participant.

Safety was cited as a primary factor in the decision process. The participants stressed that the small environment made for a more secure school. None of the parents mentioned the physical characteristics of the school as providing safety. The contention from all of those interviewed was that the people on campus provide a more secure setting. One parent of an incoming student expressed, “I mostly wanted a place that felt maternal because she is spending her day in school and not with her family. I wanted her to be in a place that is comfortable, safe, and not rigid or cold.”

Along with the small, safe, school environment, parents were also looking for access to teachers. Schools that incorporated teachers in the enrollment process impressed the parents. One school made sure that the child's future teacher reached out to the family during the enrollment phase. Parents in this study indicated that they liked the idea that teachers would respond to them and their child. A parent who selected a school that offers multi-age classrooms commented, “Everything was done in teams, so our child gets the attention of one teacher or the other.” Many of the schools had a lead teacher and an assistant in the classroom, especially in the younger grades. The parents who enrolled their child in one of these schools cited that they felt that their children had a better chance of getting their needs met.

Parents seemed more concerned with the location of the school than the administrators who participated in the study. While each administrator cited location as either being a positive or negative attribute, all eleven identified other factors to be more meaningful to parents. Parents, during the interview phase, named location to be extremely important in how they identified the school's brand. Many cited the green space at some of the schools or the ease of drop off and

pick up was easy on the way to work. Another school, which was not known for being a convenient location, struggles with getting prospective students on campus. A parent who selected the school for their daughter commented, “even though it is out of the way, it is such a beautiful campus and in a nice area, that we can make the drive and still feel good about it.”

The pedagogy of a school would seem to be the most vital element of their branding. While every parent interviewed stated that the curriculum was relevant, it was outweighed by the previously mentioned attributes. Schools with identifiable historical pedagogy seemed to fare better with parents placing value in that as a positive attribute. The parents who selected schools with deep-rooted educational philosophies, such as Montessori or Waldorf, identified more strongly with the curriculum. A mother with a young child at a Waldorf school stated, “even if I move I will always look for another Waldorf school.” Another parent participant said, “we love the teachers at this school, but the Montessori practices sold us.”

Some of the schools that participated have a rich academic tradition that parents recognize. One parent of a six-year-old stated, “we didn’t want a cookie cutter kind of school where they mold all their kids. We like that each child learns at their own pace.” A participant, who is also a teacher at another school, met some of the faculty at a professional development workshop and was impressed with how they were teaching. “the more you learn about the school you find out if it is a good fit or not. When we were on tour, a parent asked about the lack of textbooks, proving it is not for everyone.”

Eight of the eleven schools that participated in the interviews had a religious affiliation. The schools were affiliated in some form with the Catholic, Episcopal, Nazarene, or Lutheran Churches. The parents who participated and sent their child to one of the faith-based schools cited to some degree that selecting the school was based on Christian principles. “My husband

went to Catholic school and wanted to have that environment for our kids,” asserted a mother, who went to a secular private school when she was a student. Another parent selected an Episcopal school, because even though she was turned off by mainstream religion, she commented, “I want my children to get the values and character that this school can give.”

Honolulu, as previously was stated, has several large schools that dominate the market. Only three of the small schools that took part in the interviews went past 8th grade. The other schools often feed into the larger schools. Schools will market their acceptance rate into “schools of choice,” much like high schools list where their graduates attend university. The parents that took part in the interview did not express as much concern as would have been anticipated. One parent whose child is in kindergarten mentioned, “our daughter is too young to be prepping for another private school.” There was a strong sense of confidence that their children would get the skills they needed and would find the school that fits their learning style in the future. This attitude may be indicating a shift in the market, or it may also be contributed to the younger age of the participant's children.

Parents often have preconceived ideas about what their child’s peer group will be like at a private school. Except for the family that had just moved to Honolulu, all the parents in this study said they already knew children at the school. Honolulu is a diverse city both racially and economically. One parent at a historically favorite school said her perception changed after visiting the campus. “I was a little concerned before the tour that he would be surrounded by certain types of kids or parents would surround us, but I found it to be very inclusive, and not elitist.” All of the parents acknowledged that they had heard good things about their child’s peer group, and it reflected well on the character of the school.

The tuition of the schools that participated in the interview ranged from \$10,800 to \$22,000 per year. Each school offered some degree of financial assistance based on need. One of the schools qualified for free or reduced lunch. Even with the high cost of living in Hawaii, the group of parents who were interviewed did not mention the price of their child's education on their own. When it was brought up to the parents, all perceived the value of education justified their enrollment in their current school. A single mother who participated in the interview commented, "I didn't even think about the price. I just wanted him to be with friends, but after he was accepted, then I was like wow this is quite a bit more than I expected." Another parent mentioned, "affording school is hard, but I love it here."

The participating parents indicated that the schools send a strong message that the schools are affordable. One participant stated, "price is a killer, but they help you out in any way they can. From our first visit, they were like, let us see what we can do to have you be here." There was a consensus that all eleven schools did a great job of messaging about affordability. One parent summed up her feelings about tuition when she said, "tuition does play a factor, of course, you see it and say oh my gosh, but that is why we work so hard, and you can't really put a price on education."

The Type of Media Parents Cited that Influenced Enrollment

Table 22. *The form of Marketing Media that Influenced Enrollment in a Small Independent School in Hawaii*

Word of Mouth
Website
Open House/Event
Tours

Social Media
Honolulu Magazine
Television/Radio
Banners
Newspapers

Table 22 shows the media tools used by contributing schools from the most effective to the least likely to influence parents to enroll their child. The marketing media that influenced each parent in this study to first visit the school and later to enroll was cited to be word of mouth. The scenario that was heard consistently was that a group of friends or work colleagues would discuss where their child was going to school and their impressions. Word of mouth was either positive or negative. Depending on the relationship of the people talking word of mouth would either peak interest or give a lasting impression that the school did not have the right attributes that would warrant further steps. One of the participants stated, “my friend enrolled her son here, and I trust her, so that made it easy to inquire about my child.” Another parent mentioned, “we have friends here that have kids a few years older, and they loved it. You mostly go through word of mouth, and those referrals are better than advertisements. You start to ask everyone where they are applying and what they think.”

An informal network is created where parents discuss schools. This network can make or break enrollment. One school experienced a conflict, which enabled negative word of mouth. A parent who ignored the negative talk and enrolled their child despite the talk said, “people don't always get the whole story straight, so you have to trust yourself.” Word of mouth often drives the consumer to check other sources for information.

The participants in the interview looked for other forms of communication after hearing about the school through word of mouth. Each parent mentioned that they looked at the school website after hearing about the school from friends or knew about the reputation of the school. Exploring various schools' websites was particularly useful for a prospective family who moved to Honolulu during the summer before school began. The participant said, "we started our search by looking for websites of Catholic schools in the area where we were moving." The websites generally give useful information and can leave a strong impression on the potential consumer. One parent stated, "some schools had a junk website, and that turned me off." The quality of the website and the ease of browsing left an impression on the participants.

Each of the schools held either an open house or an event to attract potential enrollees. Parents seemed to appreciate the chance to get on campus and to get to talk firsthand with representatives from the school. Four of the schools hold themed events, which attract larger audiences and yield follow up tours and applications. "My first time on campus was when I came for a festival in the fall, I never really thought about the school before that, but I followed up with a tour, and now we have two children here," commented a participant. HAIS also holds a school admissions fair each year which attracts a large crowd. Only two of the parents interviewed said they attended.

Each of the schools in the study offered a personalized tour for prospective families. Each interview contributor mentioned the tour as being useful. The participants with high schools, incorporate their current students on the tours. One mother of a junior said, "getting to have someone close to my daughter's age helped her to feel more welcome." The goal of the tour was to establish a relationship and give a firsthand experience to the prospective student. One of the parents added, "after the tour, I felt validated because the admin director knew my child."

Another parent stated, “A lot of the schools sound alike on paper, so I made an appointment to come see for myself. I was impressed with the students, that I came away and said I want my child here.”

Social media allows parents to stay up-to-date on events and happenings at a school. No participant in the interview felt that social media influenced their decision to enroll, but each said they did follow the school on either Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. The parents acknowledged that they saw the Honolulu Magazine Private School edition. The overall impression was that it was good to help spread the message about the school, but it did not have an impact on enrollment.

Parents did not cite television, radio, banners, or newspapers having any significant influence on enrollment. One parent said, “being on TV or the radio makes the school look good and keeps our name out there, but I'm not sure anyone decides where I'm sending my child to school based on it.” Another parent summed up their feelings when they said, “it is just about the relationship you have with people at the school, the other ads, keep us informed.”

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived effectiveness of using specific marketing and branding strategies to increase retention and enrollment of students in independent schools in Hawaii. The qualitative data was collected from Hawaii independent schools' administrators, asked for their perceptions of the effectiveness of their marketing message and media. The surveys produced data based on the perceptions of the administrators about their knowledge of how their school incorporates marketing to produce brand awareness and increase enrollment. The interviews were conducted with lead administrators and separately with parents,

who had enrolled their children in the participating schools. This section of the study allowed for the use of qualitative data, which enhanced and added depth to the survey results.

The research results demonstrated that Hawaii independent school administrators and parents perceived the impact of marketing to be useful in creating a consumer action specifically, brand awareness and enrollment. Specific marketing tools were used in creating the consumer action. This study found that administrators had a general knowledge of the scope of a marketing plan, but often confused the use of media as a strategy for marketing. The research phase of a school's potential market was often overshadowed by the method of delivery of an intended message.

The research affirmed that Hawaii independent schools benefited from a purposeful and well-crafted marketing plan, which included building and maintaining relationships. Relationship marketing methods, such as open houses, social media, tours, and personal contact was found to have the most significant impact on the enrollment process. Despite the challenges associated with marketing in a competitive school environment, administrators demonstrated they have a grasp on the needs of the consumer group they serve and produce useful marketing messages. Hawaii small schools struggle with creating a budget, time allotment, and the personnel to enrich their school's brand awareness and increase enrollment. While no two small schools had identical challenges, the research clearly illustrated the difficulties they faced competing in an independent school market dominated by established large schools with established reputations.

Chapter one introduced the study's problem of practice, purpose, and research questions. Chapter two outlined the process of reviewing the literature for relevant content to inform the research. Chapter three defined the study's method of collecting and interpreting the data. Chapter four presented the research findings collected from the survey with depth provided from

the responses to the one-to-one interviews. Chapter five reviews and answers the research questions, interprets and aligns the findings with relevant literature, provides recommendations and establishes conclusions about the study.

Chapter 5

Interpretation of Findings

The qualitative study examined Hawaii Independent School administrators' and parents' perceptions of marketing strategies and the associated messages and media which effectively influenced brand awareness and enrollment growth. There were two phases of the study. The first phase employed a sequential exploratory strategy using a survey distributed to all HAIS member school administrators. The second phase consisted of separately conducted one-to-one interviews with eleven administrators and eleven parents who had selected an independent school to enroll their child. The study produced data regarding marketing plans, school attributes, the content of messages, implementation, brand awareness, and enrollment results.

Literature and research support the use of marketing strategies to develop a message about a school's brand and has demonstrated that parents find value in a school's attributes. Schools that employed marketing strategies that delivered an accurate and enticing message, and in a platform that parents valued, produced enrollment. The research was framed in Fishbein's Multi-Attribute Attitude Model, where specific questions were designed to probe the participants regarding the content of the marketing message. The presentation of the perceptions of the school administrators, regarding the value of the method and message of marketing the school attributes encouraged parents to take action. This research examined if the perceptions of the school administrators matched the parent's experience. This chapter will interpret the findings of the research, and present conclusions, recommendations, and implications of the study.

Review of Research Questions

Research Question #1

What marketing message and media, if any, is used in a school's strategic marketing plan that can be perceived by administrators and prospective parents as effectively influencing consumer attitude toward a school's brand?

A school's brand is the identifiable attributes or impressions, both internally and externally, that make the school unique. The survey indicated that administrators who identified that they had either a formal or informal marketing plan, felt strongly that their plan was effective in influencing stakeholders with the identification of the school's brand. The message a school portrays in their branding has to match what the prospective parents of enrolling students value.

Internally the message of a school's brand has to be accurate and agreed upon by the majority of their stakeholders. School's that have an unrealistic perception of their brand or how their potential consumers view them, face a difficult time matching the message with reality. Externally, school's that have a brand that is recognizable because of pedagogy or reputation face the challenge of educating their potential consumers between what is real and what is perception. In the study, it was found that schools with specific curriculums still faced either misperception of what they offered or parents enrolled their child because the culture was a fit. Interestingly, schools associated with Waldorf, Montessori, or who had church affiliations, still struggled with how the consumers viewed their brand.

This study revealed that the majority of administrators had a deep understanding of what their school offers concerning their academics and culture. What many administrators lacked was the resources, specifically, time, budget, and personnel, to conduct an in-depth market analysis to

better develop strategies for brand awareness. The administrators at many of the small and larger schools that directly compete against the historically dominant schools, could not afford the market research to develop a strategy to increase brand awareness. Many of the school's lacked marketing research that could provide the administration with an accurate picture of their attributes and the method of communication that best suited their consumer base.

Based on the literature and this research, the development of relationships appeared to be the method most used to convey brand awareness. Small schools built their reputations on personal and nurturing environments. Students needs being met was a top priority of the administrators at the small schools. They cited overwhelmingly, that the relationships between the students, parents and the teachers defined their schools. The small school brand promoted the benefits of being known and a better student/teacher ratio. The perception of the majority of the administrators was that their brand message revolved around the care a student receives from a small school which in turn outweighed the attributes of a larger school.

The message of the brand was conveyed through relationships. Referrals or word of mouth was found to be the best source of communication when informing consumers about the school's attributes. Current families, friends, neighbors, and alumni transmit the brand message to potential consumers. Schools that had conducted market research, and designed a word of mouth strategy, appeared to control their message with great purpose and success.

The administrators viewed the use of social media as a means to produce brand awareness, and in some cases, control the message. Facebook and Instagram afforded schools with a relatively low-cost method of producing consumer awareness for the school's programs and culture. Platforms where negative comments can to an extent be blocked or deleted, allowed schools to present their brand in a format where the message is controlled. Many administrators

in this study cited that negative messages on social media can produce damage. Overall, social media enhanced the relationships with their community concerning the school's brand. Websites were also referred to as a reliable source of information. The importance of a website was apparent in this study. School's produce a message to consumers that is controlled internally. The website engages the consumer with information, a call to action, and procedures to move forward. Social media is a significant component in executing a relationship marketing strategy. While many administrators did not verbalize their understanding of relationship marketing, they did acknowledge that schools cannot exist without relationships.

Research Question #2

What marketing message and media used by Hawaii independent schools are perceived by the school's administration to be the most effective for increasing enrollment?

The survey and interview phases of this study revealed that many independent schools identified that they had a marketing strategy in place, but often did not have a formal research-based plan. After discussing the development of a formal marketing plan with interview participants, the common perception of school administrators was that the methods of communication defined their strategy. Except for two administrators in the interview, all the other participants acknowledged that very little research had been accomplished that defined their potential audience. The interview phase of the research disclosed that the administrators viewed marketing as employing media to increase brand awareness and ultimately increase enrollment. Feedback or data was rarely collected to determine effectiveness.

Enrollment and tuition generally produced the primary stream of revenue for the independent schools that participated in this study. Some of the schools had limited openings and a waitlist, while others struggled to fill seats. A few of the schools had increased enrollment over

the past two years, some maintained enrollment patterns, while others had experienced near critical losses. In any case, all participants agreed that matching the attributes of the school with the desired needs of the student, generally produced enrollment.

It is difficult to prove that there is a direct causation between a marketing plan and enrollment. The research and the literature indicate that without the essential elements of a marketing plan, there is less certainty that schools have statistical evidence of their consumer base, what attributes interest parents, and the best method of communication that results in creating an action. School's employed media to communicate their attributes.

The perception of the administrators was that there was an association between word of mouth and enrollment. A trend that occurred in both the survey and interviews was that positive word of mouth led to an action. Often after hearing about the school from someone they trusted, the potential consumer followed up by either going on the school website or exploring on Facebook or other social media outlets. A call to action, such as attending a school-sponsored event, an open house, scheduling a tour, or a phone call followed after the initial word of mouth. According to the participants, the call to action created a relationship resulting in either an application or led the potential student in a different direction. To a lesser extent other tools of media, such as television, radio, newspapers, or magazines influenced enrollment.

Administrators often cited various forms of media as necessary to create name recognition, but rarely experienced a direct correlation between forms of advertisement and enrollment.

Research Question #3

What were the marketing messages and media cited by parents in making their decision to select an independent school in Hawaii?

The use of specific marketing messages and media can be identified as having some relationship to creating the action of enrollment for a student in Hawaii independent schools. Parents responded in this study, that they weigh the attributes a school has to offer with the value they place on what a school can offer before they elect to enroll their child. When the attributes align with the perceived value and the message has been delivered in a platform that parents cite as effective, enrollment often occurs. Schools which design their message to feature their attributes produce the desired result of enrollment.

The goal of a school marketing strategy is to increase consumer awareness and to use media, and other outlets to match attributes with consumer needs. The parents responded in this study that they valued that their child was in a small, safe, school environment, where they have easy access to teachers and staff. Location of the school in Honolulu, where traffic patterns are inconsistent, decreased the likelihood of enrollment. While academic pedagogy played a key role, parents cited they found it to be a contributing factor with their decision, but not the only measure before enrolling. Parents interviewed in this study at faith-based schools cited religion as a deciding factor in the process. It was interesting to note that price was not mentioned as a factor during the interviews until after their child was enrolled. It appears that the attributes justified the financial cost, although schools providing financial assistance, was not in the scope of this study.

Through the research, survey, and interviews, it is clear that a potential enrollee, may make contact after hearing about the school through an association with someone, through word of mouth, attendance at an event, contact with an admission representative, took a tour or made contact through some form of media. Once there had been a connection between the consumer and the school, a relationship was formed and the participants were taken through the enrollment

process, including acceptance or rejection from one or both parties. In a setting where a relationship is part of the marketing strategy, there remains contact between administrators, the student and the family until they have finished the program.

According to parent participants, the platform used to communicate the message of the school was important in the decision-making process. Parents confirmed the administrator's perceptions that a relationship can be formed and the school attributes can be communicated through various methods. While, word of mouth, websites and social media ranked as positive forms of messaging, parents having had a personal touch or experience with the school through an open house, an event, or a tour helped to establish a relationship. Parents recognized the use of magazines, radio, television, banners, and newspapers as a means to hear about the school. No parents mentioned that traditional forms of media strongly influenced their enrollment. Yet, as stated earlier, messaging that encouraged a relationship created a correlation between the school, the parent, and enrollment.

Interpretation and Alignment of the Findings with the Literature

As the literature in this study documents, marketing is necessary for the viability of independent schools. Participants in this study support the work of Read and Bick, Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown, and Giannakis, Harker, & Baum. Administrators of independent schools are challenged with shrinking enrollment, increased competition, and budgetary restraints. Understanding or sourcing of marketing is essential to create a study of potential consumers, develop a formal strategy, establish a unique school brand, identify attributes, select and deliver a message, and collect data that ultimately produce enrollment. Educational marketing is based on organized objectives and involves a plan, a system of analysis, designed programs, and an exchange of values (Read & Bick, 2014).

The literature confirms the findings of this study that the attributes of a school need to match the message and media established through a marketing plan. The attitude of the potential enrollee toward the school must be either confirmed or refuted compared to the message the school is presenting and upon what platform the communication is delivered. The positive or negative impression made through media, word of mouth, or personal visits and the distinct qualities of a school, influences potential stakeholders. The external perception and the recognized significance of a school often determine enrollment (Giannakis, Harker, & Baum, 2015).

The literature outlines the struggles administrators experience developing a plan that reaches the intended consumers. The school's management is not trained in marketing and often cannot afford specialists. This study confirmed research by Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown, where administrators understand the need for marketing in a competitive environment like Hawaii, but cannot agree consistently on the value and the returns on investment. Often small schools experienced stretched staffs resulting in the development of marketing strategies seeming less urgent related to the safety and academic offerings at a school.

The study confirms the literature of Powell and Rey, Vander Schee, and Oplatka, that small schools incorporate Relationship Marketing (RM) to develop marketing strategies. The message of the school's attributes is best communicated by purposefully developing a relationship. The literature details some of the methods incorporated in conveying the school's message by thoughtfully planning to use word of mouth, open houses, personal tours, and social media.

Other literature documents that established schools may choose to form a more transactional relationship, where enrollment occurs with a transfer of money through tuition, and

minimal effort is made to form a lasting relationship. In this scenario, outlined by Palmer, Lindgreen, and Vanhamme (2005), the administrators at a school would have little to do with the enrolling student or family after the admissions process is over. Teachers would then become the point person for the student and parent. The transactional marketing method, to a greater extent, does not appear to be practiced at Hawaii independent schools.

The perceptions of the administrators in this study reflect the literature about the value in forming marketing strategies and messages based on the attributes of their schools. Meeting the desired attributes with a clear message through the desired platform is reinforced through the research of Stone & Woodcock and Ajzen & Fishbein, Consumers place value in a message about desired attributes, which in turn, creates an action. In Hawaii independent schools, the action would ideally result in brand awareness and the enrollment of students.

Implications and Recommendations for Action

Given that marketing literature supports the results of this study, the following recommendations may assist independent school leaders in developing a strategy that can help them address the challenges of creating strategies, brand awareness, messaging, and competing for students to increase enrollment. The first two recommendations are specific to small independent schools, while the third is designed to encourage further education.

Small Schools Form Partnerships to Hire Marketing Professionals

As this study and the literature has confirmed, small schools struggle with defining their market, developing a brand message, and effectively communicating their attributes. The result in Hawaii is that many small schools have struggled to keep enrollment at a sustainable level. The cost of hiring marketing professionals is generally out of reach for many small schools to include in their budgets. While only a small minority of administrators reject the notion that

having a formal marketing plan has value, the cost and lack of professional resources prohibit many from hiring an outside agency. Marketing professionals can form an independent profile of the school, including a list of attributes the school offers, a demographic study, and develop a strategy to communicate the school's message. A professional marketing agency can deliver a profile of consumers and target the potential enrollment opportunities. Another avenue would be to engage a university in offering a graduate-level project or internship to conduct a marketing analysis.

In Honolulu, many small schools face the prospect of competing against large independent and traditionally imposing schools with an established market. Besides, independent schools are challenged by charter and public schools. Administrators are tasked with designing an enrollment management plan while competing for a tiny pool of applicants. Since employing a full-time marketing coordinator is often cost prohibitive, combining resources and contracting a marketing firm or professional to conduct a small school study, which produces data that can inform each institution on how to proceed to increase brand awareness and attract enrollment. In a cooperative study, the small schools would have to view themselves not as competitors, but as filling a niche in the Honolulu market.

Small Schools Develop Data Collection Procedures

Admissions Directors are often tasked with collecting enrollment information on prospective students. Each administrator in the interview phase of this study indicated that they have a section on their application which asked how the prospect heard about the school. This question is a good beginning, but needs to be expanded to collect demographic information, a collection of desired school attributes, and the preferred methods of communication. A recommendation from this study would be to equip small schools in Hawaii with a brief form

that would enable schools to get a better understanding of their consumer market. It would also allow schools to collaborate to match the needs of the student. A scenario where this collaboration could work would be when a parent inquires at a school not equipped to deal with a child with a specific learning challenge, or a family looking for a single-sex school or faith-based school. The standard data collection form would allow an admissions director or administrator to make recommendations to a school that had the attributes the prospect desired.

In many markets, this may seem far-fetched because independent schools often assume they are competing for the same students. With accurate data, this may prove not to be the case. While schools often share many of the same attributes, a better-defined brand awareness allows schools to target students whom they can best serve. A collaborative may not be possible in competitive environments, but in Honolulu where the culture encourages cooperation, a common form to collect marketing data may allow small schools to flourish.

University and Professional Development Marketing Training

This study and the current literature validates that independent school administrators are often tasked with understanding and designing marketing strategies. This study also confirms that administrators are challenged with the professional skills, time, and knowledge of marketing to successfully produce the data needed to increase brand awareness and increase enrollment. The research points to the need for universities to offer specially designed courses for administrators in school marketing. Many education graduate programs are including courses in business and law. Enrollment often determines independent and charter school's existence. The inclusion of graduate level, school marketing courses could assist education leaders to understand a crucial part of their job.

Organizations like the National Business Officers Association and the National Association of Independent Schools sponsor professional development opportunities in marketing. Lead administrators, admission directors, and staff members should be encouraged by their board of trustees to attend these sessions. The knowledge they will gain from learning from marketing professionals will inform their marketing strategies, and possibly enhance the enrollment process.

Recommendations for Further Study

The lack of relevant research, specifically in marketing strategies of independent schools in the United States, handicaps administrators looking for answers to the question of how to create brand awareness and media messaging. Only a modest amount of research has assessed the value of marketing and its impact on enrollment. Future research should examine the cost benefits of customer acquisition concerning conducting a formal marketing study and media campaign.

Researchers should continue adding studies to the literature to bridge the gap between commercial marketing strategies and approaches that may help independent school leaders plan large-scale initiatives. The continued study on the benefits of administrators in identifying and matching attributes with consumer values may guide strategies which could result in the sustainability of schools in competitive markets.

Further study about the impact of Relationship Marketing and the shift away from transactional models is necessary to inform schools of the changes in strategies to better improve enrollment and retention. Further research on the power of word of mouth and how to incorporate the approach in a marketing plan that retains control over messaging would benefit school leaders. Many school administrators rely on assumptions about their market and the

media, to effectively communicate the value of their school. A study focusing on successful marketing strategies at independent schools could guide leaders in creating a plan resulting in enrollment growth.

Lastly, when considering recommendations based on this study, future research can address how to create value which addresses market needs. A study may look at how a school rebrands itself when enrollment is declining. In competitive markets, many small independent schools struggle to exist. Schools that have faced a crisis need research that suggests the tools to reimagine the message to their stakeholders. This current study touches on perceptions and should inspire more research to produce data to address the future needs of independent schools outside of Hawaii.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to produce research on the perceived effectiveness of using specific marketing and branding strategies to increase retention and enrollment of students in independent schools in Honolulu, Hawaii. The research confirmed through qualitative data that administrators perceived significance in specific marketing messages and media used by Hawaii independent schools.

A new perspective for enrollment management was provided by incorporating Fishbein's Multi-Attribute Theory (1997) to frame questions about the value of a school's attributes and its relationship to using specific marketing tools to create a consumer action. Independent school administrators, in Hawaii, understand the challenges of competing for students and the creation of brand awareness has proven to be essential in their continued viability as an educational institution. The lack of understanding or employment of a formal marketing strategy makes enrollment growth unpredictable at best.

This study adds to the existing literature on the marketing of independent schools by providing data, which can be used to enhance strategies to influence brand awareness and enrollment. Hawaii independent schools can incorporate the perceived applicable practices that encourage messaging, which could result in attracting and retaining students. While this study did not seek to prove that there is direct causation between marketing and enrollment, it provided data to support the perception by administrators that a robust marketing strategy could provide schools with tools to contend in a competitive market.

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APPENDIX A

Survey

What is your position at the school? (Can be more than one role)

Lead Administrator (Head of School/President/Director)

Principal/Dean

Marketing Director

Admissions Director

Support Staff

What is your current enrollment?

1-300

300-600

600-1000

1000-3000

3000+

Does your school have a formal marketing plan?

Yes No

As the lead administrator how would you characterize your involvement in developing the marketing plan?

Extremely Moderately nor Moderately Extremely
Involved Involved Uninvolved Uninvolved Uninvolved

How do you perceive the effectiveness of the marketing plan?

Extremely Moderately nor Moderately Extremely
Effective Effective Ineffective Ineffective Ineffective

Since implementing the marketing plan how would characterize your enrollment growth?

Extremely Moderately nor Moderately Extremely
Effective Effective Ineffective Ineffective Ineffective

Do you have a designated marketing person at your school?

Yes No

Would you employ an outside marketing agency to help develop a strategy?

Yes No

Would you consider hiring a dedicated marketing professional?

Extremely Moderately nor Moderately Extremely
Effective Effective Ineffective Ineffective Ineffective

Since implementing the marketing plan how would you characterize your enrollment growth?

Extremely Effective	Moderately Effective	nor Ineffective	Moderately Ineffective	Extremely Ineffective
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How would you rate your knowledge of your target audience?

Extremely Good	Moderately Good	nor Bad	Moderately Bad	Extremely Bad
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How important is it to collect data on:

Age of parents

Extremely Important	Moderately Important	nor Unimportant	Moderately Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant
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Parent's occupation

Extremely Important	Moderately Important	nor Unimportant	Moderately Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant
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Demographic information of your customer base

Extremely Important	Moderately Important	nor Unimportant	Moderately Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant
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How likely do you feel parents will cite the following school attributes as the reason they enrolled their child in your school?

Class size

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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Teacher/student ratio

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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Facilities

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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Proximity to home				
Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Teaching staff				
Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Academic curriculum				
Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Relationships within the school				
Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Access to teachers				
Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Peer relations amongst students				
Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Price				
Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Financial aid				
Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
Religious affiliation				
Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely

Athletics

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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Social status/networking opportunities

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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How likely would a teacher at your school be able to describe your brand to an interested parent?

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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How would you rate your competitive advantage over other schools in your market?

Extremely Good	Moderately Good	nor Bad	Moderately Bad	Extremely Bad
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How effective do you feel your marketing efforts established a relationship with the students and their families?

Extremely Good	Moderately Good	nor Bad	Moderately Bad	Extremely Bad
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How likely are interested parents going to see your school on TV?

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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How effective do you feel TV advertisements have been in influencing a parent to enroll their child in your school?

Extremely Effective	Moderately Effective	nor Ineffective	Moderately Ineffective	Extremely Ineffective
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How likely are interested parents going to hear about your school through radio advertising?

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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How effective do you feel radio advertising has been on influencing a parent to enroll their child in your school?

Extremely Effective	Moderately Effective	nor Ineffective	Moderately Ineffective	Extremely Ineffective
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How likely are interested parents going to visit your website?

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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How effective do you feel your website has been in influencing a parent to enroll their child in your school?

Extremely Effective	Moderately Effective	nor Ineffective	Moderately Ineffective	Extremely Ineffective
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How likely are interested parents going to attend an Open House?

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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How likely are open houses cited as influencing a parent to enroll their child in your school?

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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How likely are interested parents going to cite word of mouth as an influence when enrolling their child?

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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How likely are parents to cite social media as an influence when enrolling their child?

Extremely Likely	Moderately Likely	nor Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely
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How would you rate your presence on Facebook in communicating your school brand?

Extremely Good	Moderately Good	nor Bad	Moderately Bad	Extremely Bad
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How would you rate your presence on Twitter in communicating your school brand?

Extremely Moderately nor Moderately Extremely
Good Good Bad Bad Bad

How would you rate your presence on Instagram in communicating your school brand?

Extremely Moderately nor Moderately Extremely
Good Good Bad Bad Bad

How effective are blogs in communicating your school brand?

Extremely Moderately nor Moderately Extremely
Effective Effective Ineffective Ineffective Ineffective

Is there anything else you would like to share about your perception of the effectiveness of your implementation of your school's marketing strategies?

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

The twelve participating schools will be asked to arrange access for a meeting with the lead administrator and a parent of a newly enrolled student. The meeting will be individual semi-structured interviews. Each interview should last approximately 10 minutes.

Welcome Participants

- Introduce myself as the facilitator. Thank them for their participation in the case study.
- Provide brief overview of the subject: “The purpose of this study is to explore the perceived effectiveness of using specific marketing and branding strategies to increase retention and enrollment of students in independent schools in Honolulu, Hawaii.” For Parents: “I will be asking you today about your perception of the effectiveness of different types of marketing techniques and asking you to comment on what attracted you (or what attributes) the marketing message provided that resulted in your decision to enroll your child.” For school personnel: “I will be asking you today about your perception of the effectiveness of different types of marketing techniques used by the school to attract new students.” Provide examples.
- Review confidentiality and voluntary nature of the case study.

Explain Interview Process

- Facilitator asks questions of the individuals, clarifies terms, and summarizes
- Facilitator will take notes.
- Explain that the individuals with their permission will be recorded on an audiotape and that it will be erased after the information has been compiled

Establish Ground Rules

- Remind participants no names will be cited.
- Encourage individuals that they can answer in detail.
- Explain that the semi-structured nature of the interview allows for follow up discussions.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Free to end the interview at any time.

Conclusion of the Interview

- Thank the participants and offer to share the final results of the research.

APPENDIX C

Semi-structured Interview for Educators (Administrators and Teachers)

- Are you aware if your school has a formal marketing plan and what does marketing mean to you?
- If you have a formal plan how and when was the marketing plan developed?
- Did your school employ an outside marketing agency or develop the plan in-house with a designated marketing employee?
- How would you describe your school's customer base and demographic?
- How do you perceive the effectiveness on enrollment of the marketing plan?
- What school attributes do your enrolling students and parents like best?
- What do you perceive to be your school's competitive advantage?
- How effective do you feel your marketing effort establishes a relationship with the students and their families?
- Which of the following do you perceive to be the most effective communication techniques in promoting your school brand: earned media, word of mouth, paid advertising, internet marketing, social networks, open house, event
- What are some of the challenges in marketing your school in Honolulu?
- What are other ideas or comments you'd like to share?

APPENDIX D

Semi-structured Interview for Parents

- Can you describe the attributes you look for in an independent school for your child?
- How did you hear about the school you enrolled your child in?
- Can you describe your attitude about the school before making contact with them?
- How did you make contact with the school?
- Which forms of communication did you receive from the school after you made contact?
- Are you aware of the school using earned media, word of mouth, paid advertising, internet marketing, social networks, open house, event. If so can you give examples?
- Which of those marketing techniques was the most helpful in making your decision?
- How does this school maintain communication with you and do you feel that the school values your ongoing relationship?
- How would you describe this school's brand?
- What were the major influences that caused you to enroll your child?
- How much did price factor in on your decision to enroll your child?
- As a parent, do you feel a part of the marketing effort?
- What are other ideas or comments you'd like to share?

APPENDIX E

Participant Outreach –Parents

Participant Outreach - Parent/Guardian

Title of the Research Study: Marketing Approaches Used In Independent Schools: Analysis of the Perceived Effectiveness of Marketing in Hawaii Independent Schools

Dear _____

My name is Tim Spurrier and I am a graduate student in the Educational Leadership doctorate program at the University of New England. I am conducting a research study designed to investigate the perceived effectiveness of the use of marketing techniques for the purpose of brand awareness and enrollment for Hawaii independent schools.

You are invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision on whether or not you would like to participate. If you have any questions at any time, please do not hesitate to ask.

You have been selected by the administration of _____ to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of marketing approaches used in independent schools in Hawaii. The area of concentration for this research study will focus on your perception of the effective use of marketing techniques to inform your decision to enroll your child in school. You will be asked to describe what attributes you were looking for in an independent school and how the school made you aware of their brand.

Your participation will be part of a study where selected parents, educators, and administrators from your school will meet individually with the researcher to explore the school's effectiveness in marketing. Each participant will be asked to take part in a one-to-one semi-structured interview. The interview will be conducted at your child's school in a private setting and will last 10-15 minutes. With your consent, the interview will be recorded through an audio device and written notes. There will be no students included in this study.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to answer only the questions with which you feel comfortable and can discontinue participation at any time. Some of the data may be used for future research purposes consistent with the original purpose stated in the consent

document. The final data will be stored for a period of no longer than two years after which it will be destroyed.

Every effort will be made for you to remain anonymous, but there is a risk of loss of privacy. However, no names or any other identifying information will appear in any published reports of the research. The research material will be kept in a secure location, and only I will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, all audiotapes of interviews will be deleted and any other identifying information from the transcripts will be removed.

If you have any additional questions concerning your child's rights, you may contact Tim Spurrier at telephone 803-221-6460.

Documentation of Informed Consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have agreed to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX F**Participant Outreach –Educators****Participant Outreach – Administrators, Staff, Teachers**

Title of the Research Study: Marketing Approaches Used In Independent Schools:

Analysis of the Perceived Effectiveness of Marketing in Hawaii Independent Schools

Dear _____

My name is Tim Spurrier and I am a graduate student in the Educational Leadership doctorate program at the University of New England. I am conducting a research study designed to investigate the perceived effectiveness of the use of marketing techniques for the purpose of brand awareness and enrollment for Hawaii independent schools.

You are invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not you would like to participate. If you have any questions at any time, please do not hesitate to ask.

You have been selected because of your position at _____ to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived effectiveness of marketing approaches used in independent schools in Hawaii. The area of concentration for this research study will focus on your perception of the effective use of marketing techniques to inform parents of the school's attributes and to enroll their child. You will be asked to describe what your knowledge of the school's attributes, marketing plan, implementation, and effects on enrollment. Your participation will be part of a study where selected parents, educators, and administrators from your school will meet individually with the researcher to explore the

school's effectiveness in marketing. Each participant will be asked to take part in a one-to-one semi-structured interview. The interview will be conducted at your school in a private setting and will last 10-15 minutes. With your consent, the interview will be recorded through an audio device and written notes. There will be no students included in this study.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to answer only the questions with which you feel comfortable and can discontinue participation at any time. Some of the data may be used for future research purposes consistent with the original purpose stated in the consent document. The final data will be stored for a period of no longer than two years after which it will be destroyed.

Every effort will be made for you to remain anonymous, but there is a risk of loss of privacy. However, no names or any other identifying information will appear in any published reports of the research. The research material will be kept in a secure location, and only I will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, all audiotapes of interviews will be deleted and any other identifying information from the transcripts will be removed.

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Signature of Participant

Date