A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF COLLEGE STUDENT COMMUNICATION RECRUITMENT PREFERENCES AT A MIDWEST PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

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A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF COLLEGE STUDENT COMMUNICATION RECRUITMENT PREFERENCES AT A MIDWEST PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

presented by Kathryn L. Machovsky

a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance

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Dr. Nissa Ingraham

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Dr. Everett Singleton

_____________________________________________________
Dr. Ashley Strickland
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and all the young people who have ever felt or been told they are not good enough or deserving.

To my husband, Bob, thank you for believing in me even when I doubted myself. I could not have achieved this without your continued love and support. To my mom, dad, and brother, thank you for supporting me with continuing my education, even when I wanted to take a break or quit. I appreciate the phone calls, checking in on me and encouraging me to achieve this goal.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my husband, Bob, I thank you for your constant support throughout this journey. Until we married, I did not have the ambition or drive to continue my education post bachelor’s degree. Your drive to do better has encouraged me to never stop, never give up, and always try to improve myself.

Thank you to my advisor Dr. Tim Wall. The kind words, encouragement, and confidence in me helped me to achieve this goal. Through the tears and excitement, you were there for me from day one.

To my committee members, Drs. Time Wall, Nissa Ingraham, Everett Singleton, and Ashley Strickland, thank you for your valuable feedback, encouragement, and time you spent away from your loved ones to help me complete my dissertation.

To my former supervisor, Brandon Stanley, thank you for taking a chance on me and giving me opportunities to use the education I learned and implement new strategies in my position that lead me to furthering my career.
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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study analyzed more than 240 first-year freshmen from Generation Z at a rural, Midwest, four-year public higher education institution. The data included first-year college students and were categorized by domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and male or female. Because there were fewer than five individuals who did not self-disclose their gender, their responses could not be included in the study results.

The results of the study found that there were not statistically significant findings for the preferred mode of communication for domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented or male and female college students from Generation Z. However, there was a statistically significant finding for the preferred mode of communication for first-generation and non-first-generation college students from Generation Z, which is contradictory of research about the preferred communication style of Generation Z individuals.
SECTION ONE

Background of the Study

According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2019), in fall 2018, first-year student enrollment at higher education institutions decreased by 1.7 percent nationwide resulting in increased concern about enrollment for higher education administrators (National Student Clearinghouse, 2019). By 2026, an enrollment crash may strike universities due to the reduced birth rate stemming from the 2008 recession (Boeckenstedt, Perez, & Rhyneer 2019). Researchers have concentrated on how to increase enrollment leading up to 2026. However, the literature about Generation-Z (Gen-Z) students (individuals entering a higher education institution for the first time and are born between 2002 and 2003) and higher education enrollment focuses on specific segments such as race, not on preferred mode of communication to increase or maintain levels of enrollment beyond the anticipated crash of 2026 (Boeckenstedt et al., 2019; Fosnacht, & Nailos, 2016; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019; Nealis 2018; Poock 2008; Schwieger & Ladwig 2018; Terenzini, et al., 1996).

Students born between 2002 and 2003 were selected for this study because these were the years in which students were born for the incoming freshman class at the higher education institution studied. Studies have consistently shown that university administrators should study what Gen-Z prospective students need and want when selecting a higher education institution (Andersen et al., 2009; Bachnak et al., 2003; Baker et al., 2018; Eichler & Martinez 2012; Merolla 2018; Hoover 2017). Administrators might also consider marketing the value of meeting customer needs, as it may positively impact enrollment during a challenging economy.
State-level funding for American public higher education institutions has declined by more than $6.6 billion from 2008-2018 (Mitchell et al., 2019). The state from which the proposed study takes place, state funding declined from 66.7% to less than 33.9% since 1990 (Matthews, 2018). As state funding declines, marketing for recruitment and retention is vital. Inside Higher Ed reports “State funding nationwide is nearly 9% below pre-Great Recession levels and 18% below where it was before 2001” (Whitford, 2020, p. 1). The decline in state funding coupled with the increase in first-generation college students who are technology driven, has higher education admissions and marketing teams aggressively competing for each student to enroll at their higher education institution. Additionally, Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) and Inman and Mayes (1999) reported that first-generation Gen-Z college students tend to come from lower-income families, thus heightening the importance of funding accessibility to promote societal and higher education institution goals for increased access and equity.

This study will explore preferences in mode of communication based on domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and gender for students at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. Extant literature will be reviewed in three main pillars. The pillars of this study include changes in enrollment strategies at public higher education institutions through 2020; Gen-Z college students’ influences on university selection; and effective marketing and communication practices to Gen-Z college students.

Statement of the problem

The problem studied is the lack of information about the preferred mode of communication from Gen-Z college students at a four-year, rural, Midwest, public higher
education institution. Beginning in 2026, student enrollment is expected to decline due to the 2008 recession (Boeckenstedt et al., 2019; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center et al.). Higher education institutions should meet college students from Gen Z at their preferred communication platform. Since these students also value the input and opinion of their parents, it is essential that marketers also consider the preferences of family members of prospective college students from Gen Z and meet their communication expectations (Fromm & Read, 2018). Fromm and Read go on to report that relationships with parents from this generation are different from Millennials and Baby Boomers as Gen-Z children tend to value their parent’s, particularly their mother’s, opinions more than the previous generation (2018), thus the importance of engaging them in the recruitment process.

Based on survey results gathered from accepted college students attending orientation the week before starting classes, this study seeks to determine if a difference in preference of domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first-generation, or non-first generation, and gender of college students from Gen Z exists when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gather data to fill a portion of the knowledge gap about distinctions that may exist in the effectiveness in different modes of higher education recruitment communication to college students from Gen Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest, public higher education institution. There is little research about preferred modes of communication to fill this gap, thus the importance in acknowledging the
changes in recruitment strategies when considering students from Gen Z (Fromm & Read, 2018). A study conducted in 2014 discovered that “mobile marketing was more effective compared to email marketing... but we still feel that email and mobile marketing are unexplored areas, where we need to know their effectiveness” (Rehman et al., 2014, pp. 38-41). By learning more about the preferred communication platforms, marketers at higher education institutions could have a more focused communication plan based on student preference.

Because of the projected decline in student enrollment at higher education institutions, it is also important to recognize the financial challenges that first-generation college students encounter (Boeckenstedt et al., 2019; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center et al.). By communicating with these students through various and appropriate channels (Fromm & Read 2018), awareness and transparency about college affordability as well as enrollment at higher education institutions may increase.

This study will offer demographic information about college students from Gen Z and identify their marketing preferences based on survey data collected at Midtown University.

**Research Questions**

RQ1: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented generation-z college student at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?
H1: There is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented generation z college student at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.

RQ2: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for college students from Gen Z who identify as male or female at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

H2: There is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for college students from Gen Z who identify as male or female at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.

RQ3: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

H3: There is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social
media and text message communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution

**Identification of Variables**

The dependent variables are the marketing type, either direct mail and email communication or text messaging and social media communication. Communication is a form of student recruitment that assists students in determining which higher education institution to attend. The independent variables for the first research question are domestic underrepresented and non-domestic college students from Generation Z, male and female college students from Generation Z for research question two, and first-generation and non-first-generation college students from Generation Z for research question three. These independent variables were selected because there is little research about preferred modes of communication to fill this gap, thus the importance in acknowledging the changes in recruitment strategies when considering students from Gen Z (Fromm & Read, 2018).
Table 1.

Research Questions and Null Hypothesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Null Hypothesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the descriptive statistics for the study participants?</td>
<td>The descriptive statistics for the study participants include gender, race, and first-generation student status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material</td>
<td>H2: There is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented generation z college student at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented generation z college student at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?</td>
<td>H3: There is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented generation z college student at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and email communication or social media and text message communication for college students from Gen Z who identify as male or female at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

4. Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for college students from Gen Z who identify as male or female at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

H⁴: There is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.

**Theoretical Framework**

This quantitative study is informed by concepts from Kotler and Zaltman’s (1971) Social Marketing Theory, McCarthy’s (1968) 4 P’s and Elias St. Elmo Lewis’ (1989) attention factor, interest element, desire element, and action element (AIDA) model by analyzing the history of higher education student admittance, first-generation college students from Gen Z, and marketing to this segment of students. These theories were
selected due to the alignment with marketing efforts to Gen Z. However, the minimal differences will be addressed.

Figure 1.

*Theoretical Framework*

When considering marketing to Gen-Z prospective students with the goal of enrolling them in a public higher education institution, it is important to understand this generation, meet their needs at their platforms of interest, and use language that is common to them (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971 and Fromm & Read, 2018). In 1971, Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman coined the term Social Marketing Theory (Dibb & Carrigan, 2013). This term is defined as
The design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research. Thus, it is the explicit use of marketing skills to help translate present social action efforts into more effectively designed and communicated programs that elicit desired audience response (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971 p. 5).

Kotler and Zaltman (1971) describe a social marketing approach as marketing to the right people, at the right time, and at the right location. Herome McCarthy established the “Four P’s: Product, Promotion, Place, and Price” (1968) for stages of marketing.

Table 2.

Herome McCarthy’ four P’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four P’s</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Product  | • Understand the audience  
          | • Understand and meet their desires  
          | • Make their desires affordable |
| Promotion| • Mass communication about product |
| Place    | • Communicate quickly and easily about where to obtain product  
          | • Meet audience where they are |
| Price    | • Affordable price |

Four P’s

Product, in the Social Marketing Approach, encourages marketers to understand the desires of their target audience, meet those desires, and do so at a rate that is affordable. Kotler and Zaltman refer to this as focusing the product and striving to make
it purchasable (1971). When applying this to Gen Z and marketing for higher education, the core product is earning a degree, while other tangible ideas could focus on their desires such as marketing concerts on campus or graduates using their education to make a difference in the world (Fromm & Read, 2018).

McCarthy (1968) describes promotion as the next approach in social marketing. This includes communicating with the masses about large ideas. In the world of higher education, this could consist of billboards, news releases, or tv or radio commercials. Although this does not offer a personalized approach, it offers brand awareness and makes the product recognizable (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). The third approach describes a place which provides a seamless and easily acceptable mode of communication so people know where they can purchase a product. When considering marketing to prospective Gen-Z students, Fromm and Read (2018) emphasize the importance of mobile-friendly communication as well as ensuring content can be obtained quickly.

The final approach to McCarthy’s (1968) 4 P’s is price. “Price represents the costs that the buyer must accept in order to obtain the product” (Kotler & Zaltman 2018, p. 9). With state funding decreasing (Whitford 2020) and Gen-Z students cautious about accumulating debt (Fromm and Read, 2018), higher education marketers may want to consider the Four P’s when recruiting and enrolling students from this generation. In addition to the Four P’s strategy, there are other approaches to consider when marketing higher education to prospective students such as the AIDA Model.

**AIDA Model**

As demonstrated by Elias St. Elmo Lewis in 1989, the Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action (AIDA) model was developed to attract consumers to purchase a product.
This model aligns with McCarthy's Four P’s and Kotler and Zaltman’s Social Marketing Theory (1971). Similarly, the AIDA model focuses on taking the consumer through four stages from brand awareness to purchase (Somefalean, 2014). This approach grabs the customer’s attention, or in the case of this study, college students from Gen Z. If the approach is not secured, the student will be lost. Fromm and Read (2018) describe this as “Bite-Sized = Right-Sized” (p. 54). Communication to Gen-Z should be short, eye-catching, and include a graphic that strikes the attention of these individuals.

In the interest stage of the model, Somefalean (2014) emphasizes the importance of conveying to the consumer the bargain and benefits of the product. The desire, like McCarthy’s (1968) promotion and place approaches, shows the need and desire to have the product. Finally, is the action approach which is purchasing the product. As Fromm and Read (2018) and McCarthy (1968) describe, this phase should be seamless, easy, and require minimal effort to make the purchasing commitment. Since Gen-Z students have quick access to information as a result of technology, it is important that marketers for higher education institutions understand the impacts of marketing to first-generation college students from Gen Z at a rural, Midwest, public, four-year higher education institution.

By understanding the needs and desires of college students from Gen Z when considering which higher education institution to attend, it is important to consider the Social Marketing Theory, use the 4P’s Approach and AIDA model when designing marketing strategies. This study will use the Social Marketing Theory as a framework for determining if there is a difference in preference of mode of communication for Gen-Z college student who identify as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-
underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and male or female when considering communication through direct mail and email communication compared to social media and texting communication at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.

**Conceptual Underpinnings**

When marketing a product, Kotler and Zaltman (1971) use the Social Marketing Theory to describe the methods marketers should implement to successfully launch and complete a marketing campaign. Studies have described the importance of marketing to prospective students, but there is a gap of knowledge in the preferred modes of communication for college students from Gen Z. To assist in making a case for the importance of investigating where there is a difference in preference of mode of communication for domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first-generation or non-first-generation, and male or female college students from Gen Z when considering direct mail and email communication compared to social media and text message communication, the researcher will explore the history of higher education in the United States, the demographics of college students from Gen Z, and marketing to Gen Z.
History of U.S. Higher Education

Admittance to higher education institutions has changed significantly since the inception of Harvard College in 1636, which was established to prepare young white men for careers in ministry, law, and medicine (Goldin, 1999; Ornstein, 2019). Admits were required to have “some knowledge of Latin, a bit of Greek, and arithmetic” (Antler et al., 1991, p. 69). Funding was also different in terms of who attended college. After the establishment of Yale in 1701, Yale and Harvard identified students for admission based on “privilege, rank, and station in life” (Ornstein, 2019 p. 336). Leading up to 1944, the Government Issue Bill (G.I. Bill) was established as a way of rewarding individuals for their service. Followed by the National Defense Education Act of 1957, established based on one’s talents and provide aid to students primarily interested in science, mathematics, and foreign languages, and hoped to offer assistance to all students (United States Senate, 1957).
Marketing Generation Z

Marketing strategies have evolved since the establishment of Harvard College. The trend has transitioned from admitting to recruiting students, thus higher education admissions and marketing teams competing for each student to enroll at their university. Marketing to Gen Z is vastly different than marketing to Baby Boomers or Gen Xers (Fromm & Read, 2018). “Gen Z is considered the last generation that is a majority of the White race (2018), thus the importance in understanding the preferred mode of communication for domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented college students from Gen Z. Fromm and Read (2018) found that 55 percent identify as white, 24 percent Hispanic, 14 percent African American, and four percent as Asian, while 70% of Baby Boomers are white” (p. 4, 2018).

College students from Generation Z

Because of changes in student demographics such as socioeconomic status, race, and parent approval, marketers should consider the use of digital marketing techniques such as social media, texting, and websites as well as targeted communication to provide opportunities to receive information about a higher education institution in multiple ways. Being digital natives, Gen Z is technologically savvy, therefore, using blanketed statements (communication with a mass audience rather than targeted based on one’s name, area of interest, or demographic) in written communication is discouraged (Nadelson et al., 2013, pp. 59-60). It is imperative, however, to understand the audiences’ needs and communicate with them in their preferred mode (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). The Social Marketing Theory aids in describing and educating marketers about strategies to take to influence a target audience.
Design of the Study

Setting

This study used quantitative data from survey responses from students at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. The goal was to determine if there was a difference in preference for communication when using direct mail and email or text message and social media communication when considering college students. College students included those Gen Z who identify as domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented, first-generation non-first generation, and male and female. Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was conducted. This analysis was selected because the researcher seeks to understand the likelihood of two categorical variables having a relationship (Field, 2018). The two categorical variables are direct mail and email communication and social media and text message communication. Descriptive statistics included entering the class year, gender identity, and race.

Archival data attributors

The archival data revealed perceptions of college students from Generation Z who identified as domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented, first generation and non-first generation, and male and female (born between 2002 and 2003) starting at Midtown University for fall 2021. Participants who completed the survey were selected because they attended orientation in August 2021, and provided responses based on their experiences as incoming students. Approximately 1,300 students typically attend this orientation. At the time of the survey, students were fully committed to attending Midtown University and were not required to complete the survey. Students had moved
in their residence halls and participated in events to acclimate to campus while they met
other incoming students.

**Data Collection Tools**

The primary data collection was obtained from archival data via a survey
administered a week before college students from Generation Z who identified as
domestic underrepresented, domestic non-underrepresented, first generation, non-first
generation, male, and female officially began classes at Midtown University in fall 2021.
In this study, a survey was used as a form of data collection as the researcher gathered the
perceptions of Gen Z’s preferred mode of communication. Fink (2015) describes that
surveys should be conducted when “deciding policy or in planning and evaluating
programs and conducting research when the information you need should come directly
from people” (p. 5).

Chi-square analysis was utilized to determine the likelihood of college students
from Generation Z who identified as domestic underrepresented and domestic non-
derrepresented, first generation and non-first generation, and male and female
preferred direct mail and email communication compared to social media and text
message communication. This analysis was selected because it will determine if there is a
difference between two categorical variables (direct mail and email compared to social
media and text message communication) (Field, 2018). All statistical analysis was
configured using IBM SPSS 25 and Microsoft Excel.

Before obtaining the data, a request for data was submitted to Midtown
University’s Institutional Research Board to seek approval to obtain de-identified
responses from an existing survey. Once approved, the researcher contacted the Student
Success Center and requested additional questions be added to the survey. After the survey results were collected, a third party working for the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness at Midtown University removed all identifiable information leaving only the responses to the questions the researcher provided, which ensured confidentiality of all survey takers (Fink, 2015).

For this project, direct mail was defined as mail through the United States Postal Service, email was defined as correspondence online through programs such as Gmail or Hotmail, and social media included platforms such as Facebook.

**Data Analysis**

Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was selected to determine if there is a difference between two categorical variables (direct mail and email compared to social media and text message communication) (Field, 2018). The independent variables for research question one were domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented college students from Generation Z at a rural, four-year, Midwest public higher education institution. For research question two, the independent variables were first-generation and non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a rural, four-year, Midwest public higher education institution. For research question three, the independent variables were male and female college students from Generation Z at a rural, four-year, Midwest public higher education institution.

The data received will indicate whether the college students entering Midtown University in fall 2021, who identified as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-
underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, male or female had a preference for mode of communication for higher education recruitment.

**Table 3.**

**Research Questions, Variables, & Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The descriptive statistics for the study participants include gender, race, and first-generation student status.</td>
<td>Domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented college students from Generation Z</td>
<td>Digital and email communication or social media and text message communication</td>
<td>Pearson’s Chi-Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ1: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented generation z college student at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?</td>
<td>Domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented college students from Generation Z</td>
<td>Digital and email communication or social media and text message communication</td>
<td>Pearson’s Chi-Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for male or female college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?</td>
<td>Male or female college students from Generation Z</td>
<td>Digital and email communication or social media and text message communication</td>
<td>Pearson’s Chi-Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for first-generation college students or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z</td>
<td>First-generation college students or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z</td>
<td>Digital and email communication or social media and text</td>
<td>Pearson’s Chi-Square</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

Statistical data analysis was executed using IBM SPSS. Descriptive statistics included entering the class year, gender identity, and race. Table 4 represents the variables for the study.

**Table 4.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable 1</th>
<th>Variable type</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct mail and email communication</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Dichotomous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text message and social media communication</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Dichotomous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Limitations of Study**

Limitations of this study included that the data was collected during a global pandemic (COVID-19), resulting in potentially fewer survey completers and orientation attendees. As with all survey data where participants' perceptions are assessed, the researcher relied upon survey respondents' honesty, completeness, and accuracy (Fink, 2015). Additionally, the study only reviewed enrollment of college students from Generation Z for the fall 2021 academic year at Midtown University.

**Definition of Key Terms**

*Direct mail:* “Direct mail is a form of advertising relying on printed materials and the postal service to deliver advertising appeals directly to consumers” (Zhang, 2020).

*Admitted:* Accepted to a higher education institution.
First generation: a student whose parents have earned a high school diploma or less (Chen, 2005).

First-year student: First year a student is enrolled at a higher education institution

Higher education institution: Continued education toward an associate or bachelor's degree.

Enrollment: Number of students at a higher education institution that remained enrolled after three weeks of classes.

State funding/assistance: Funding from the state designated to college students

Recruitment: The act of identifying, communicating, and enrolling at a higher education institution.

Retention: “When a student enrolls each semester until graduation, studies full-time, and graduates in about four years” (College Student Retention, n.d.).

Generation Z (Gen Z): Individuals born between 1996 and 2010 (Fromm & Read, 2018)

Social media: “The term social media marketing (SMM) refers to the use of social media and social networks to market a company’s products and services. Social media marketing provides companies with a way to engage with existing customers and reach new ones while allowing them to promote their desired culture, mission, or tone” (Hayes 2021).

Communication platform: An online mode of communication such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, texting, Zoom, or email.

Pearson’ Chi Square analysis: determines if there is a difference between two categorical variables (Field, 2018). Answers the question, “What is the likelihood?”
Email communication: Communication sent via an online platform such as Hotmail, Gmail, etc.

Digital communication: For the purpose of this study, digital communication is communication via text messaging and social media platforms.

Leading indicator: Actions that prospective students take to indicate their plans to attend the higher education institution.

Significance of the Study

From a scholarly lens, influenced by research from Kotler and Zaltman’s (1971) Social Marketing Theory, this study may contribute to further understanding of preferences of prospective college students from Gen Z when considering the mode of communication for determining which higher education institution to attend. Because much of the research about recruitment and marketing to prospective students focuses on specific segments of students rather than the preferred mode of communication to increase enrollment (Boeckensted et al., 2019; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019), this study may positively impact higher education institutions by enhancing their strategy when considering marketing methods and meeting recruitment goals determined by the institution's governing board.

From the practitioner lens, the results may offer guidance and insight about types of outside vendors such as the importance of virtual tours, texting platforms, or social media platforms to consider partnering with based on the needs of first-generation, non-first-generation, domestic underrepresented, domestic non-underrepresented, male and female college students from Generation Z. Additionally, this study may identify trends in preferences based on socioeconomic status, which could impact the mode of
communication for prospective students when considering the equity of recruitment material distribution. For example, if a family from a comparatively lower socioeconomic status does not have reliable access to the internet, is it equitable to discontinue direct mail recruitment? To determine which modes of marketing distribution is most successful, it is important to consider demographics and ensure equitable opportunities to receive recruitment materials.

With anticipation of the number of students enrolling in higher education institutions declining in 2026 as a result of the 2008 recession, (Boeckenstedet et al., 2019; Mitchell, et al., 2017; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019; Schaffhauser, 2018; Schwieger, & Ladwig, 2018), this study may provide a model for institutions to consider when developing a segmented and targeted marketing campaign based on the needs of college students from Gen Z who identify as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and male or female.

**Summary**

Considering the reduction of state funding for higher education institutions coupled with the expected decline in student enrollment beginning in 2026, higher education institutions must educate themselves about the preferred modes of communication for prospective college students from Generation Z when considering which higher education institution to attend (Andersen, et al., 2009; Bachnak, et al., 2003; Baker, et al., 2018; Eichler & Martinez 2012; Hoover 2017; Merolla 2018). The results from a survey conducted at orientation from Midtown University and Kotler and Zaltman’s (1971) Social Marketing Theory will guide this study to determine preferences
of mode of communication from prospective college students from Gen Z who identify as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and male or female.
SECTION TWO

PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

History of Midtown University

Midtown University is a four-year, regional, Midwest public higher education institution with a mission that focuses on “student success – every student, every day” (Midtown University, 2019). Known not only for their championship athletic culture, the university offers more than 120 academic programs, has a 96 percent of undergraduate and 99 percent of graduate graduation rate, and is a leader in academic excellence in Agricultural Science, Education, and Business. In recruitment cycle 2017-2018, the University experienced a decline in enrollment, resulting in the leadership team’s decision to evaluate the organization and its policies, leading them to conduct a Kaizen event to reframe recruitment strategies (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

A Kaizen event, according to Masaaki Imai, founder of Kaizen Institute, can be described as “continual improvement, everybody improvement, everyday improvement and everywhere improvement” (Kaizen Institute, 2019). The event lasted three days and was led by the vice president of strategy and operations at Midtown University. The goal was to determine areas for improvement, opportunities for realignment of roles and responsibilities, and identification of gaps in current recruitment strategies. Bolman and Deal (2017) suggest that for organizations and objectives to be successful, “the right combination of goals, roles, relationships, and coordination is essential to organizational performance” (p. 47).
Organization structure prior to the Kaizen Event.

Prior to the decline in student enrollment in the 2017-2018 recruitment cycle, the structure or the organization was siloed and the Offices of Scholarships and Financial Assistance, Marketing and Communication, Admissions, Bursar, etc., each focused exclusively on their area (Personal communication, September 2018). This is contradictory to Mitzenberg’s *Five Basic Parts of Organizations*: Strategic Apex, Middle line; Technostructure; Support staff; and Operating core (Mintzberg 1979).

**Figure 3.**

*Mintzberg’s Five Basic Parts of an Organization*

At the time, the dean of enrollment management was in the role of strategic apex. This individual led each of the areas focused on student enrollment. The departments that reported directly to the dean included the Offices of Scholarships and Financial
Assistance, Admissions – Recruiting, Admissions – Operations, Registrar’s Office, and the Student Success Center. The leaders from each of these offices would be considered middle line in Mintzberg’s (1979) definition as they supervised the work in their area, while the employees who reported directly to them would be considered the operating core.

**Figure 4.**

*Organization Chart Prior to Kaizen Event*
Each year, the dean of enrollment management gathered their direct reports, the
designer from the Office of Marketing and Communication team, and the admission
recruiters to discuss what the recruiters learned from families while they visited high
schools or attended college fairs. While at the fairs, they could view other higher
education institution’s marketing materials to identify other successful campaigns.
During this meeting, significant information was shared (Personal communication,
September 2018). However, the decision about implementing any changes were to the
discretion of the individuals from the middle management and strategic apex and is referred to as consultative decision making.

**Organization Structure after Kaizen Event**

After the Kaizen event in 2018, the results from the three-day meeting indicated the importance of restructuring and collaborating from other offices on campus that were involved in the student recruitment process (Personal communication, September 2018). The results also suggested there was not sufficient personnel in place to effectively market Midtown University to prospective students. Prior to the Kaizen event, the dean of enrollment management led the admission’s team that included an assistant director of admissions - recruitment, assistant director of admission - operations, director of financial assistance, and the registrar’s office. As a result, new positions were developed such as the vice president of external relations, senior marketing specialist, director of student recruiting, and director of student success and retention.
The vice president led admissions, marketing, and development, while the student success team reported to a different leader, and a Recruitment Team was established. The Recruitment Team included leaders from the University’s leadership team to focus on the results from the Kaizen event to identify workload and processes and determine how to work collaboratively across all student recruitment efforts. When considering Mintzberg’s figure on parts of an organization, figure seven displays the new organizational structure.
Over a two-year timespan, there were multiple changes in this branch of Midtown University’s organizational leadership as a result of shifting priorities based on the outcomes from the Kaizen event. Bolman and Deal (2017) find that restructures can occur for multiple reasons including an environment change, technology changes, growth in an organization, and a change in leadership.

During the initial structure of student recruitment, Bolman and Deal’s vertical structure was present, meaning that communication was more decentralized, thus
allowing for less creativity for designers and recruiters. Although the recruiters shared what they were learning during recruitment activities and provided recommendations, personal interaction (lateral structure) was inconsistent. By implementing this restructure, increasing conversation (Brufee, 1999), and utilizing Bolman and Deal’s vertical and lateral communication structures, the restructure offered a more cross-categorical and cohesive team that focused on timely student recruitment efforts.

**Organizational Analysis**

Bolman and Deal (2017) pose five questions when determining which organizational frame to use:

1. Are individuals’ commitment and motivation essential to success?
2. Is the technical quality of the decision important?
3. Are there high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty?
4. Are conflict and scarce resources significant?
5. Are you working from the bottom up? (p. 303)

With the answers to the second, third, and fifth questions as yes, the structural, human resource, or political frames could be considered most effective (2017). The political frame, also present in Lencioni’s (2012) *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, suggests that leaders and followers must have a commitment and buy-in from the followers. If there is an absence of buy-in or meaning and purpose, reframing an organization is essential (Bolman & Deal, 2017). By shifting roles and responsibilities among the staff, the Structural Frame assumes that increased performance may occur resulting in creating new strategies to meet enrollment goals.
This aligns with the dilemma of timely decision making to aid in enhancing the recruitment strategies at Midtown University. Through three of the assumptions that support the structural frame, an extended analysis of the organizational dilemma is provided by understanding the goals, employee representation, and forms of coordination of the Recruitment Team.

**Structural Frame**

Bolman and Deal’s (2017) Structural Frame describes that the composition of an organization is similar to the skeleton of a body. If one part is out of alignment, it can affect the whole body. The structural frame can be described through six assumptions:

1. Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives and devise strategies to reach those goals.
2. Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and appropriate division of labor.
3. Suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh.
4. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures.
5. Effective structure fits an organization’s current circumstances (including its strategy, technology, workforce, and environment).
6. When performance suffers from structural flaws, the remedy is problem solving and restructuring (p. 48).

As a result of the Kaizen event, the organization’s structure was changed and became parallel to Bolman and Deal’s (2017) assumptions. Goals and objectives were
identified and shared with colleagues from each of the recruitment offices, a communication calendar was shared to increase and enhance the cohesiveness of efforts, leading indicators were shared along with how each area’s decision may affect the communication strategy for the next decision, and individuals were encouraged to share new ideas about methods and mode of communication such as a texting platform.

**Strategies and goals**

For organizations and objectives to be successful, group norms (Levi, 2017), goals, roles, and collaboration must be present to enhance the performance (Bolman & Deal, 2017). During the 2018-2019 recruitment cycle, Midtown University’s Board of Directors set an aggressive goal for the 2019-2020 academic year (Personal communication, September 2018). To achieve this goal, leaders on the Recruitment Team came together to develop a plan, evaluate what was successful the prior year, which strategies should be altered, and propose the implementation of additional technology.

In response to 2017-2018 enrollment goals, the Recruitment Team established new marketing strategies in the 2018-2019 recruitment cycle such as Free Tuition Giveaway, Eat Free for a Year, and Free Room for a Year campaigns. This consensus approach gave the team an opportunity to decide on strategies as a group and with everyone having consensus (Levi, 2017). These were created to increase housing applications, Summer Orientation, Advisement, and Registration sign ups, and room selections; each of which are leading indicators for enrollment. Although these campaigns increased participation in each of these areas, there was no statistical data from year to year to determine if it truly affected enrollment (Personal communication,
September 2019). These strategies and goals were maintained as they were a driver when marketing higher education student recruitment.

**Increasing efficiency and enhancing performance**

Through the Kaizen event, the Recruitment Team issued a blueprint for recruitment efforts that were adjusted accordingly each year.

Structure provides the architecture for pursuing an organization’s strategic goals. It is a blueprint for expectations and changes among internal players (executives, managers, and employees) and external constituencies…limited only by human performances and capacities, technological limits, and constraints in the surroundings. (Bolman & Deal, 2017 pp. 51-52).

This exemplifies the challenge at Midtown University. During the 2018-2019 recruitment cycle, a limitation was the implementation of a texting platform. A limitation is when an adjustment requires a financial investment from the University, it slows the process. While the Recruitment Team understood the importance of texting communication and had not been granted approval for a university-wide texting platform, some of the recruitment offices purchased a temporary texting platform (Personal communication, September 2018).

Staff from these offices found that students replied quicker and more frequently to a text message than to an email as “we are in a world where text messaging has surpassed in-person communication and voice calls” (Fromm & Read, 2018, p. 57). The problem with each office purchasing a temporary texting platform was that the communication to the student was not recorded where correspondence could be viewed across the campus, the number that the text message came from was not consistent, and when a person
replied to the text message, the student’s name did not display causing the employee to search for the student’s name to respond appropriately. This was a major inefficiency for employees and caused inconsistent messaging. “Formal structure enhances morale if it helps us get our work done. It has a negative impact if it gets in our way” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 52). This was one how the lack of a texting platform caused inefficiencies in recruitment efforts.

Leadership Analysis

For the purpose of this study, leadership is defined as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2019 p. 5). This definition exemplifies the purpose of Midtown University’s Recruitment Team, particularly after the Kaizen event that resulted in a reorganization. When analyzing the leadership style at Midtown University Northouse’s Skills Approach was used.

Skills Approach

Northouse (2018) described the Skills Approach as both knowledge and skills as important aspects of leadership consisting of three approaches: technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills. With the reorganization resulting in the formation of the Recruitment Team, members of the team portrayed each of the skills.

Technical Skills. Technical skills are those for which individuals have knowledge and skills in a specific area or with a software, for example (Northouse, 2018). In the recruitment team, representatives from the financial aid office, the admissions-operations team, and the research divisions each had technical skills to provide data-driven
decisions. By including these staff members in the meetings, they afforded justification about student demographics, financial aid trends among applicants, and knowledge or recommendations about how and when to make decisions about recruitment efforts based on data. These skills are not frequented by top management, so including middle management in the conversations about decisions fills this gap (Northouse, 2018).

**Human Skills.** Northouse (2018) describes human skills as the ability to work with others. Therefore, having individuals present at the Recruitment Team meetings to discuss the interactions with prospective families, high school guidance counselors, etc. is significant. Although Northouse (2018) describes this in reference to leadership roles, it is also important for team members who are not formally named leaders to have this skill. Having human skills are important at each level of management because it provides the ability to work well with each other and communicate the needs and advocating for prospective students and families effectively.

**Conceptual Skills.** These skills are used more frequently at the middle and top management levels. For the purpose of this study, having individuals present with these skills are beneficial in determining methods of ensuring ideas or concepts become a reality. By identifying the strategic plan for the Recruitment Team, individuals with these skills help teams to identify goals and how to create a strategy.

Prior to the establishment of the Recruitment Team, much of the decisions were made by the dean and were based on research and feedback received. However, without having representatives with each of these skills or having some of each of these skills, it could have been detrimental to the organization (Northouse, 2018).
Implications for Research

Research indicates a focus on the decrease in enrollment beginning in 2026, however, the literature about Generation-Z college students and higher education enrollment focuses on specific segments, not on preferred mode of communication to increase or maintain enrollment beyond the anticipated crash (Boeckenstedt et al., 2019; Fosnacht, & Nailos, 2016; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019; Nealis 2018; Poock 2008; Schwieger & Ladwig 2018; Terenzini et al., 1996). Because of the changing preferences in communication among Gen-Z students researching which higher education institution to attend (Fromm & Read, 2018), it is imperative that leadership has the right people in the right place, (Bolman & Deal, 2017), which parallels Kotler and Zaltman’s (1971) Social Marketing Theory that describes marketing to the right people, at the right time, and at the right location.

Summary

As leaders, there will be many successes and failures. Gill suggests that when implementing a new strategy or policy such as the Eat Free for a Year or Free Room Giveaways, it is beneficial to revisit the policies to allow opportunity to assess and improve the program (Gill, 2010).
SECTION THREE
SCHOLARLY REVIEW FOR THE STUDY

Purpose of the Study

Funding for public two-year and four-year higher education institutions has declined by more than $6.6 billion from 2008-2018 (Mitchell, Leachman, & Saenz, 2019). In the state in which the proposed study takes place, state funding has declined from 66.7% to less than 33.9% from 1990 and 2018 (Matthews, 2018). Because of this decline, marketing for recruitment and retention is vital. Inside Higher Ed reports, “State funding nationwide is nearly nine percent below pre-Great Recession levels and 18% below where it was before 2001” (Whitford 2020). This coupled with the increase in first-generation college students, higher education admissions and marketing teams are competing for each student to enroll at their higher education institution. Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) and Inman and Mayes (1999) report that first-generation college students tend to come from lower-income families, thus heightening the importance of funding accessibility. By understanding the preferred mode of communication of domestic underrepresented, domestic non-underrepresented, first-generation, non-first-generation, male, and female college students from Gen Z, marketers for higher education institutions can streamline their efforts and develop a strategic communication plan that is tailored and deliverable to students and families. The Social Marketing Theory (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971) will guide this study based on research about the history of higher education in the United States, college students from Generation Z, and marketing to Generation Z.
The purpose of this study is to gather data to fill a portion of the knowledge gap about distinctions that may exist in the effectiveness of different modes of higher education recruitment communication to college students from Generation Z who identify as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and male or female at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. There is little research about preferred modes of communication to fill this gap, thus the importance in acknowledging the changes in recruitment strategies when considering students from Gen-Z (Fromm & Read, 2018). A study conducted in 2014 discovered that mobile marketing was more effective than email marketing, but there is room for additional research about this topic, (Rehman, Nawaz, Ilyas, & Hyder, 2014). By learning more about the preferred communication platforms, marketers at higher education institutions could have a focused communication plan based on student preference.

Because of the projected decline in student enrollment at higher education institutions (Boeckenstedt, 2019), it is also important to recognize the financial challenges that first-generation college students from Gen-Z might encounter. By communicating with them through various channels, awareness and transparency about college affordability may increase and could result in heightened enrollment at higher education institutions. This study will offer demographic information about college students from Gen-Z and identify their marketing preferences based on survey data collected at Midtown University.

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study were:
RQ₁: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for college students from Generation Z who identify as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

RQ₂: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for college students from Generation Z who identify as male or female at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

RQ₃: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for college students from Generation Z who identify as first generation or non-first generation at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

**Theoretical Framework**

This quantitative study is guided by the concepts from Kotler and Zaltman’s (1971) Social Marketing Theory, McCarthy’s (1968) 4 P’s, and Eli St. Elmo Lewis’ (1989) attention factor, interest element, desire element, and action element (AIDA) model, and by analyzing the history of higher education student admittance, college students from Generation Z, and marketing to Generation Z.
Kotler and Zaltman’s (1971) Social Marketing Theory focuses on marketing as the exchange of a product through social marketing and McCarthy’s (1968) 4 Ps: product, promotion, place, and price, which parallel Elias St. Elmo Lewis’ (1989) AIDA model. When considering marketing about higher education institutions to college students from Gen Z who identify as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and male or female through the lens of the Social Marketing Theory, one must consider the audience and their desires, and be knowledgeable about their preferred social media platforms and consumer behavior resulting in obtaining prospective student’s interest, and meeting their desire to apply at a higher education institution.

**History of Higher Education in the United States**

**First-admitted students**

American higher education institution admission requirements have changed significantly since its inception of Harvard College in 1636. Initially, Harvard College was founded to prepare young white men for careers in ministry, law, and medicine (Goldin, 1999; & Ornstein, 2019). Admitted students were also required to have knowledge of Latin, a bit of Greek, and arithmetic (History of Higher Education Annual, n.d. 2021). After the establishment of Yale in 1701, Yale and Harvard identified students for admission based on “privilege, rank, and station in life” (Ornstein, 2019 p. 336) and “exceptional abilities, stemming from both family background and innate differences” (Goldin, 1999 p. 4).

In 1862, enrollment at higher education institutions increased due to funding provided through the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 (Golden, 1999). This funding was
“marked the first Federal aid to higher education” and offered farmers and working people who previously were unable to enroll at a higher education institution an opportunity to further their education (Morrill Act, 1862). Advance to the twentieth century and the percent of students enrolling in a higher education institution continued to increase at Harvard and Yale; however, prior to 1930, most of the people who applied were accepted, as prospective students who were not from affluent families or alumni did not apply because they knew the chance of their acceptance was minimal (Ornstein, 2019).

**Funding**

**GI Bill.** Leading up to 1944, the government intervened and offered the Government Issue (G.I.) Bill, as an attempt to increase opportunity for entrance into a higher education (Kimball, 2011). Although it was unsuccessful, the G.I. Bill was the government’s way of rewarding individuals for their service. An article in the Times discussed that the first seven years of this program provided “$14 billion to more than 8,000,000 veterans, $9.9 billion in subsistence, and spent more than $4 billion on tuition, equipment, and counseling” (Times, 1951 p. 1 & 35). Much like the recruitment strategies of Harvard College in 1636, this was an opportunity to make higher education accessible to a specific demographic.

In 1958, the National Defense Education Act was established to provide assistance to a higher education institution, based on one’s talents (United States Senate, 1951) and those who did not have the funds to attend a higher education institution (Jolly, 2009). In 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first earth-orbiting satellite, Sputnik, which was concerning to the United States. This launch raised questions about the
educational influence of individuals, specifically in the sciences. The results of this act were significant. The United States Senate reported that “in 1960, there were 3.6 million students in college, and by 1970, there were 7.5 million” (United States Senate, 1957).

**Higher education act of 1965.** The Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 was instilled to financially assist students from low-income families, “encouraged colleges and universities to broaden their programs of teacher preparation and was designed to increase accessibility and reduce barriers such as income and geographic location” (Discover U.S. Government Information, retrieved 2021). Additionally, the HEA offered federal student aid programs to all students and families, aid for low-income families, and support to less-advantaged students. The Act has been modified eight times between 1965 and 2013 (American Council on Education, retrieved 2021). Typically, it is updated by Congress every five years to ensure growth and development while considering accessibility and affordability (American Council on Education, retrieved 2021).

**Middle Income Student Assistance Act of 1978.** A second Higher Education Act was passed in 1972 to address the needs for low-income families. However, the topic of equity arose and questioned the financial feasibility for middle-income families, also known as “a middle-income squeeze” (Kimball, 2018 p. 22), thus the establishment of the Middle Income Student Assistance Act (MISAA) of 1978. This Act increased loan and Pell eligibility to middle-income families (Aschenbrener, 2016). A study conducted in 2010 found that the formation of this Act increased the probability of female enrollment when comparing MISAA years and non-MISAA years (Marcus, 2010 p 43).

**State Funding.** Since the Great Recession in 2008, state funding for higher education has decreased while federal funding increased (Federal and State Funding of
Higher Education, retrieved 2021). “The Federal Pell Grant program and veterans’ educational benefits have increased by $13.2 billion or roughly 72% and $8.4 billion, roughly 225% between 2008 and 2013 (Federal and State Funding of Higher Education, retrieved 2021). The Pell Grant program is awarded to undergraduate students who have not previously earned a “bachelor’s, graduate, or professional degree” (Federal Student Aid, retrieved Jan. 17, 2021).

The amount of aid awarded changes each year and is based on the Estimated Family Contribution that is determined after completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA, retrieved Jan. 17, 2021). Because of this, higher education institutions have competed for funding through performance-based funding models (Miao, 2012). Initially, graduation rates were used as an incentive for higher education institutions to receive more funding, “but many of the more recently implemented policies gave colleges additional incentives for graduating low-income and at-risk students” (Kelchen, 2018 p. 703), which is beneficial to first-generation college students.

In 2018, 69% of the 3.2 million 16- to 24-year-olds who completed high school or earned a GED in the first nine months of the year were enrolled in college by October compared to 63.3% in 2000, and 45.1% in 1960 (NCES, retrieved Feb 3, 2021). With the increase in the number of students attending post-secondary institutions, funding models must reflect the demand. Finances have a significant impact on students attending a higher education institution (History of Higher Education Annual, retrieved 2021). It has evolved from individuals enrolling at Harvard based on family status to today where students can complete the FAFSA and receive federal aid based on data entered. Federal aid includes the Federal Pell Grant and the Subsidized and Unsubsidized student loans. In
academic year 2019-2020, $27.8 million was provided through the Pell Grant program, compared to $42 million in the 2010-2011 academic year, a significant decline in state funding (Total expenditure on Federal Pell Grant Awards in the United States from 1979/80 to 2019/2020, 2021).

Trends in research have shown that first-generation college students come from low-socioeconomic families, which can make paying for college challenging (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; Inman & Mayes, 1999). However, Gen Z requires transparency about finances as they are considered more ‘money-conscious’ (Fromm & Read, 2018 p. 14) than previous generations. With the number of first-generation college students increasing (Irlbeck et. al, 2014), by higher education institutions putting forth an effort to have funding available for these students and promoting it in marketing materials, earning a post-secondary degree could be more obtainable.

**First-generation college students from Generation Z**

The number of students graduating high school is declining and resulting in increased concern about enrollment for administrators at higher education institutions. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2021) reports that student enrollment has decreased nationwide by 3.5% from spring 2020 to spring 2021. By 2026, an enrollment crash may strike universities as a result of reduced birth rate stemming from the 2008 recession (Boeckenstedt, 2019). With the number of first-generation college students increasing, the importance of understanding their characteristics and need for college preparation is vital (Nadelson, et. al, 2013). For the purpose of this study, college students from Generation Z will be defined as “students whose parents did not attend college” (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004) and were born between 2002 and 2003.
Although significant research has been conducted about student retention, persistence, graduation rates, and the anticipated higher education institution enrollment crash beginning in 2026 (Nealis 2018; Poock 2008; Schwieger & Ladwig 2018; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora 1996; & Vela, & Gutierrez 2017), little research has been conducted about their preferred mode of communication for the recruitment of college students from Gen Z.

**Characteristics of first-generation college students from Gen Z.** The Center for First-Generation Student Success (2021) reports that approximately one-third of the students enrolled at a higher education institution are considered a first-generation college student. These students tend to identify more frequently as female, come from low-socioeconomic families, are less prepared academically, attend colleges or universities closer to home, have less guidance in applying to a higher education institution, need to work while attending a higher education institution, and have lower self-efficacy than non-first-generation college students (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; Inman & Mayes, 1999; & Terenzini, et al., 1996). Furthermore, anxiety is higher for first-generation students when applying to a higher education institution as they are less likely to have financial assistance (Engle, Bermeo, & O’Brien, 2006) or fully understand the cost (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). It is also worth mentioning the importance of distinguishing out-of-state first-generation college students compared to in-state first-generation college students as in-state students are more likely to have a lower socioeconomic status (Nadelson, et al., 2012).

First-generation college students may also fear they will not be able to enroll in the courses they prefer, which can be a challenge at public, four-year institutions due to
course availability (Inman & Mayes, 1999). Additionally, the class size is important for these students as they will need greater interaction from faculty (Murphy & Hicks, 2006; & Nadelson, et al., 2013).

**Generation Z**

Gen-Zers are motivated by “social and career expectations and experiences, developing purpose, interpersonal relationships, and interdependency” (Nadelson et al., 2013, p. 51). These students tend to pay more attention to branding, are considered digital natives, i.e., they do not recall a time in life where social media did not exist (Seemiller & Grace, 2016), are cost-conscious, and have experienced significant changes during their life such as the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, marriage equality, the first black president of the United States, and the 2008 Great Recession (From & Read, 2018). Furthermore, Gen Zers want instant gratification, are conscious of the environment, and consider social networking as an important part of their lives (Singh & Dangmei, 2016).

Gen Z is referred to as the most ethnically diverse generation (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). As reported by the Center for First-Generation Student Success, in academic year 2015-2016, for example, “47% of first-generation students attended a public four-year institution while 64% attended a public two-year institution; 46% identified as white, followed by 25% as Hispanic/Latinx/a/o, 18% Black or African American, 6% Asian, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and .05% as Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander” (Center for First Generation Student Success, retrieved 2021). With the continued increase of diverse student populations, it is important for marketers to communicate in a way that meets the needs of all student populations.
Preparing first-generation college students for college.

First-generation college students are less academically prepared compared to non-first-generation college students (Horn & Nunex, 2000). As a result, these students have lower grade-point averages and scores on the ACT or SAT tests and were less likely to participate in high school honors programs (Inman & Mayes, 1999), which cause barriers for meeting higher education admission requirements. Therefore, these students and families rely on guidance from high school counselors and view their perspective as beneficial (Chapman, O’Brien & DeMasi, 1991). Because of the reduced knowledge about higher education entrance and enrollment requirements, the importance of increasing the availability and accessibility to campus visit days and opportunities to meet with admission representatives to provide information about applying to higher education institutions and earning a post-secondary degree is vital (Engle, et al., 2006).

To assist in preparing first-generation college students for a post-secondary education, it is recommended that higher education institution recruiters host informal information sessions for students and families and offer guidance about tools available to aid in student success and ways to get involved on campus (Murphy & Hicks, 2006). Providing convenient informational sessions about financial assistance and opportunities to visit college campuses help students see themselves obtaining a college degree and creates a safe atmosphere to discuss the cost of attending a higher education institution (Engle, et al., 2006). Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) and Inman and Mayes (1999) report that first-generation students from Gen Z tend to come from lower-income families, thus heightening the importance of funding accessibility in order to promote societal and university goals for increased access and equity. With state-level funding for public
higher education institutions declining by more than $6.6 billion from 2008-2018 (Mitchell, Leachman, & Saenz, 2019), first-generation students need to be educated about scholarship and grant opportunities to assist in paying for a post-secondary education degree.

Because first-generation students have lower self-efficacy than non-first-generation students, it is beneficial for recruiters, faculty, and high school counselors to validate that they will be successful and find a job after graduation (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Murphy and Hicks, 2006). Relationships for first-generation college students have a significant role, therefore administrators and higher education institution professionals should educate themselves about the needs and influences of underrepresented and first-generation students when selecting a higher education institution to attend (Andersen, Friedman, Carreon, Bai, Nakazono, Afifi, & Gutierrez 2009; Bachnak, Bellomo, & Resendez 2003; Baker, Klasik, & Reardon 2018; Eichler & Martinez 2012; Hoover 2017; and Merolla 2018). Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) encourage programs for both students and parents to help fill the gap of knowledge about completing the tasks of searching for a higher education institution, applying for admission, and completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Providing this level of service to first-generation college students could provide opportunities for their future and increase their self-efficacy.

When considering marketing preferences to prospective first-generation college students from Gen Z, it is important to acknowledge who these individuals are (Fromm & Read, 2018), identify their concerns and barriers to selecting, applying, and enrolling in a higher education institution, and continue to learn about the ways to assist them, their
families/guardians, and high school counselors about preparing for college. The Social Marketing Theory describes the exchange of product and promotion, and by knowing the characteristics of first-generation college students, higher education professionals can adhere to their needs and assist them in enrolling in a higher education institution. Kotler and Zaltman (1971) acknowledge the multiple definitions of social marketing, however, describe it as an “exchange process” and the exchange of goods or services for other or for money” (p. 4).

**Marketing**

When marketing to college students from Gen Z about attending a higher education institution, one must consider the audience, their desires, and be aware of their preferred social media and digital platforms and consumer behavior. “Marketing management is the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of programs designed to bring about desired exchanges with target audiences for the purpose of personal or mutual gain” (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). Gen Z is considered the most sophisticated, highly diverse, and technologically savvy generation (Sing & Dangmei, 2016). By acknowledging the significance of the product, identifying promotional opportunities, understanding their geographical constraints, and knowing the impact that the cost of attending a higher education institution can have on them, the pillars from the Social Marketing Theory are significant when developing a marketing plan.

Because this generation is considered digital natives and value social networking (Fromm & Read, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2016), marketers must implement strategies to meet these needs. Kotler and Zaltman (1971) define social marketing as “the design, implementation and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social
ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research” (p. 5), thus the importance of understanding the preferred mode of communication among first-generation college students from Gen Z when recruiting them to a higher education institution.

**Convenience.**

With Gen Z, technology has played a significant role in their college search and has changed the approach to higher education student recruitment (Sandlin & Peña, 2014; Benedict, Lesley, Winn, & Baker, 2016). As digital natives, these students are accustomed to searching on the internet and receiving information immediately. When recruiting these students, it is vital to have content on university websites up-to-date and easily accessible as this allows for quick interaction without digital constraints (Stefko, Fedorko, & Bacik, 2014). Additionally, to have the highest presence and web traffic, Gifford (2010) suggests using Search Engine Optimization (SEO) “to gain top positioning in web search results” (p. 64). By ensuring SEO is in place and content is up to date on websites, businesses (higher education institutions) are designing products to meet the needs of prospective students (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971).

**Social Media**

In reference to higher education institutions, Sandin and Peña (2014) maintain that social media is one of the first connections for Gen Z. However, having a social media presence is not enough for Gen Z prospective students. Higher education institutions must have an authentic (Fromm and Read, 2016) and strategic presence as well as a methodological approach that builds relationships (Benedict, et al., 2016). Kotler and Zaltman’s Social Marketing Theory suggests that overuse of direct language
may leave the audience feeling resentful (1971); however, because Gen Z and first-generation college students are known for wanting authentic, transparent information (Fromm & Read, 2018), this portion of Kotler and Zaltman’s theory may not accommodate the needs of this generation of students.

**Products**

When creating a product for prospective students from Gen Z, marketers need to study their audience and create products based on the data they gathered (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). Since Gen Z and first-generation college students are future-focused, want to know they will graduate ready to make a difference in the world, and have a desire to financially help their families (Fromm & Read, 2018; Goldman, Heddy, & Cavazos, 2020; & Seemiller & Grace, 2016), it is important for higher education institutions to market positive outcomes in careers after graduation (Nadelson, et al., 2013).

When considering content for marketing materials, available resources such as tutors, study groups, access to faculty, and “validating experiences from faculty, administrators, and peers who are involved in events that promote academic and social awareness and offer the needed boost for these students” (Murphy & Hicks, 2006, p. 16) should be in the marketing plan and easily accessible to all students. By creating content that engages first-generation student interest and providing a deeper knowledge about individualized academic programs, it could increase the likelihood that students will enroll at a specific higher education institution (Nadelson, et al., 2013).
Summary

Understanding communication preferences of students from Gen Z is vital when recruiting students to higher education institutions leading up to the projected higher education enrollment crash in 2026. Without knowing their preferences, marketers’ efforts could be unproductive, financial resources could be spent ineffectively, and students may not attend a higher education institution or earn a degree because they are not receiving the information in a way that aligns with their needs. Based on these concerns, the research will seek to fill the gap in knowledge about preferred mode of communication for college students from Generation Z who identify as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and male or female at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.
SECTION FOUR

CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

Plan for Dissemination of Practitioner Contribution

Who: Attendees of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) District VI/Mid America annual conference

When: 2023 annual conference, proposal submitted by April 2022

How: Through a presentation at the CASE District VI/Mid America annual conference. The presentation will be a slide show.

Type of Document

The type of document will be a slide show presentation that will be presented at the annual CASE District VI/Mid America conference. The presentation will inform the audience regarding the preferred mode of communication for college students from Generation Z who identify as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and male or female at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. A full report will be made available upon request.

Rationale for this Contribution Type

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education conference focuses on improving relationships with alumni, donors, prospective students, parents, governmental officials, community leaders, corporate executives, foundation officers, and other external constituencies” (CASE website, retrieved on Nov. 25, 2021). CASE is available to more than 64,000 advancement professionals from 3,400 educational institutions from colleges and universities to elementary and secondary schools. CASE District VI/Mid
America consists of professionals from Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming (CASE website, retrieved on Nov. 25, 2021).
A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF COLLEGE STUDENT COMMUNICATION RECRUITMENT PREFERENCES AT A MIDWEST PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Katie Machovsky
CASE Conference 2023
There is little research about preferred modes of communication to fill this gap, thus the importance in acknowledging the changes in recruitment strategies when considering students from Gen Z (Fromm & Read, 2018). A study conducted in 2014 discovered that “mobile marketing was more effective compared to email marketing... but we still feel that email and mobile marketing are unexplored areas, where we need to know their effectiveness” (Rehman et al., 2014, pp. 38-41).

By learning more about the preferred communication platforms, marketers at higher education institutions could have a more focused communication plan based on student preference.

By communicating with these students through various and appropriate channels (Fromm & Read 2018), awareness and transparency about college affordability as well as enrollment at higher education institutions may increase.
Students born between 2002 and 2003 were selected for this study because these were the years students were born for the incoming freshman class at the higher education institution studied. Studies have consistently shown that university administrators should study what Gen-Z prospective students need and want when selecting a higher education institution (Andersen et al., 2009; Bachnak et al., 2003; Baker et al., 2018; Eichler & Martinez 2012; Merolla 2018; Hoover 2017).

Administrators may also want to consider marketing the value of meeting customer needs, as it may positively impacts enrollment during a challenging economy.
Social Marketing Theory: “The design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research. Thus, it is the explicit use of marketing skills to help translate present social action efforts into more effectively designed and communicated programs that elicit desired audience response” (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971 p. 5).

Elias St. Elmo Lewis’ (1989) **AIDA Model**: Attention factor, interest element, desire element, and action element.

**4 P’s**: Kotler and Zaltman (1971) Established by Herome McCarthy and is referred to as the “Four P’s: Product, Promotion, Place, and Price” (1968).

Social Marketing Theory is the over-arching theory, the AIDA Model and the 4 P’s support the theory.
Describe the methods marketers should implement to successfully launch and complete a marketing campaign.
### Theoretical Framework

**Four P’s: Herome McCarthy (1968)**
- **Product**
  - Understand the audience
  - Understand and meet their desires
  - Make their desires affordable
- **Promotion**
  - Mass communication about product
- **Place**
  - Communicate quickly and easily about where to obtain product
  - Meet audience where they are
- **Price**
  - Affordable price

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four P’s</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Product</strong></td>
<td>• Understand the audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Understand and meet their desires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Make their desires affordable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promotion</strong></td>
<td>• Mass communication about product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
<td>• Communicate quickly and easily about where to obtain product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Meet audience where they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Price</strong></td>
<td>• Affordable price</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This model aligns with McCarthy’s Four P’s and Kotler and Zaltman’s Social Marketing Theory (1971).

Focuses on taking the consumer through four stages from brand awareness to purchase (Somefalean, 2014). This approach grabs the customer’s attention, or in the case of this study, college students from Gen Z. If the approach is not secured, the student will be lost. Fromm and Read (2018) describe this as “Bite-Sized = Right-Sized” (p. 54). Communication to Gen-Z should be short, eye-catching, and include a graphic that strikes the attention of these individuals.

In the interest stage of the model, Somefalean (2014) emphasizes the importance of conveying to the consumer the bargain and benefits of the product. The desire, like McCarthy’s (1968) promotion and place approaches, shows the need and desire to have the product. Finally, is the action approach which is purchasing the product. As Fromm and Read (2018) and McCarthy (1968) describe, this phase should be seamless, easy, and require minimal effort to make the purchasing commitment. Since Gen-Z students have quick access to information as a result of technology, it is important that marketers for higher education institutions understand the impacts of marketing to first-generation students from Gen Z at a rural, Midwest, public, four-year higher education institution.

By understanding the needs and desires of college students from Gen Z when considering which higher education institution to attend, it is important to consider the Social Marketing Theory and use the 4P’s Approach and AIDA model when designing marketing strategies.
Conceptual Underpinnings

- History of higher education admittance
- Marketing to Generation Z
- College students from Gen Z
Admittance to higher education institutions has changed significantly since the inception of Harvard College in 1636, which was established to prepare young white men for careers in ministry, law, and medicine (Goldin, 1999; Ornstein, 2019). Admits were required to have “some knowledge of Latin, a bit of Greek, and arithmetic” (Antler et al., 1991, p. 69).

Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 (Golden, 1999). This funding was “marked the first Federal aid to higher education” and offered farmers and working people who previously were unable to enroll at a higher education institution an opportunity to further their education (Library of Congress, 2017).

G.I. Bill was the government’s way of rewarding individuals for their service. An article in the Times discussed that the first seven years of this program provided “$14 billion to more than 8,000,000 veterans, $9.9 billion in subsistence, and spent more than $4 billion on tuition, equipment, and counseling” (Times, 1951 p. 1 & 35).

In 1958, the National Defense Education Act was established to provide assistance to a higher education institution, based on one’s talents (United States Senate, 1951) and those who did not have the funds to attend a higher education institution (Jolly, 2009).
The Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 was instilled to financially assist students from low-income families, “encouraged colleges and universities to broaden their programs of teacher preparation, and was designed to increase accessibility and reduce barriers such as income and geographic location (Discover U.S. Government Information, retrieved 2021). Additionally, the HEA offered federal student aid programs to all students and families, aid for low-income families, and support to less-advantaged students.

A second Higher Education Act was passed in 1972 to address the needs for low-income families. However, the topic of equity arose and questioned the financial feasibility for middle-income families, also known as “a middle-income squeeze” (Kimball, 2018 p. 22), thus the establishment of the Middle Income Student Assistance Act (MISAA) of 1978. This Act increased loan and Pell eligibility to middle-income families (Aschenbrener, 2016).

**State Funding** Since the Great Recession in 2008, state funding for higher education has decreased while federal funding increased (Federal and State Funding of Higher Education, retrieved 2021). “The Federal Pell Grant program and veterans’ educational benefits have increased by $13.2 billion or roughly 72% and $8.4 billion, roughly 225% between 2008 and 2013 (Federal and State Funding of Higher Education, retrieved 2021).
The number of students graduating high school is declining and resulting in increased concern about enrollment for administrators at higher education institutions. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2021) reports that student enrollment has decreased nationwide by 3.5% from spring 2020 to spring 2021.

With the number of first-generation college students increasing, the importance of understanding their characteristics and need for college preparation is vital (Nadelson, et. al, 2013).

These students tend to identify more frequently as female, come from low-socioeconomic families, are less prepared academically, attend colleges or universities closer to home, have less guidance in applying to a higher education institution, need to work while attending a higher education institution, and have lower self-efficacy than non-first-generation college students (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; Inman & Mayes, 1999; & Terenzini, et al., 1996).
Most ethnically diverse generation (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). As reported by the Center for First-Generation Student Success, in academic year 2015-2016, for example, “47% of first-generation students attended a public four-year institution while 64% attended a public two-year institution; 46% identified as white, followed by 25% as Hispanic/Latinx/o, 18% Black or African American, 6% Asian, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and .05% as Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander” (Center for First Generation Student Success, retrieved 2021).

Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) encourage programs for both students and parents to help fill the gap of knowledge about completing the tasks of searching for a higher education institution, applying for admission, and completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Providing this level of service to first-generation college students could provide opportunities for their future and increase their self-efficacy.

Gen Z is considered the most sophisticated, highly diverse, and technologically savvy generation (Sing & Dangmei, 2016).
Because this generation is considered digital natives and value social networking (Fromm & Read, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2016), marketers must implement strategies to meet these needs.

**Convenience**

With Gen Z, technology has played a significant role in their college search and has changed the approach to higher education student recruitment (Sandlin & Peña, 2014; Benedict, Lesley, Winn, & Baker, 2016). As digital natives, these students are accustomed to searching on the internet and receiving information immediately. When recruiting these students, it is vital to have content on university websites up-to-date and easily accessible as this allows for quick interaction without digital constraints (Stefko, Fedorko, & Bacik, 2014).

**Social Media**

Sandin and Peña (2014) maintain that social media is one of the first connections for Gen Z. However, having a social media presence is not enough for Gen Z prospective students. Higher education institutions must have an authentic (Fromm and Read, 2016) and strategic presence as well as a methodological approach that builds relationships (Benedict, et al., 2016).

**Products**

When creating a product for prospective students from Gen Z, marketers need to study their audience and create products based on the data they gathered (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). Since Gen Z and first-generation college students are future-focused, want to
know they will graduate ready to make a difference in the world, and have a desire to financially help their families (Fromm & Read, 2018; Goldman, Heddy, & Cavazos, 2020; & Seemiller & Grace, 2016), it is important for higher education institutions to market positive outcomes in careers after graduation (Nadelson, et al. 2013).

By creating content that engages first-generation student interest and providing a deeper knowledge about individualized academic programs, it could increase the likability that students will enroll at a specific higher education institution (Nadelson, et al., 2013).
Research Questions

RQ₁: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented generation Z college student at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

RQ₂: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for male or female college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

RQ₃: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?
The Study
Participants

A sample of freshmen at Midtown University were analyzed.
- De-identified, fully committed, first-time students for fall 2021 (n = 241).

- 155 disclosed whether they were domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented
  - 8 - Domestic underrepresented students
  - 147 - Domestic non-underrepresented students.

- 158 disclosed their preferred gender
  - 34 Male
  - 120 Female
  - 4 Did not disclose

Because there were fewer than five individuals who did not self-disclose their gender, they could not be included in the study results.

- 158 answered whether they are first-generation students or not
  - 35 identified as first-generation college students
  - 123 did not identify as first-generation college students
Before obtaining the data, a request for data was submitted to Midtown University’s Institutional Research Board and Effectiveness to seek approval to obtain de-identified responses from an existing survey. Once approved, the researcher contacted the Student Success Center and requested additional questions be added to the survey. After the survey results were collected, a third party working for the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness at Midtown University removed all identifiable information leaving only the responses to the questions the research provided, which ensured confidentiality of all survey takers (Fink, 2015).

In this study, a survey was used as a form of data collection as the researcher gathers the perceptions of Gen Z’s preferred mode of communication.

Fink (2015) describes that surveys should be conducted when “deciding policy or in planning and evaluating programs, and conducting research when the information you need should come directly from people” (p. 5).
Data Collection and Analysis

Chi-Square Analysis

- Determines if there is a difference between two categorical variables (direct mail and email compared to social media and text message communication) (Field, 2018).

Independent Variables

- RQ1: Domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented college students from Gen Z
- RQ2: Male and female college students from Gen Z
- RQ3: First-generation and non-first-generation college students from Gen Z
To answer RQ1, the Pearson’s Chi-Squared analysis was performed separately on both the direct mail and email communication and social media and text message communication to determine the preference in mode of communication for domestic underrepresented and non-domestic underrepresented students. Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05 between domestic underrepresented and non-domestic underrepresented students attending Midtown University in fall 2021, $X^2 (1) = .337, p = .562$.

For the preference on the mode of communication based on fall 2021 entering freshmen at Midtown University, researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis that there is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery for domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented Generation-Z college students at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.
Null Hypothesis

$H^2$: There is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented generation z college student at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.
To answer RQ1, the Pearson’s Chi-Squared analysis was performed separately on both the direct mail and email communication and social media and text message communication to determine the preference in mode of communication for domestic underrepresented and non-domestic underrepresented students. Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05 between domestic underrepresented and non-domestic underrepresented students attending Midtown University in fall 2021, $X^2 (1) = .337, p = .562$.

For the preference on the mode of communication based on fall 2021 entering freshmen at Midtown University, researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis that there is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery for domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented Generation-Z college students at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.
RQ2: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for male or female college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Direct mail &amp; email</th>
<th>Social media &amp; text message</th>
<th>Total students enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Null Hypothesis

H₀: There is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for male or female college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.
To answer RQ2, the Pearson’s Chi-Squared analysis was performed separately on both the direct mail and email communication and social media and text message communication to determine the preference in mode of communication for male or female college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05 between male and female students attending Midtown University in fall 2021, $X^2 (1) = 2.20, p = .13$.

For the preference on the mode of communication based on fall 2021 entering freshmen at Midtown University, researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. There was not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for male or female college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.
### Descriptive Statistics

**RQ**: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

**Mode of communication preference based on first-generation status in fall 2021**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct mail &amp; email</th>
<th>Social media &amp; text message</th>
<th>Total number of students enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-generation student</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-first-generation student</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students enrolled</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Null Hypothesis

H³: There is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.
To answer RQ3, the Pearson’s Chi-Squared analysis was performed separately on both direct mail and email communication and social media and text message communication to determine the preference in mode of communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was statistically significant at the alpha level of .05 between first-generation and non-first-generation students attending Midtown University in fall 2021, $X^2 (1) = 4.445, p = .03$.

For the preference on the mode of communication based on fall 2021 entering freshmen at Midtown University, researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there was not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.
Discussion and Implications

- The goal of this study was to determine if there is a difference in preference for communication material among the following groups of college students from Generation Z who identified as:
  - Domestic underrepresented or domestic non-identified
  - Male or female
  - First-generation or non-first-generation
Discussion and Implications

Although research indicates the preference of Generation Z to be digital (Fromm and Read, 2018), this study reveals that there was not a statistically significant difference in preference of distribution of marketing materials as a higher education institutions for students who typically come from a lower socioeconomic status (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; Inman & Mayes, 1999).

Consider AIDA Model

- **Attention** - Grab the consumer’s attention “Bite-sized = Right-Sized” (Fromm and Read, 2018)
- **Interest** – Talk about the bargain (Gen Z is cost conscious)
- **Desire** –
- **Action** – Students apply and enroll
Since these students also value the input and opinion of their parents, it is essential that marketers also consider the preferences of family members of first-generation students from Gen Z and meet their communication expectations (Fromm & Read, 2018). Fromm and Read go on to report that relationships with parents from this generation are different from Millennials and Baby Boomers as Gen-Z children tend to value their parent’s, particularly their mother’s, opinions more than the previous generation (2018), thus the importance of engaging them in the recruitment process.

Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) encourage programs for both students and parents to help fill the gap of knowledge about completing the tasks of searching for a higher education institution, applying for admission, and completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Providing this level of service to first-generation college students could provide opportunities for their future and increase their self-efficacy.

Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) and Inman and Mayes (1999) reported that first-generation Gen-Z college students tend to come from lower-income families, thus heightening the importance of funding accessibility to promote societal and higher education institution goals for increased access and equity.

By communicating with these students through various and appropriate channels (Fromm & Read 2018), awareness and transparency about college affordability as well as enrollment at higher education institutions may increase.
Discussion and Implications

Practitioner
Marketers and recruitment teams might consider using both direct mail and email in addition to social media and text messages to communicate about higher education institutions for certain populations - especially first-generation college from Generation Z. If not already in use, might consider text message communication.

Scholarly
Further understanding of preferences of prospective college students from Gen Z when considering the mode of communication for determining which higher education institution to attend.
With the projected crash in enrollment beginning in 2026, identifying ways to recruit students to higher education institutions is a topic researchers and practitioners might consider (Boeckenstedt et al., 2019; Fosnacht, & Nailos, 2016; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019; Nealis 2018; Poock 2008; Schwieger & Ladwig 2018; Terenzini, et al., 1996).

Social Marketing Theory (Kotler & Zaltman)

- Consider the audience and their desires and be knowledgeable about their preferred social media platforms and consumer behavior resulting in obtaining prospective student’s interest and meeting their desire to apply at a higher education institution.
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SECTION FIVE

CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

Target Journal

The target journal for publication is the Journal of Marketing for Higher Education.

Rationale for this Target

The Journal of Marketing for Higher Education was established in 1988 and publishes articles that address and study the role of marketing in higher education and the critiques of higher education marketing and is a hub for information about higher education marketing. The international double-blind peer reviewed journal is published twice a year, has an Impact Factor of 3.156 in 2020, and has approximately 45 thousand downloads and views annually.

Plan for Submission

Who: Journal of Marketing for Higher Education

When: Spring 2022

Submission-ready Article

Title

A Quantitative Analysis of College Student Communication Recruitment Preferences at a Midwest Public Higher Education Institution

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to gather data to fill a portion of the knowledge gap about distinctions that may exist in the student preference in different modes of higher education recruitment communication for college students from Generation Z who identify as domestic underrepresented, domestic non-underrepresented, first generation, non-first generation, male, and female at a four-year, rural, Midwest, public higher education institution. Survey participants (n = 242) consisted of first-year students from Generation Z (born between 2002 and 2003) starting at Midtown University in fall 2021. The study results indicate that there is not a statistically significant difference in preferred mode of communication for college students from Gen Z who identify domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, or male or female when marketing through direct mail and email communication compared to social media and text message communication at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. However, there was a statistically significant difference in preferred mode of communication for college students from Gen Z for college students from Gen Z who identify as first generation and non-first generation when marketing through direct mail and email communication.
compared to social media and text message communication at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.

**Keywords:** marketing, generation z, college students, communication preferences, underrepresented, first-generation college students, enrollment, and higher education.

**Background of the Study**

According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2019), in fall 2018, first-year student enrollment at higher education institutions decreased by 1.7 percent nationwide resulting in increased concern about enrollment for higher education administrators (National Student Clearinghouse, 2019). By 2026, an enrollment crash may strike universities due to the reduced birth rate stemming from the 2008 recession (Boeckenstedt, Perez, & Rhyneer 2019). Researchers have concentrated on how to increase enrollment leading up to 2026. However, the literature about Generation-Z (Gen-Z) students (individuals entering a higher education institution for the first time and are born between 2002 and 2003) and higher education enrollment focuses on specific segments such as race, not on preferred mode of communication to increase or maintain levels of enrollment beyond the anticipated crash of 2026 (Boeckenstedt et al., 2019; Fosnacht, & Nailos, 2016; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019; Nealis 2018; Poock 2008; Schwieger & Ladwig 2018; Terenzini, et al., 1996).

Students born between 2002 and 2003 were selected for this study because these were the years in which students were born for the incoming freshman class at the higher education institution studied. Studies have consistently shown that university administrators should study what Gen-Z prospective students need and want when selecting a higher education institution (Andersen et al., 2009; Bachnak et al., 2003;
Baker et al., 2018; Eichler & Martinez 2012; Merolla 2018; Hoover 2017).

Administrators might also consider marketing the value of meeting customer needs, as it may positively impact enrollment during a challenging economy.

State-level funding for American public higher education institutions has declined by more than $6.6 billion from 2008-2018 (Mitchell et al., 2019). The state from which the proposed study takes place, state funding declined from 66.7% to less than 33.9% since 1990 (Matthews, 2018). As state funding declines, marketing for recruitment and retention is vital. Inside Higher Ed reports “State funding nationwide is nearly 9% below pre-Great Recession levels and 18% below where it was before 2001” (Whitford, 2020, p. 1). The decline in state funding coupled with the increase in first-generation college students who are technology driven, has higher education admissions and marketing teams aggressively competing for each student to enroll at their higher education institution. Additionally, Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) and Inman and Mayes (1999) reported that first-generation Gen-Z college students tend to come from lower-income families, thus heightening the importance of funding accessibility to promote societal and higher education institution goals for increased access and equity.

This study will explore preferences in mode of communication based on domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and gender for students at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. Extant literature will be reviewed in three main pillars. The pillars of this study include changes in enrollment strategies at public higher education institutions through 2020; Gen-Z college students’ influences on university selection; and effective marketing and communication practices to Gen-Z college students.
Statement of the Problem

The problem studied is the lack of information about preferred mode of communication of college students from Gen Z who identify as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and male or female when marketing through direct mail and email communication compared to social media and text message communication at a four-year, rural, Midwest, public higher education institution. Beginning in 2026, student enrollment is expected to decline due to the 2008 recession (Boeckenstedt et al., 2019; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center et al.). Higher education institutions should meet college students from Gen Z at their preferred communication platform. Since these students also value the input and opinion of their parents, it is essential that marketers also consider the preferences of family members of students from Gen Z and meet their communication expectations (Fromm & Read, 2018). Fromm and Read (2018) go on to report that relationships with parents from this generation are different from Millennials and Baby Boomers as Gen-Zers tend to value their parent’s, particularly their mother’s, opinions more than the previous generation (2018), thus the importance of engaging them in the recruitment process.

Based on archival survey results gathered from accepted college students attending orientation the week before starting classes, this study seeks to determine if there is a preferred mode of communication for college students from Gen Z who identify as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and male or female when marketing through direct mail and email
communication compared to social media and text message communication at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gather data to fill a portion of the knowledge gap about preferences in mode of communication for college students from Generation Z who identify domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and male or female when marketing through direct mail and email communication compared to social media and text message communication at a four-year, rural, Midwest, public higher education institution. There is little research about preferred modes of communication to fill this gap, thus the importance in acknowledging the changes in recruitment strategies when considering students from Gen Z (Fromm & Read, 2018). A study conducted in 2014 discovered that “mobile marketing was more effective compared to email marketing... but we still feel that email and mobile marketing are unexplored areas, where we need to know their effectiveness” (Rehman et al., 2014, pp. 38-41). By learning more about the preferred communication platforms, marketers at higher education institutions could have a more focused communication plan based on student preference.

Because of the projected decline in student enrollment at higher education institutions, it is also important to recognize the financial challenges that first-generation college students encounter (Boeckenstedt et al., 2019; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center et al.). By communicating with these students through various and appropriate channels (Fromm & Read 2018), awareness and transparency about college affordability as well as enrollment at higher education institutions may increase.
This study will offer demographic information about students from Gen Z and identify their marketing preferences based on archival survey data collected at Midtown University.

**Research Questions**

In anticipation for the decline in student enrollment beginning in 2026 (Boeckenstedt et al., 2019; Fosnacht, & Nailos, 2016; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019; Nealis 2018; Poock 2008; Schwieger & Ladwig 2018; Terenzini, et al., 1996), leaders focusing on recruitment efforts at higher education institutions may want to consider preferences in modes of recruitment communication to Generation Z.

This quantitative study sought to answer the overarching question: What are the communication preferences for mode of communication for college students from Generation Z who identify as domestic underrepresented, domestic non-underrepresented, first generation, non-first generation, male, and female at Midtown University?

**Research Questions**

RQ1: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for domestic underrepresented or non-domestic underrepresented generation-z college student at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

H1: There is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for domestic underrepresented or non-
domestic underrepresented generation z college student at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.

RQ2: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for college students from Gen Z who identify as male or female at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?
H2: There is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for college students from Gen Z who identify as male or female at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.

RQ3: Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?
H3: There is not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.
Identification of Variables

The dependent variables are the marketing type, either direct mail and email communication or text messaging and social media communication. Communication is a form of student recruitment that assists students in determining which higher education institution to attend. The independent variables for the first research question are domestic underrepresented and non-domestic college students from Generation Z, male and female college students from Generation Z for research question two, and first-generation and non-first-generation college students from Generation Z for research question three. These independent variables were selected because there is little research about preferred modes of communication to fill this gap, thus the importance in acknowledging the changes in recruitment strategies when considering students from Gen Z (Fromm & Read, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

This quantitative study is informed by concepts from Kotler and Zaltman’s (1971) Social Marketing Theory, McCarthy’s (1968) 4 P’s, and Elias St. Elmo Lewis’ (1989) Attention Factor, Interest Element, Desire Element, and Action Element (AIDA) model by analyzing the history of higher education student admittance, first-generation college students from Gen Z, and marketing to this segment of students. These theories were selected due to the alignment with marketing efforts to Gen Z. However, the minimal differences will be addressed.
Figure 8.

Theoretical Framework

Social Marketing Theory

When considering marketing to Gen-Z prospective students with the goal of enrolling them in a public higher education institution, it is important to understand this generation, meet their needs at their platforms of interest, and use language that is common to them (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971 and Fromm & Read, 2018). In 1971, Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman coined the term Social Marketing Theory (Dibb & Carrigan, 2013). This term is defined as

The design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research. Thus, it is the
explicit use of marketing skills to help translate present social action efforts into
more effectively designed and communicated programs that elicit desired
audience response (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971 p. 5).

Kotler and Zaltman (1971) describe a social marketing approach as marketing to the right
people, at the right time, and at the right location. This parallels Herome McCarthy “Four
P’s: Product, Promotion, Place, and Price” (1968).

**Table 5.**

*Herome McCarthy’s four P’s*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Definition</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Product** | • Understand the audience  
|          | • Understand and meet their desires  
|          | • Make their desires affordable               |
| **Promotion** | • Mass communication about product               |
| **Place**  | • Communicate quickly and easily about where to obtain product  
|          | • Meet audience where they are                 |
| **Price**  | • Affordable price                               |

**Four P’s**

Product, in the Social Marketing Approach, encourages the marketers to
understand the desires of their target audience, meet those desires, and do so at a rate that
is affordable. Kotler and Zaltman refer to this as focusing on the product and striving to
make it purchasable (1971). When applying this to Gen Z and marketing for higher
education, the core product is earning a degree, while other tangible ideas could focus on
their desires such as marketing concerts on campus or graduates using their education to
make a difference in the world (Fromm & Read, 2018).

McCarthy (1968) describes promotion as the next approach in social marketing. This includes communicating with the masses about large ideas. In the world of higher education, this could consist of billboards, news releases, or tv or radio commercials. Although this does not offer a personalized approach, it offers brand awareness and makes the product recognizable (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). The third approach describes a place which provides a seamless and easily acceptable mode of communication so people know where they can purchase a product. When considering marketing to prospective Gen-Z students, Fromm and Read (2018) emphasize the importance of mobile-friendly communication as well as ensuring content can be obtained quickly.

The final approach to McCarthy’s 4 P’s is price. “Price represents the costs that the buyer must accept in order to obtain the product” (Kotler & Zaltman 2018, p. 9). With state funding decreasing (Whitford 2020) and Gen-Z students cautious about accumulating debt (Fromm and Read, 2018), higher education marketers may want to consider the Four P’s when recruiting and enrolling students from this generation. In addition to the Four P’s strategy, there are further approaches to consider when marketing higher education to prospective students such as the AIDA Model.

**AIDA Model**

As demonstrated by Elias St. Elmo Lewis in 1989, the Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action (AIDA) model was developed to attract consumers to purchase a product. This model aligns with McCarthy’s Four P’s as described by Kotler and Zaltman (1971). Similarly, the AIDA model focuses on taking the consumer through four stages from
brand awareness to purchase (Somefalean, 2014). This approach grabs the customer’s attention, or in the case of this study, college students from Gen Z. If the approach is not secured, the student will be lost. Fromm and Read (2018) describe this as “Bite-Sized = Right-Sized” (p. 54). Communication to Gen-Z should be short, eye-catching, and include a graphic that strikes the attention of these individuals.

In the interest stage of the model, Somefalean (2014) emphasizes the importance of conveying to the consumer the bargain and benefits of the product. The desire, like McCarthy’s (1968) promotion and place approaches, shows the need and desire to have the product. Finally, is the action approach which is purchasing the product. As Fromm and Read (2018) and McCarthy (1968) describe, this phase should be seamless, easy, and require minimal effort to make the purchasing commitment. Since Gen-Z students have quick access to information as a result of technology, it is important that marketers for higher education institutions understand the impacts of marketing to prospective students from Gen Z.

By understanding the needs and desires of college students from Gen Z when considering which higher education institution to attend, it is important to consider the Social Marketing Theory, 4 P’s, and use the AIDA model approaches when designing marketing strategies. This study will use the Social Marketing Theory, the 4 P’s, and AIDA model as a framework for determining if there is preferred mode of communication for college students from Generation Z who identify as domestic underrepresented, domestic non-underrepresented, first-generation, non-first-generation, male, and female when considering communication through only direct mail and email
marketing communication compared to social media and text message communication at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution.

**Materials and Methods**

This study used quantitative data from survey (Appendix A) responses received from students at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution to determine if there was a difference in preference for communication for when using direct mail and email or text message and social media communication when considering college students from Gen Z who identify as domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented, first generation and non-first generation, and male and female. Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was conducted. This analysis was selected because the researcher seeks to understand the likelihood of two categorical variables having a relationship (Field, 2018). The two categorial variables are direct mail and email communication and social media and text message communication. Descriptive statistics included entering the class year, gender identity, and race.

**Archival data attributors**

The archival data revealed perceptions of college students from Generation Z who identified as domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented, first generation and non-first generation, and male and female (born between 2002 and 2003) starting at Midtown University for fall 2021. Participants who completed the survey were selected because they attended orientation in August 2021, and provided responses based on their experiences as incoming students. Approximately 1,300 students typically attend this orientation. At the time of the survey, students were fully committed to attending Midtown University and were not required to complete the survey. Students had moved
in their residence halls and participated in events to acclimate to campus while they met other incoming students.

**Data Collection Tools**

The primary data collection was obtained from archival data via a survey administered a week before college students from Generation Z who identified as domestic underrepresented, domestic non-underrepresented, first generation, non-first generation, male, and female officially began classes at Midtown University in fall 2021. In this study, a survey was used as a form of data collection as the researcher gathered the perceptions of Gen Z’s preferred mode of communication. Fink (2015) describes that surveys should be conducted when “deciding policy or in planning and evaluating programs and conducting research when the information you need should come directly from people” (p. 5).

Chi-square analysis was utilized to determine the likelihood of college students from Generation Z who identified as domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented, first generation and non-first generation, and male and female preferred direct mail and email communication compared to social media and text message communication. This analysis was selected because it will determine if there is a difference between two categorical variables (direct mail and email compared to social media and text message communication) (Field, 2018). All statistical analysis was configured using IBM SPSS 25 and Microsoft Excel.

Before obtaining the data, a request for data was submitted to Midtown University’s Institutional Research Board to seek approval to obtain de-identified responses from an existing survey. Once approved, the researcher contacted the Student
Success Center and requested additional questions be added to the survey. After the survey results were collected, a third party working for the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness at Midtown University removed all identifiable information leaving only the responses to the questions the researcher provided, which ensured confidentiality of all survey takers (Fink, 2015).

For this project, direct mail was defined as mail through the United States Postal Service, email was defined as correspondence online through programs such as Gmail or Hotmail, and social media included platforms such as Facebook.

**Data Analysis**

Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was selected to determine if there is a difference between two categorical variables (direct mail and email compared to social media and text message communication) (Field, 2018). The independent variables for research question one was domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented college students from Generation Z at a rural, four-year, Midwest public higher education institution. For research question two, the independent variables were first-generation and non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a rural, four-year, Midwest public higher education institution. For research question three, the independent variables were male and female college students from Generation Z at a rural, four-year, Midwest public higher education institution.

The data received will indicate whether the college students entering Midtown University in fall 2021, who identified as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, male or female had a preference for mode of communication for higher education recruitment.
Results and Discussion

Research Question 1. Is there a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented generation z college students at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution?

To answer RQ1, the Pearson’s Chi-Squared analysis was performed separately on both the direct mail and email communication and social media and text message communication to determine if there was a difference in the preference in mode of communication for domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented students. Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05 between domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented college students from Generation Z attending Midtown University in fall 2021, $X^2 (1) = .337, p = .562$. For the preference on the mode of communication based on fall 2021 entering freshmen at Midtown University, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis that there was not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery for domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented Generation-Z college students at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. The frequency table of preferred mode of communication for domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented students is located in Table 6 and Figure 9.
Table 6.

*Mode of communication preference based on race in fall 2021*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Direct mail &amp; email</th>
<th>Social media &amp; text message</th>
<th>Total students enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic underrepresented students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic non-underrepresented students</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9 shows that domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented students preferred direct mail and email communication more than social media and text message communication. However, with a $p = .562$, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis that there was not a statistically significant difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery based on first-time freshmen college students from Generation Z identifying as domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented at Midtown University in fall 2021.
To answer RQ2, the Pearson’s Chi-Squared analysis was performed separately on both the direct mail and email communication and social media and text message communication to determine if there was a difference in the preference in mode of communication for male or female college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was not statistically significant at the alpha level of .05 between male and female students attending Midtown University in fall 2021, $X^2 (1) = 2.20, p = .13$. For the preference on the mode of communication based on fall 2021 entering freshmen at Midtown University, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. There was not a statistically significant difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message.
communication for male or female college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. The frequency table of preferred mode of communication for male and female students is located in Table 7 and Figure 10.

**Table 7.**

*Mode of communication preference based on gender in fall 2021*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Direct mail &amp; email</th>
<th>Social media &amp; text message</th>
<th>Total students enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10 shows whether there was a difference in preferred mode of communication for male or female college students from Generation Z when considering direct mail and email communication compared to social media and text message communication. However, with a $p = .13$, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis that there was not a statistically significant difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery based on first-time freshmen college students identifying as male or female at Midtown University in fall 2021.
Figure 10. *Number of students that completed the survey preferred mode of communication based on gender (N=152)*

To answer RQ3, the Pearson’s Chi-Squared analysis was performed separately on both direct mail and email communication and social media and text message communication to determine if there was a difference in the preference in mode of communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was statistically significant at the alpha level of .05 between first-generation and non-first-generation students attending Midtown University in fall 2021, $X^2 (1) = 4.445, p = .03$. For the preference on the mode of communication based on fall 2021 entering freshmen at Midtown University, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there was not a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media.
and text message communication for first-generation or non-first-generation college students from Generation Z at a four-year, rural, Midwest public higher education institution. The frequency table of preferred mode of communication for first-generation and non-first-generation college students from Generation Z is located in Table 8 and Figure 11.

Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of communication preference based on first-generation status in fall 2021</th>
<th>Direct mail &amp; email</th>
<th>Social media &amp; text message</th>
<th>Total number of students enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-generation students</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-first-generation students</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students enrolled</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11 shows that first-generation and non-first-generation college students preferred direct mail and email communication more than social media and text message communication. With a $p = .03$, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there was not a statistically significant difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery based on first-time freshmen college students from Generation Z identifying as first generation or non-first generation at Midtown University in fall 2021.
Discussion

This explanatory quantitative study using Pearson’s Chi Square analysis resulted in impactful findings. The Chi Square analysis was selected because it determines if there is a difference between two categorical variables (direct mail and email compared to social media and text message communication) (Field, 2018). The result of the first research question asking if there was a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery when considering direct mail and email communication or social media and text message communication for domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented students from Gen Z rejected the null hypothesis. The researcher also rejected the null hypothesis for the second research question asking if there was a difference in preference for students from Gen Z who identified as male or female. However, there was a statistically significant finding in
research question three that there was a difference in preference of higher education recruitment material delivery based on first-generation and non-first-generations first-time freshmen college students from Generation Z.

**Implications.** Based on the results of this study, from a practitioner perspective, marketers and recruitment teams might consider using both direct mail and email in addition to social media and text messages to communicate about higher education institutions for certain populations—especially first-generation college students from Generation Z.

When considering the mode of communication with first-generation and non-first-generation college students from Generation Z, prior research indicated that Gen Z students are digital natives and prefer to communicate through videos and mobile-friendly communication strategies (Fromm and Read, 2018). Nealis (2018) described that social media was a significant mode of communication to Generation-Zers and found that they spend nine hours a day on a mobile device. However, the results from this study indicated these students have a greater likelihood of preferring communication through direct mail and email communication in comparison to social media and text messages. The results from the study do not agree with prior research of Gen Z preferences. In this case, the study results allow the researcher to conclude that direct mail and email communication to first-generation and non-first-generation college students from Gen Z is impactful, thus supporting Nadelson, et. al (2013) recommendation that with the number of first-generation college students increasing, the importance of understanding their characteristics and need for college preparation is vital.
Recommendations for Future Study

There are several potential opportunities for future study. With the finding that first-generation and non-first-generation college students from Generation Z prefer to receive communication via direct mail and email, it is recommended that a qualitative study be conducted to identify specific types of communication through these communication platforms. It is recommended to determine if synthesis occurs through focus groups and interviews. Because the research has indicated that Generation Z holds high regard to the opinions of their family (Fromm and Read, 2018), it may be beneficial to include a parent focus group as well.

When considering domestic underrepresented and domestic non-underrepresented students and first-generation and non-first-generation college students, it might be beneficial to conduct a qualitative study on the following:

1. Marketing preference based on race, especially since Fromm and Read (2018) identified Generation Z as the last generation where the White race is the majority.

2. With the increase in first-generation college students (Irlbeck, et. al, 2014) and the finding that they typically come from low-socioeconomic families (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; Inman & Mayes, 1999), ensuring communication about financial aid is distributed based on their preference. Questions might include whether first-generation college students prefer to have a specific financial aid counselor assigned to them to discuss their finances or if they prefer financial aid counselors travel to high schools to schedule meeting with students and families to discuss financial aid options.
This study only focuses on students after they are committed to attending Midtown University. Future researchers may want to consider a quantitative study to determine the following:

1. Is there a difference in first-generation college student enrollment when considering direct mail and digital communication. The findings may conclude whether digital communication truly impacts a student’s decision to attend a higher education institution.

2. If higher education institutions are conducting live social media sessions such as Facebook Live, what is the likelihood that a student will enroll at a higher education institution if they attend one or two sessions, three to five sessions, or five or more session?

**Conclusion**

Kotler and Zaltman’s (1971) Social Marketing Theory was used as a guide to determine how marketers at higher education institutions might consider communicating to entering first-time freshmen from Generation Z who identify as domestic underrepresented or domestic non-underrepresented, first generation or non-first generation, and male or female. Studies have described the importance of marketing to prospective students, but there was a gap of knowledge in the preferred modes of communication for college students from Gen Z.

With the projected crash in enrollment beginning in 2026, identifying ways to recruit students from Generation Z to higher education institutions is a topic researchers and practitioners might consider (Boeckenstedt et al., 2019; Fosnacht, & Nailos, 2016; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019; Nealis 2018; Poock 2008;
Schwieger & Ladwig 2018; Terenzini, et al., 1996). Based on the results of this study, communication preference is different for varying student groups. Although research indicates the preference of Generation Z to be digital (Fromm and Read, 2018), this study reveals that there was a statistically significant difference in preference of distribution of marketing materials at a higher education institution for students who typically come from a lower socioeconomic status (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; Inman & Mayes, 1999).

Although there was not a statistically significant difference in preferred mode of communication among domestic underrepresented, domestic non-underrepresented, male, and female students at Midtown University, higher education marketing professionals may consider studying the communication preferences of prospective students and their families while aligning their efforts with the ever-changing digital communication platforms.
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Section 6

SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

Northouse (2018) describes that leadership has many definitions. For the purpose of this reflection, leadership is defined as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2019 p. 5). This definition is used through the themes of leadership theory and practice, organizational analysis, policy analysis, and content and context for learning to connect the information learned in the Higher Education Leadership and Policy Analysis coursework and to my professional experience as the executive director of communication, alumni and external relations in the Office of Marketing and Communication at a higher education institution in the Midwest.

When considering who I am as a leader, Merriam and Bierema (2014) provided insight to my transformation in my career. Upon graduation from a higher education institution in the Midwest where I received my bachelor’s degree in English, I accepted a position at an institution as the annual fund and prospect research assistant. My responsibilities included managing the phonathon program and researching prospective donors to determine appropriate giving levels to the institution. The phonathon was raising money, direct mail solicitations were successful, and I was gaining confidence in myself. However, during my time at this employer, I received comments from management that, as Merriam and Bierema (2014) describe, were “disorienting dilemmas” (p. 84).
Over the past 16 years in my professional and educational career, I reflected upon those comments on multiple occasions. After completing the Clifton StrengthsQuest Assessment, I started to understand why this situation still affects me. My results from the StrengthsQuest included learner, achiever, arranger, includer, and futuristic (Clifton Strengths Quest, 2018). For instance, as a learner, Rath (2007) suggests a link between learning and performing. He continues to describe that individuals who have the opportunity to grow in their career perform better. Because the leader of my division did not offer opportunities for me to grow as a professional, I did not perform to my highest capability. Since I was not offered opportunities to progress in my role and develop my skills, this was discouraging. Gill (2010) suggests that it is the responsibility of the learner to take charge of learning opportunities and the responsibility of the organization to encourage learning.

At the time I was identifying a topic for my dissertation, I was the senior marketing specialist at a higher education institution. I accepted the role because in 2017, there was a decline in enrollment of first-time freshmen, which resulted in an evaluation of the program. Kowalski (2009) describes there are three aspects that aid in defining a problem, one must identify “(a) the current state, (b) a desired state, and (c) a lack of a direct obvious way to eliminate the gap between the current state and the desired state” (p. 5). The team was aware of the current state, knew the desired state, as defined by the institution’s leaders and governing board, but needed to identify ways in which the team could meet the goals. As a result, a team of individuals from different departments on campus collaborated and participated in a three-day Kaizen training to identify the
gaps, discuss workload processes, and determine how to work collaboratively across all student recruitment efforts.

The design of the training aligned with Visscher’s (2020) use of data-based decision making. For example, in the communication aspect of student recruitment, the mode and type of communication was analyzed and restructured. When considering the demographics of first-time students, it is valuable to acknowledge their needs and characteristics, understand the best way to communicate (Boeckenstedt et al., 2019; Fosnacht, & Nailos, 2016; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019; Nealis 2018; Poock 2008; Schwieger & Ladwig 2018; Terenzini, et al., 1996), as well as the frequency of each communication. Although the initial training only lasted three days, the team knew that to meet enrollment goals, weekly meetings must be maintained to continue the sharing of knowledge and ideas (Bruffee, 1999), and constant analysis (Visscher, 2020) of recruitment tactics based on where the student was in the funnel.

As I reflect on myself as a leader before I started the program and after the final day of coursework, I consider my results from Clifton StrengthsQuest (2018): learner, achiever, arranger, includer, and futuristic that was conducted during the first summer of classes.

Arranger

As an arranger in my profession, I develop and organize communication to prospective students as well as analyze content the institution is communicating and determine when to alter the communication to enhance the messaging and goals. Clifton (2000) supports this behavior for people who effectively “manage all the variables, align
and realign them until you are sure that you have arranged them in the most productive configuration as possible” (p. 3). While I enjoy this process, it is important for me as a leader to gain the confidence and trust of followers, so when changes are implemented, followers and leaders know decisions were made based on the betterment of the organization (Northouse, 2019).

**Includer**

As a leader with teammates from different offices on campus, it is important that I seek knowledge from professionals in their respective department. However, working with people from varying departments has its advantages and disadvantages. As Levi (2017) describes, team decision making can be a daunting task as some decisions do not require the presence of all team members, and if everyone is present, discussion and decision making can be prolonged. Thus, as a leader, having the trust of teammates and followers to make appropriate decisions and determine the individuals who should be present is important when analyzing programs.

For the purpose of student recruitment and the goal of recruiting diverse groups of students, it is vital that I pursue knowledge of a diverse community on campus and specifically partner with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to ensure terminology is inclusive to all regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status, to name a few (Fromm & Read, 2018). An area in which I feel I have grown as a leader is encouraging the sharing of information both with the marketing and communication team as well as the entire Recruitment Team which consists of formal and informal leaders from offices across campus.
Prior to 2017 when the institution experienced a decline in student enrollment, each of these areas worked in silos. By bringing these teams together, identifying strategies and group norms (Levi, 2017) to achieve goals, and providing an inclusive atmosphere where each of the leaders has an opportunity to participate, emotional intelligence was fostered and cohesive, data-driven decisions were developed, and a comprehensive communication plan was created (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Levi, 2017). By sharing information, the Recruitment Team obtained trust among each other and understood the importance of having a cross-functional team that works together to achieve success (Levi, 2017; & Bruffee, 1999).

Learner

Clifton (2000) defines a learner as “having a strong desire to continue to improve” (p. 2). The 2020-2021 academic year has been challenging for many but has offered opportunities for learning. Hammond, Keeney, and Raiffa (2006) referenced anchors and how past events or trends guide us in making decisions. This has been true of my role in the admission recruitment sector of higher education. Prior to the establishment of the Recruitment Team, staff from the various offices maintained strategies because they were successful in the past. This year, we were still using those strategies, however adjusted to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it was important that members of the recruitment team reached out to colleagues from various institutions to learn if they were experiencing the same impacts (Hammond, et al., 2006).

As the recruitment cycle ends, the team continues to evaluate our actions and adjust accordingly (Hammond, et al., 2006). Although this year has been challenging and we attempted to embrace the ambiguity, I learned the importance of identifying clear
goals (Bolman & Deal, 2017), sharing knowledge (Bruffee, 2017), and using the symbolic frame (Bolman & Deal, 2017) to show prospective students how their dream of earning a college education can become a reality.

**Achiever**

As an achiever, I find that my best days at work are those where I check multiple items off my to-do list and have a feeling of accomplishment. People with this strength “take immense satisfaction in being busy and productive” (Clifton, 2000 p. 3). A challenge with achievers is that we do not take the time to celebrate accomplishments or success (Clifton, 2000). Bolman and Deal (2017) suggest that the Symbolic Frame describes situations where people embrace ambiguity and value motivation and success. However, as achievers, Clifton (2000) describes individuals as moving to the next project without acknowledging accomplishments. This was a challenge of the Recruitment Team this year. However, the leader of the team mentioned the need for recognizing our accomplishments the team rarely took time to celebrate. When working with a team, it is easy to finish one project and advance to the next. However, I believe it is vital for team morale to take a moment, consider what has been accomplished, and celebrate those milestones.

**Futuristic**

When I started my role as the senior marketing specialist, I challenged myself and the leaders from the Admissions Office, Office of Student Success, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Student Account Services, and Residential Life to review in detail what has been done in the past, determine the success and areas for improvement, and identify
gaps in our recruitment cycle based on the results from the Kaizen training. Northouse (2019) suggests using sketches to establish and articulate a plan. When I met with each of the teams, we mapped the communication plan on a whiteboard, identified areas for improvement, implemented new brochures, and executed a digital marketing plan that aligned with the traditional direct mail and email campaigns.

While communicating with each of the leaders about the marketing materials, it was helpful to use the techniques outlined by Bolman and Deal (2017) through encouraging assertiveness by active listening, positive recognition, clear expectations, and assertive withdrawal. As a new member of the Recruitment Team, it was important for me to actively listen to the leaders, provide options based on data, and set weekly, monthly, and yearly objectives in the effort to obtain the goals set by the Board of Regents. Because of the collaboration from leaders, each member was aware of the communication plan at any point in the recruitment cycle, which allowed for ad-hoc projects or any adjustments to the plan, such as the COVID-19 pandemic communication.

**Organizational Analysis**

For organizations and objectives to be successful, “the right combination of goals, roles, relationships, and coordination is essential to organizational performance” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 47). In the 2018-2019 recruitment cycle, the year following the decline in student enrollment, the higher education institution’s Board of Regents set an aggressive goal for first-year student enrollment. To achieve this goal, leaders from the Recruitment Team developed a plan to evaluate successful recruiting techniques, identify strategies that needed alteration, and consider implementing new technology.
The team established new marketing strategies such as Free Tuition Giveaway, Eat Free for a Year, and Free Room for a Year campaigns for the 2018-2019 recruitment cycle. These were created to increase housing applications, summer orientation registrations, and room selections; each of which were leading indicators for enrollment. Although these campaigns increased participation in each of the perspective areas, there was no statistical data from year to year to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the number of students enrolled for the fall 2019 semester (Personal communication, 2019).

Bolman and Deal (2017) refer to an organization’s structure “as a blueprint for expectation and changing among internal players… limited only by human performances and capacities, technological limits, and constraints in the surroundings” (p. 51). This represents the challenge at the higher education institution for which I was employed. Through the Kaizen event, the Recruitment Team issued a blueprint for recruitment efforts that were adjusted accordingly each year. For the 2018-2019 recruitment cycle, the limitation was implementing a texting platform. For Gen Z students, preferred communication is via text message rather than phone calls (Fromm & Read, 2018, p. 57). Additionally, if prospective students do not view higher education institutions as forward thinking and view recruitment efforts as archaic, students and families will “walk away” (Bolman & Deal, 2017 p. 232). Since the Recruitment Team understood the importance of texting communication and had not been granted approval for an institution-wide texting platform, the Offices of Admissions, Student Success Center, and academic offices purchased a temporary texting platform.
Although this closed the gap in the preferred communication to prospective students, I was concerned that the communication was not recorded where correspondence could be viewed across campus by other offices, the phone number the text message came from was not consistent, and when a person replied to the text message, the student’s name did not display causing the employee to search for the student’s name in order to respond appropriately. This was an inefficiency for employees and caused inconsistent messaging. It was one of many examples of how the lack of a texting platform had a negative impact and caused inefficiencies in recruitment efforts.

When the Recruitment Team was created, it consisted of the higher education institution’s Leadership Team including the vice presidents from strategy and operations, finance, student affairs, and marketing and communication, the provost, the associate provost of enrollment management, director of the student success center, and the senior marketing specialist. At this time, the team had vertical coordination as they were “charged with keeping action aligned with strategy and objectives” (Bolman & Deal, 2017 p. 55) set forth by the Board and Regents and president of the institution.

After the first year, the leaders of the Recruitment Team changed from vice presidents to directors, assistant directors, and managers, which transformed the coordination to lateral coordination (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Because of the decline in enrollment, it was important for objectives to become stronger with buy-in from upper leadership (Lencioni, 2002). However, the challenge with the adjustment in coordination was that decisions of change recommended by the Recruitment Team took longer to implement as the new members had to seek approval of the vice president from their respective area.
Political Frame

Bolman and Deal (2017) pose five questions when determining which organizational frame to use: “Are individual’s commitment and motivation essential to success; Is the technical quality of the decision important; Are there high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty; Are conflict and scarce resources significant; and Are you working from the bottom up” (p. 303). By responding yes to each of these questions, Bolman and Deal (2017) recommend either the political and/or the symbolic frames are most effective. The political frame is also present in the in Lencioni’s (2012) *Five Dysfunctions of a Team* in that the leaders and followers must have a commitment and buy-in from the followers.

Recommendations and Action Plan

Since 2017, I witnessed that members of the Recruitment Team were highly passionate about their work and had the drive to meet goals. To these members, the implementation of a texting platform was significant. When advocating for the texting platform, it would have been beneficial to have one of the individuals researching Gen-Z preferences in attendance at the Leadership Team meeting along with a strong negotiator (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Having representation from the Recruitment Team would have helped the Leadership Team understand the significance and urgency of adapting to the needs of Gen Z (Tierney, 2012).

During this process, I also learned that in addition to the decentralization of high-level leaders (Manning, 2017) in the Recruitment Team, one must recognize there are points in time where certain members of the Leadership Team should be present to articulate the recommended changes that cannot be decided without their knowledge.
(Jansson, 2012, p. 1013). At this higher education institution, there are multiple levels of approval one must go through to make a decision. I would recommend a change in the structure of the Recruitment Team as the decisions being made required the input from the upper level of the strategic apex (Shafritz, Ott, and Jang, 2015). Although decentralization of leaders has its benefits, Manning (2017) describes the challenges of too much decentralization as “detrimental to organizations. Goals become too disparate, waste results from duplication of effort, and power struggles erupt” (p. 121), which explains why the approval time for the texting platform was so extensive.

While having specific representatives from the Leadership Team present during certain times of the recruitment cycle may be beneficial, it was also important that the Recruitment Team and the Leadership Team meet to discuss group norms and measurable goals. After the success of the 2018-2019 recruitment cycle, the team did not have an opportunity to reflect and review new goals set by the Board of Regents. Rather, the team was reorganized by removing members of the Leadership Team and including people who did not have prior knowledge of the decisions and recommendations made during the previous cycle. Additionally, with the intake of new members to the team, group norms were not established.

**Policy Analysis**

Bardach and Patashnik (2020) and Fowler (2009) describe the first step in analyzing a policy is defining the problem. For the policy analysis portion of the paper, the policy about completing a prospective student marketing publication was evaluated. Bardach and Patashnik’s (2020) guide for policy analysis consists of “defining the problem, assembling some evidence, constructing the alternatives, selecting the criteria,
projecting the outcomes, confronting the trade-offs and stopping, focusing, narrowing, deepening, and deciding, and finally telling the story” (pp. 1-96). As I conducted my analysis, these steps were used to alter the marketing recruitment process.

Beginning in 2017 when I accepted the senior marketing specialist position, it was my goal to work with the Recruitment Team to streamline efforts in reviewing and creating new marketing materials and communication strategies. However, before this could take place, it was important for me to start at the foundation of some of the challenges. One of the challenges the staff in the Office of Marketing and Communication commented about was the inconsistent project requests, unclear direction about the edits for publications, and clients not meeting deadlines. Without a deadline, clients tend to forget about the task or fail to perform the project (Balasubramanian, Lee, & Sivadasan, 2018; Zamir, Lewinsohn-Zamir, & Rotiv, 2017). To continue to execute the quantity of projects, it was vital to implement a policy about deadlines and expectations. Loss and McGuinn define governance as “the process of making and enforcing authoritative decisions about the use of public power and the institution within which those processes take place (2016, p. 21). They continue to define this as structures for how types of decisions are made.

At the time of the analysis, the higher education institution’s marketing and communication team consisted of 10 full-time staff members. During the 2017-2018 fiscal year, the office managed more than 1,200 requests from faculty and staff including flyers, website design and content, news releases, email marketing campaigns, and institutional branding, to name a few.
Because of the quantity of projects, the marketing team produced, I implemented a timeframe for all recruitment-based marketing materials that included two weeks for content creation and final approval before submission to the designer. This policy was created to reduce the quantity of redesign which caused immense work and time for the designer to recreate pieces. To enhance the use of time and resources, only final content would be submitted to the designer. Upon submission of final content, the designer was given two weeks to design and provide a first draft of the publication to the client. After the first draft was disbursed, clients had two business days to review, provide edits to the documents, and submit to the writer who compiled the edits and submitted them to the designer. The designer then had two days to implement each of the edits and disburse to the client for a second review. This process continued for three rounds of edits to ensure the satisfaction of the document.

By using Bardach and Patashnik’s (2020) contingency planning of the multistage analysis model, I suggested creating a document that was visible for each of the clients describing deadlines for each project. If a client missed a deadline, their project would have an adjusted completion date. By implementing this policy, it protected client projects and reduced the possibility of error.

Another alternative was developing a calendar and policy that included identifying projects six months prior to the due date. The purpose of working six months ahead on projects was to give the clients, designers, the senior multimedia specialist, and the senior marketing specialist ample time to develop new communication strategies rather than reworking what has been completed in prior years. When considering workload and time that affects the outcomes of projects, rushed or last-minute projects
hinder the opportunity for unique and creative products from the marketing team (Amabile Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996) and “reduce the quality of decisions made just before the expiration of the deadline” (Zamir et al., 2017, p. 6).

Since implementing this policy, there have been three changes in leadership. I learned that when a new person enters the role, adjustments need to be made to the policy. Additionally, I was recently notified that clients had concerns about the policy that were not communicated to me. Therefore, when implementing a new policy, it would be beneficial to revisit the policy with all the stakeholders to ensure their satisfaction and allow opportunity to assess and improve the program (Gill, 2010).

Content and Context for Learning

Creating an Environment for Learning

As I reflect on my experience after graduating college and consider all the information learned during this program, my thought process about leadership has completely changed. Due to the increased responsibility of project management for student recruitment and leading a full-time staff member, I would consider myself a transformational learner and leader. Merriam and Bierema (2014) suggest that transformational learning occurs when an individual acknowledges the frame of reference that for which they have grown accustom and broaden their beliefs and opinions. When I was promoted to senior marketing specialist in 2017, I had the opportunity to be mentored from the dean of enrollment management about the traditional recruitment efforts. By having a mentor, people can grow personally and professionally (Gill, 2010). Because of this relationship, I learned about decision making and how it should be data
driven. When I would make a statement about a concern with the marketing materials or changes that I would propose, I can still hear her say to me, “What does the data say?”

Data-driven Decision Making

This year was challenging with recruitment due to the COVID-19 pandemic as many students were unsure of their plans post high school graduation. Hammond, Keeney, and Raiffa (2006) referenced anchors and how past events or trends guide us in making decisions. This has been true of my role in the admission recruitment sector of higher education. Many times, we have used strategies because they have worked in the past. This year, we were still using those strategies, but added new to adapt to the pandemic. Additionally, members of the recruitment team have reached out to colleagues from various institutions to see if they are experiencing the same impact. However, it was important to evaluate our actions, adjust accordingly, and not “give too much weight to supporting information” (Hammond, et al., 2006, p. 2).

As the semester and recruiting cycle came to an end, it was important that I discussed with the director of student recruiting the importance of establishing new goals each academic year based on data of different segments of students to meet the strategic plan (Bresciani 2011). Until this point, the enrollment goal has been identified; however, as recruiters, we needed to better understand the preferences of prospective students based on data.

When considering the context and content of learning, I have challenged myself to identify ways to use data to analyze the success of marketing materials. I am working with the assistant vice president of admission and student success to add questions to the
Advantage survey. Advantage is a continuation of summer orientation where students attend programs on campus, get to know other incoming students, and become acclimated to campus (Northwest Missouri State University, n.d.). At the end of the three days, the students complete a survey about their experience. Although I will no longer be working at this higher education institution when the data is collected, the results can be shared with the Recruitment Team about preferred communication styles and modes of communication to Gen-Z college students.

Summary

As I reflect on the past couple of years of this doctoral program, I am grateful for the opportunities to understand who I am as a leader, to implement what I have learned into my new position as the executive director of communication, alumni, and external relations at higher education institution in the Midwest and have knowledge about data and research that will guide me in decision making in my roles. As I continue my career, I hope to have the same impact on others that I have received from my cohort and professors. As a transformational leader and learner (Merriam and Bierema, 2014) I will continue to broaden my knowledge about topics such as diversity, equity, and inclusion, continue to reflect about projects and events completed by the team for which I work (Gill, 2010), and continue to have communication to ensure others are informed (Bruffee, 1999).
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Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. Are you at least 18 years old?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Prefer not to say
   d. Prefer not to self-describe

3. Select one or more of the following races for which you identify:
   a. American Indian or Alaska Native
   b. Asian
   c. Black or African American
   d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   e. White

4. I am the first in my family to go to college:
   a. Yes
   b. No

5. I participated in ____ Facebook Live and Zoom sessions:
   a. 1-2 sessions
   b. 3-4 sessions
   c. 5-6 sessions
   d. More than 6 sessions

6. My preference for receiving recruitment materials (campus brochures, financial aid information, residential life information, etc.) from the University is:
   a. Mail
   b. Email
   c. Social Media
   d. Text Message
   e. Mail and email only
   f. All the above
Appendix B

IRB Approval

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<td>IRB Determination Notice Project #2090897 Review #375803</td>
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Project #2090897
Project Title: A Quantitative Analysis of College Student Communication Recruitment Preferences at a Midwest Public Higher Education Institution
Principal Investigator: Kathryn Machovoy (MU Student)
Primary Contact: Kathryn Machovoy (MU Student)

Dear Investigator,
The MU Institutional Review Board reviewed your application and supportive documents. It has been determined that this project does not constitute human subjects research according to the Department of Health and Human Services regulatory definitions. As such, there are no further IRB requirements.
If you have questions, please feel free to contact the MU IRB office at 573-882-3181 or email at muresearch@missouri.edu.

Sincerely,
MU Institutional Review Board
Dear Principal Investigators,

The Northwest Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application under expedited review criteria. You may proceed with your project and with data collection using the procedures, materials, and documents as outlined in your application.

Because your project was approved using expedited review, you do not need to submit a status report once your project is complete. However, if you make any changes to the research protocols outlined in your application, you must submit a Protocol Change Form to the IRB for approval. This form must be submitted prior to implementing any changes to your design or data collection. Common examples of protocol changes you may need to submit for approval include (but are not limited to):

- Adding new principal investigators, faculty advisors, or other researchers who will have access to participants and data.
- Adding new survey questions/questionnaires, or changing the wording or presentation of existing survey questions/questionnaires.
- Changing the location where an in-person study will be conducted, or changing aspects of the location (e.g., allowing larger groups to participate than was originally planned).
- Changing the modality by which the project is conducted (e.g., an in-person study which needs to shift to online data collection procedures).
- Changes to procedures or materials due to unforeseen circumstances that have arisen during data collection (e.g., adding a procedure requiring subjects to turn their phones off prior to participation).
- Collecting additional subjects significantly beyond that planned in the original IRB application.

If a protocol change is required, you can submit the form (and any supplementary documents) to the Northwest IRB email (IRBNWMS@nwmissouri.edu). You may also contact us at this email address with any other questions or concerns you have regarding the project.

Thank you for your interest in research at Northwest Missouri State University. We wish you the best with your important research.
Regards,

Dr. Bradlee W. Gamblin
Chair, Institutional Review Board AY2020-21
Assistant Professor of Behavioral Sciences
Office: Colden Hall 2380
Phone: (660) 562-1012
Vita

Kathryn L. Machovsky was born in Rhinelander, Wisconsin. She graduated from North High School in Sioux City, Iowa. Kathryn earned a Bachelor of Art in English from the University of South Dakota in 2008, a Master of Science in Higher Education Leadership from Northwest Missouri State University in 2016. She completed her Doctorate in Higher Education Leadership and Policy Analysis in 2022 from the University of Missouri in Columbia Missouri.

Kathryn is currently the executive director of communication, alumni and external relations at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa. She and her husband Bob have been married since 2012 and reside in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.